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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.

*"The least sin is a sin unto death, and is a sin eternal unless forgiven. The greatest sin, if forgiven, becomes harmless and is as if it had never been. Until the world is convinced of this great truth it feels no need of a gospel" (J.W. McGarvey, **Fourfold Gospel**, 673-674).*

*"The statements, that he had not shrunk from declaring to the brethren anything that was profitable to them, and that he had taught from house to house, as well as publicly, are both worthy of solemn consideration by the preachers of the present age. The former present Paul in striking contrast with the time-servers so abundant in our modern pulpits, who never rebuke sin except at a long distance; who speak none but smooth words about corruption in the church; and whose whole study is personal popularity. Such men care for souls only as these souls may in some way glorify them. They are too faithful to their own aggrandisement to think of being faithful to God. The second statement places Paul in contrast with another class of modern preachers, who either neglect to go from house to house in their ministrations, and study paltry excuses for the neglect; or who go from house to house, not to teach the people, but to enjoy society and to engage in gossip. Let all such take notice that, in the true apostolic method of evangelizing a community, and of edifying a congregation, earnest work from house to house was on a par with that in the pulpit." (J.W. McGarvey, **New Commentary on Acts**. 186-187 [comments on Acts 20:20]).*

Questions from Ethiopia about the Holy Spirit, God and the Son

Question

As I am searching the scriptures all the time, my mind is thinking and learning about the Holy Spirit as follows. Please explain for me as far as you can. Thank you.

Now I shall try to mention something regarding the Holy Spirit - as I find verses in the Bible itself or explanations elsewhere.

Romans 8:14: "Those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God." Here we could think that the Spirit of God could be a person, leading us.

Then the next verse: Romans 8:15: "For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave ..." Receive a spirit? Receive a person? Or rather receive a special kind of thinking? God said: "My thoughts are higher than your thoughts." So viewing things with our own thoughts, our own spirit or spiritual abilities is different from viewing them with the ability to see them with God's thoughts, with His spirit, which is the Holy Spirit.

And then the next verse: Romans 8:16: "The spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God." To me that means that when we see something as God sees it, then we see it right, not with human eyes or human spirit, but from God's standpoint, having His Spirit within us, not as a person, but as an ability. Certainly, we should not compare a person ("the spirit himself") with thinking ("our spirit"), but ability of thinking with ability of thinking.

Joel 2:28: "And afterwards, I (God) will pour out my spirit on all people." Would it be possible to pour out a person? I think not. But it is possible to pour out, to freely give in full measure, to all humans the ability to think like God, with His Spirit, i.e. with the ability to think and to feel and to see the things like He does.

In the beginning, there was the Almighty God, who created His first and only very angelic being, called the Logos which is translated "Word". We read the prophetic words in Proverbs 8:22-31: "The LORD GOD brought me forth as the first of His works ... Then I was the craftsman at His side." And then that Logos was ready and obedient towards his beloved Father to become a man, in order to die as the ransom for Adam, giving him and his offspring back the life lost in Eden.

Therefore the angel spoke to Mary: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God." (Luke 1:35) When we remember John 1:1-3, "In the beginning was the Logos (Word), and the Logos was with God, and the Logos was [a] God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made ...", then we see it as absolutely confirming the prophetic words in Proverbs 8:30 (workmaster at God's side).

And so we can understand what happened and was meant with "the Holy Spirit will overshadow you". It was a bringing to earth the most mighty and first angel from a far point in the Universe to become lowered to nearly nothing, to a tiny cell to grow up in Mary as a perfect human being without Adamic sin. Therefore we read about Jesus, "Who, being in very nature [footnote: in the form of] God, did not consider equality with God ... but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness." (Philippians 2:6-7) He "made himself nothing", i.e. he agreed to be sent, but he did not make himself a human being, but "being made in human likeness." GOD Himself, the Almighty Father, accomplished this conversion (in agreement with His obedient son) with the power or ability of His [God's] Holy Spirit, His might, His energy.

As our spirit is our potential in thinking, feeling and acting, so the Holy Spirit of God is His potential in thinking, feeling and acting. I am convinced that there has not been a third person besides the Almighty Creator God and the Logos Jesus like a servant of God to do that astonishing conversion. On the contrary

God's own energy is so special, so great, so grand to bring about what HE wishes. His Spirit is really not A holy spirit but THE Holy Spirit. And the thought that we are begotten by this God's Spirit to another nature, the nature which Jesus has now, which is a spiritual nature, is overwhelming. And because we are begotten this way, we are able to understand His thoughts and Jesus thoughts and teachings. And later the whole mankind shall receive this ability, the Spirit of God to be poured out to fill them as it fills us already now, otherwise we could not understand His word. And again and again, over the decades, we must pray for His Holy Spirit, which is the spirit of truth, of knowledge, of love.

After having been resurrected Jesus, appearing the Apostles, "breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit'." Jesus did not have a person in his mouth and did not breath a person into them, but gave them (shown in this symbolical manner) a partial understanding. Fully they received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, when "all were filled with the Holy Spirit" - not filled with a person spirit to be within in them all, but with the ability to think and understand like God and Jesus why Jesus came and died and went back to the Father and that he would come back etc. etc. Later, it is said that Cornelius and those with him received "the gift of the Holy Spirit". (Acts 10:45) That gift was not a person, but the ability to understand what Apostle Peter just had teaches those (verses 37-43).

Matthew 26:41; Luke 8:55; Romans 8:16; 1 Thess. 5:23; John 7:39 "Up to that time the spirit had not been given" is pointing to the time when the Holy Spirit would be poured out at Pentacost. And in order to make this pouring out of the Holy Spirit possible, it was necessary that Jesus would be heightened to God, "Unless I go away, the counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you" - John 16:7.] how should we think

Answer

You have given me several difficult subjects to work on.

Let me begin with the nature of God. God is one (Deuteronomy 6:4; Isaiah 44:6), but this is united oneness, even as all people before the Flood were one (Genesis 11:6) and as all disciples of Christ are to be one (John 17:20-23). The Father is God (Ephesians 4:6), The Son is God (John 1:1,14; 5:17-18; Hebrews 1:8), and the Holy Spirit is God (Acts 5:1-4).

These three are separate Persons. The Son and the Father are not the same Person (Hebrews 10:5); the Son and the Holy Spirit are not the same Person (John 15:26), and the Father and the Holy Spirit are not the same Person (John 14:26).

The Son (the Word) is not a created being. He was in the beginning with God (John 1:1-2; Colossians 1:17). All things were made by Him (John 1:3; Colossians 1:17). He has the same essential nature as the Father (John 5:16-18; Philippians 2:5-6; Colossians 1:15; Hebrews 1:1-3). As the Father is the eternal "I Am," i.e., the self-existent, eternal one (Exodus 3:13-15), so is the Son (John 8:58). He is not an angel but greater than the angels (Hebrews chapter one). He did become a human being, fully sharing our nature (Hebrews 2:5-18), a man (Acts 17:30-31; 1 Timothy 2:5), though He never ceased being truly and fully God (John 5:18; Titus 2:13).

The Holy Spirit is not an impersonal force, He is a divine Person. I do not mean He possesses a physical body (Luke 24:36-40). Rather, I means He is "a being characterized by conscious apprehension, rationality, and a moral sense b: a being possessing or forming the subject of personality" (**Webster's Third New International Dictionary** [unabridged]. 2:1686). He is spoken of by Christ as a person (10 uses of personal pronouns which designate a person; John 16:13-15). He possesses the characteristics of a person: knowledge (1 Corinthians 2:11), love (Romans 15:30), and will (1 Corinthians 12:11). He does the work of a person; He speaks (1 Timothy 4:1), teaches (1 Corinthians 2:13), guides (John 16:13), forbids (Acts 16:6-7), and searches (1 Corinthians 2:10). Furthermore, He suffers the slights and injuries of a person; He can be grieved (Ephesians 4:30), insulted (Hebrews 10:29), and lied to (Acts 5:3).

What God brought forth was “wisdom” (Proverbs chapter eight), not the divine Word (John 1:1-18). “Wisdom” is personified as a woman (Proverbs 8:1); the “Word became flesh” as the Son (John 1:14,18).

The English word “spirit” translates the Greek term *“pneuma.”* The primary meaning of *“pneuma”* is “wind,” then “breath” (cf. William Mounce, **Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words**. 1247; cf. John 3:8; 2 Thessalonians 2:8). As of any word with multiple uses, the context determines its meaning. It can be used of a spiritual being (John 4:24), i.e., a being without material substance (Luke 24:39), the human spirit, the invisible, inward part of man that returns to God at death (James 2:26; Ecclesiastes 12:7), an attitude (1 Corinthians 12:7), and other ways depending on the context.

The word “spirit” occurs twenty times in Romans chapter eight in the **New King James Version** of the Bible, whereas the Greek *“pneuma”* is found nineteen times. “Spirit” is added by the translators in verse one, and *“pneuma”* is not in the Greek.

A key to the chapter is found in verse two: “For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death” (Romans 8:2). The “law of sin and death” is the rule of sin in the life of the sinner apart from Christ (Romans 7:13-24). The “law of the Spirit of life” is the gospel that frees the sinner from the shackles of sin and brings him into the freedom in Christ (Romans 1:16).

The Spirit leads us (Romans 8:14) through the law of the Spirit, the gospel. As free men in Christ, we have the “spirit” (attitude) of sons rather than of slaves (Romans 8:15). The Holy Spirit bears witness with our spirits that we are children of God (Romans 8:16), i.e., the Holy Spirit through the gospel testifies how to become children of God (Galatians 3:26-27), and our spirits testify we have done this.

The Holy Spirit was poured out (Joel 2:28-29; Acts 2:1-4, 16-18) figuratively in that the power of the Holy Spirit was poured out enabling the apostles and first century disciples to speak by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and to confirm their word by miracles (Mark 16:17-20; 1 Corinthians 2:9-13). This outpouring of the Holy Spirit enabled its recipients to speak in various tongues (Acts 2:4, 6-11) and prophesy (Joel 2:28; Acts 2:17-18). These miraculous gifts served their purpose and ceased (1 Corinthians 13:8-13).

We do not need a direct work of the Holy Spirit on our minds to enable us to understand the Scriptures. Inspiration was to the writers of Scripture, not the readers (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Scripture is so written that when we read and diligently study it, we can understand it (Ephesians 3:1-7; 2 Timothy 2:15).

A Separate People

Foy E. Wallace, Jr. - "Bible Banner" - December, 1941
via "Hickory Heights Messenger" - editor, Jim Mickells

The divine idea of separation in religion is as old as the Jewish race. Abraham was chosen of God to be the father of the chosen race. But idolatrous Ur of the Chaldees was not a land to nourish such a race. Influences were overwhelmingly against God's purpose to raise up a separate people. Hence, the call of God came to Abram to abandon country and kindred and seek a home in an unknown land. And that is the beginning of a separation—a separate family.

Years afterwards the posterity of Abraham, through a series of varied providential circumstances, settled in the land of Egypt. There they grew into a numerous race. Time developed that they could not serve God in Egypt. Separation was essential. God called them out of Egypt. A peculiar nation was formed at Sinai, with peculiar laws, a peculiar government, and peculiar life and relations. In keeping this law and maintaining this separation Israel was blessed. But when they departed, changed their government (1 Samuel 8), served other gods (Deuteronomy 8:19), and formed alliances, they were rejected by God and subjected by their enemies. And only after reformation did God grant them restoration. (Ezekiel 10:10-11.) The lesson of the story is separation—a separate nation.

But that is not the end of the story of separation. God still requires it—a separate church. As fleshly Israel was called out of Egypt, God has called the church, spiritual Israel, out of the world. And to retain the favor of God, the church must maintain that separation distinct and peculiar.

The church must maintain separation in speech. “Hold fast the form of sound words which thou hast heard in me” (2 Timothy 1:13). The power of a united language is demonstrated in the Tower of Babel. It became the bond of an apostate union which God had to break up in a confusion of tongues. And it is so that unity and purity of speech—calling Bible things by Bible names—is a bond among Christians that will triumph over error and bring order out of confusion.

The church must maintain separation in doctrine. Paul’s admonition to “speak thou the things that become sound doctrine” needs constant emphasis today. The New Testament command to “touch not, taste not and handle not,” does not refer to strong drink, but to “the commandments and doctrines of men” (Colossians 2:21-22). It is a warning against flirting with error and fraternizing with denominationalism. The growing idea that the “church of Christ” is just a church among churches will prove fatal, and it must not prevail. It is the church or nothing. It is one way or none. Any participation on the part of members of the church of Christ in denominational functions can only compromise the church and is detrimental to the cause of truth.

The church must maintain separation in worship. The Old Testament injunction to “take heed lest ye turn aside” has its counterpart in the New Testament counsel: “Let no man beguile you.... intruding into those things which he hath not seen.... and not holding the Head, . . . after the commandments and doctrines of men. Which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will-worship” (Colossians 2:18-23). Self-devised worship is condemned along with man-written creeds and man-made doctrines. The New Testament Pattern must be adhered to.

Christians must maintain separation in life. Terms of dignity are applied to Christians. The church is “a chosen generation;” it is “a royal priesthood” and “a holy nation.” Christians are to “show forth the praises (or excellencies)” of God who called them.

The demand of the Bible upon Christians is to deny “ungodliness and worldly lusts” and to live “soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world.”

The Mystery of Christ | Ephesians 3:1-6

Pat Farish | Lancaster, Texas, USA

"For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles - assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given me for you, how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel."

"On behalf of you Gentiles." Paul was an apostle of Christ Jesus, on par with all Jesus' apostles; he was an apostle because

"the God of our fathers appointed you to know his will, to see the Righteous One, and to hear a voice from his mouth, for you will be a witness for him to everyone of what you have seen and heard" (Acts 22:14-15).

In the discharge of his responsibilities to preach, on more than one occasion he incurred the wrath of the Jews: stoned (Acts 14:19), beaten (Acts 16:22-23), and arrested (Acts 22:20-22). In 2 Corinthians 11:22-33 he itemizes what he has suffered; and it was all, “on behalf of you Gentiles”.

Why?

Well, first of all, because he was in a special way the apostle to the Gentiles. Jesus told Saul:
“for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles – to whom I am sending you to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me”
(Acts 26:16-18).

Then, there was the matter of the hostility between Jews and Gentiles. When Peter went into the house of Cornelius the first thing he said to the assembled group was, “You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation ...” (Acts 10:28). Paul in Jerusalem said the Lord told him “I will send you far away to the Gentiles”, the reaction of the Jews was, “Up to this word they listened to him. Then they raised their voices and said ‘Away with such a fellow from the earth! For he should not be allowed to live’” (Acts 22:21, 22).

“When you read this, you can perceive ...”. Some argue that the Bible cannot be understood, and occasionally even some brethren flirt with this notion. It is not so. Paul told the Ephesians, read, and perceive (understand, **KJV**) what I have written. Furthermore, a few lines later he forcefully directs them, “Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.” God does not demand that which is impossible of us; He demands that we understand His will; therefore, we can understand what is written.

By reading what Paul had written, the Ephesians could understand his “insight into the mystery of Christ.” The mystery: Gentiles were approved of God as recipients of the gospel of Christ. This understanding had a profound effect on conscientious Jews: when Peter concluded his explanation of his actions in connection with his preaching to Gentiles, Luke writes that when the Jews heard these things, they fell silent. “And they glorified God saying, ‘Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life’” (Acts 11:18).

By What Authority? (Part 1)

Jefferson David Tant | Roswell, Georgia, USA

When He entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to Him while He was teaching, and said,

“By what authority are You doing these things, and who gave You this authority?” Jesus said to them, ‘I will also ask you one thing, which if you tell Me, I will also tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John was from what source, from heaven or from men?’ And they began reasoning among themselves, saying, ‘If we say, “From heaven,” He will say to us, “Then why did you not believe him?”’ ‘But if we say, “From men,” we fear the people; for they all regard John as a prophet.’ And answering Jesus, they said, ‘We do not know.’ He also said to them, ‘Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things’” (Matthew 21:23-27).

As the Jewish leaders felt threatened by Christ and his teaching, they decided to fight back, and did so by questioning the authority by which he was teaching. Christ recognized it as a legitimate question. But he also knew their motives, and turned the question back on them.

Their question is still applicable today. There seem to be many who don't like the rules. They want more grace, more freedom. They feel constrained when they have to justify their practices by the Word of God. After all, Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus: “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9)

There you have it. “Grace” is the word, coupled with “not as a result of works.” Is it really true, then, that we don’t have to be concerned with rules and regulations, that we are free to improvise and practice things with respect to the church that make it more appealing to people?

Paul is making the point that there are not enough good things we can do to earn or merit our salvation. The prophet Isaiah tells us: “But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, And your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear” (Isaiah 59:2). Sin separates us from God. It all began with Adam and Eve when they committed one sin, which sin brought the death penalty. We know that only a pure sacrifice, without spot or blemish, can cleanse from sin, and since we have sinned and cannot offer a pure sacrifice, all the good deeds we can do in a lifetime will not change our lost situation. That’s the point Paul was making. It was only through God’s loving grace that he gave the perfect sacrifice in our place—Jesus Christ. “knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ” (1 Peter 1:18-19).

Having established that, let’s go back and consider again Paul’s statement in Ephesians, and focus on “saved through faith.” Did you know that faith is a “work?”

Consider two men. Bob is an accountant, and Joe is an auto mechanic. We would all agree that Joe “works,” because that’s what a mechanic does in “working” with his hands. But would it be correct to say that Bob doesn’t “work” because he uses his brain rather than his hands? “That’s ridiculous,” one would counter. “Obviously Bob works.”

Now consider a conversation Christ had in John 6:27-29: “Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you, for on Him the Father, God, has set His seal.” Therefore they said to Him, “What shall we do, so that we may work the works of God?” Jesus answered and said to them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.”

Jesus said “faith” is a “work.” Thus if we are saved without any works, then we can be saved without faith. Who can believe it? How is faith a work? Faith is based on evidence, so when evidence is presented to me, I take into consideration what it said, then I weigh the evidence and decide whether to accept or reject it, and act accordingly. That is something that I do. That is a work. That is why “faith” is a “work of God,” a work approved by God.

Jesus said “We must work the works of Him who sent Me as long as it is day; night is coming when no one can work” (John 9:4) The point is that saving faith is an obedient faith. And obedience involves commands. And commands are related to authority.

I suppose the most memorized Bible verse is John 3:16: “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.” Many will camp on that verse and claim “salvation by faith only.” Indeed, many denominational creed books state “Wherefore that we are justified by faith only is a most wholesome doctrine and very full of comfort,” or similar words (emphasis mine—jdt). But if those holding to this doctrine would read a little further, they would see some more words of Jesus in verse 36 of the same chapter: “He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.” Those words do not contradict what Jesus said in verse 16, but they identify the kind of faith God requires—an obedient faith, a faith that works, a faith that respects authority. And, as pointed out earlier, faith is itself a work. If we are saved without any kind of work, then we are saved without faith. Who can believe that? In verse 36, Jesus clearly links faith and obedience, and obedience and authority are so linked that they cannot be separated.

James does the same when he defined what true faith is all about.

“Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected; and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, ‘and Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness,’ and he was called the friend of God. You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone. In the same way, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead” (James 2:21-26).

Some years ago I was having a discussion with a neighbor who was a young Baptist preacher. I asked if he believed that we are saved by “faith only.” He said he did. Then I turned to James 2:24 and asked him to read it. “You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone.” As I recall, he snapped the Bible shut, and said, “That’s not the kind of God I serve.” And that was the end of our discussion. He did admit that he did not know that verse was in the Bible, but that didn’t matter. His mind was already set. Thus he was like the man my father described whose mind was like concrete—“all mixed up and permanently set.” Closed mind! Closed Bible!

Consider what Jesus said about his own situation with respect to authority. “Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own initiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His works” (John 14:10)

“Therefore Jesus answered and was saying to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner’” (John 5:19).

Think about what Christ told his disciples in John 15:10: “If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love.” Could it be any clearer? Abiding in Christ’s love is connected to keeping his commandments.

So, what are the foregoing passages telling us? That Christ was under authority while he was on the earth. Now if the Son of God had to live under authority, what about the rest of us? The implications are very clear.

Why was it that Christ could not be a priest while on the earth? We are told why in Hebrews 7:12-14: “For when the priesthood is changed, of necessity there takes place a change of law also. For the one concerning whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no one has officiated at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, a tribe with reference to which Moses spoke nothing concerning priests.”

We know that the tribe of Levi was chosen to be the tribe of priests. Christ was from the tribe of Judah. But we can search in vain to find an Old Testament verse that says a priest cannot come from the tribe of Judah. The Scriptures are silent concerning this as the writer of Hebrews notes. If Hebrews 7:14 is not telling us that respecting the silence of the Scriptures is something to be observed, then I confess I do not understand plain language. Silence does not give authority.

There are many passages that illustrate the argument that “silence” is prohibitive rather than permissive. For example, God told Noah to build the ark of gopher wood. I believe most would agree that if Noah chose to use oak instead, the ark never would have floated. God nowhere prohibited other kinds of wood. He just said “gopher” (Genesis 6:14). If every time God gave a positive command, and then had to state all the negatives, we would need a wheelbarrow to carry the Bible around. “Noah, make an ark of gopher wood. Do not use ash, birch, cedar, dogwood, elm, fir...etc, etc. etc.” That would be nonsense. Or, my wife sends our daughter to the store. “I want you to buy some onions for the supper I am cooking. Now, do not buy apples, apricots, asparagus, apple sauce, butter, beans, bread, cauliflower...” Well, you get the point.

Consider the situation with Nadab and Abihu in Leviticus 10:1-3:

“Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took their respective firepans, and after putting fire in them, placed incense on it and offered strange fire before the LORD, which He had not commanded them. And fire came out from the presence of the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD. Then Moses said to Aaron, ‘It is what the LORD spoke, saying, “By those who come near Me I will be treated as holy, And before all the people I will be honored.”’ So Aaron, therefore, kept silent.”

Notice what happened. These priests offered “strange fire...which He had not commanded them.” God had told them what he wanted, but they chose what might have been more convenient, and they were put to death. Where is the record of what God told them not to do? It is not there! Their sin was in not respecting the silence of God. They did that for which they had no authority, and in doing so did not treat the Lord as holy.

Then there is the time when King David brought back the Ark of the Covenant that the Philistines had captured sometime earlier. The story is told in Second Samuel six. As they had some distance to travel in bringing the Ark back, David had a new cart built to carry the ark. They placed the ark of God on a new cart that they might bring it from the house of Abinadab which was on the hill; and Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, were leading the new cart.

“So they brought it with the ark of God from the house of Abinadab, which was on the hill; and Ahio was walking ahead of the ark. Meanwhile, David and all the house of Israel were celebrating before the LORD with all kinds of instruments made of fir wood, and with lyres, harps, tambourines, castanets and cymbals. But when they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, Uzzah reached out toward the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen nearly upset it. And the anger of the LORD burned against Uzzah, and God struck him down there for his irreverence; and he died there by the ark of God” (2 Samuel 6:4-7)

So what was the problem? When we go back to Numbers four, we read of God’s instructions concerning moving the Ark.

“When Aaron and his sons have finished covering the holy objects and all the furnishings of the sanctuary, when the camp is to set out, after that the sons of Kohath shall come to carry them, so that they will not touch the holy objects and die. These are the things in the tent of meeting which the sons of Kohath are to carry” (Numbers 4:15).

We see that God had specified how the Ark was to be moved. God had specified that poles were to be inserted into rings at the base of the Ark, and it was to be carried on the shoulders of the sons of Kohath.

Now we read from First Chronicles fifteen where David has called for the priestly tribe to assemble and deal with the problem.

“Then David called for Zadok and Abiathar the priests, and for the Levites, for Uriel, Asaiah, Joel, Shemaiah, Eliel and Amminadab, and said to them, ‘You are the heads of the fathers’ households of the Levites; consecrate yourselves both you and your relatives, that you may bring up the ark of the LORD God of Israel to the place that I have prepared for it. Because you did not carry it at the first, the LORD our God made an outburst on us, for we did not seek Him according to the ordinance.’ So the priests and the Levites consecrated themselves to bring up the ark of the LORD God of Israel. The sons of the Levites carried the ark of God on their shoulders with the poles thereon, as Moses had commanded according to the word of the LORD” (1 Chronicles 15:11-15).

Notice some key words in what David said: “for we did not seek Him according to the ordinance.” In other words, David did not have authority to do what he did.

Why did David use the cart? There was a distance to be covered, and it would be so much easier and

convenient to transport the Ark on a cart rather than to be carried by men on their shoulders. It seemed like a good idea. Now, I challenge anyone to find one verse in the Bible where God told them not to carry the Ark on a cart. It's not there! The problem was, they did that for which they had no authority.

Where was Noah told not to use oak? Where was Moses told not to use a lame animal for a sacrifice? Where were Nadab and Abihu told not to use the fire they did for the sacrifice? Where are we told not to use potato chips and Coke for the Lord's Supper? Where are we told not to use instruments of music in our worship? Where are we told not to partake of the Lord's Supper on Tuesday? Where are we told not to sell tickets to a play in order to raise money for the church? Why is it that we can agree on the matter of Noah not using knotty pine, but on the same principle cannot agree on worshiping God in song, without adding that for which we have no authority?

Yes, Israel used instruments of music in their worship. Why? Because God authorized it.

"He then stationed the Levites in the house of the LORD with cymbals, with harps and with lyres, according to the command of David and of Gad the king's seer, and of Nathan the prophet; for the command was from the LORD through His prophets" (2 Chronicles 29:25).

There are those who "find authority" for instruments in such passages as in Second Chronicles. But this presents a serious problem. For one thing, Paul wrote to the churches of Galatia and dealt with the problem of Jewish Christians trying to bind parts of the Old Testament law on Gentile converts—specifically the law of circumcision.

"And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law. You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace" (Galatians 5:3-4).

Now, if we want to justify instruments of music in worship because God commanded it in the Old Testament, we must consider what the apostle Paul wrote about those who want to justify binding circumcision because God commanded it in the Old Testament. Paul says we are then "under obligation to keep the whole Law." That would include animal sacrifices, Saturday observances, tithing, etc. And let's not forget dancing.

"Praise Him with trumpet sound; Praise Him with harp and lyre. Praise Him with timbrel and dancing; Praise Him with stringed instruments and pipe. Praise Him with loud cymbals; Praise Him with resounding cymbals" (Psalm 150:3-5).

If instruments are justified by the Old Testament, by what reasoning do we exclude dancing?

The reason we are not to observe these things is because we live under a new law. The law of the Old Testament has been taken away. "When He said, 'A new covenant,' He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear" (Hebrews 8:13, see also Colossians 2:13-16),

With respect to instruments of music in worship, if a similar command can be found in the New Testament, there will be no objection on my part to move the piano in. But until the question, "by what authority" is answered, I'll stay with the practice of the early church, upon which all scholars agree, which was "a cappella." In fact, the meaning of that Italian word is as follows: "adverb, adjective, Music. 1. Without instrumental accompaniment. 2. In the style of church or or chapel music." The early church thus practiced what the inspired apostles taught.

When people say the Old Testament was laws and rules, but the New Testament is grace and freedom, they are overlooking, or ignoring, some plain New Testament teaching. "Now even the first covenant had regulations of divine worship and the earthly sanctuary"(Hebrews 9:1). Let me illustrate the point being made. 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." What is implied? At age 16, she should do even a better job in keeping her room

in good condition.

So, if “even the first covenant has regulations...” the obvious implication is that the second covenant also has regulations or rules. If not, why not?

Let me state clearly that this does not mean that we can earn our salvation by our good works. The Bible clearly teaches that we cannot do enough good works to overcome even one sin. Allow me to illustrate the matter. Suppose a young man comes to my door, and he is paying his way through college. He offers to mow my lawn for \$25. Because he seems like a good young man who is working his way through college, I offer him \$500 to mow my lawn. (In truth, my lawn is so sparse that it probably isn't worth even the \$25.)

So the young man says, “Wow, that's really kind of you, sir. I have faith that you are a man of your word.” Upon that, he sits down on the front porch and waits for the \$500. He'll wait a long time! But suppose he goes ahead and mows the lawn and I give him the \$500. Has he “earned” the money? Not by a long shot. My grace responded to his obedient faith.

But was there no grace in the Old Testament? Time and again the Scriptures refer to God's grace being given. “Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord” (Genesis 6:8). Lot was saved by grace (Genesis 19:19). Moses found grace in the sight of God (Exodus 33:12). We could go on, but the point is made. How was grace extended to people in the Old Testament? Through an obedient faith!

Now, back to the matter of authority. Consider what Paul wrote in Colossians 3:17: “Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.” The phrase “in the name of” is a reference to authority. If a policeman knocks at my door and says, “Open, in the name of the law,” he is declaring that he is representing authority. If he is in plain clothes, he will show me his badge or some other form of ID. Thus Paul is declaring that what we do “in word—our teaching,” or “in deed—our actions,” are to be done in keeping with the authority or law of “the Lord Jesus.”

Is Islam Compatible With Christianity? No. 6

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Islam is not compatible with Christianity in its very nature, the reason for its existence. The religion of Islam has been earthly, sensual, and violent since its beginning ca. 621 A.D. by Muhammad, who had earlier claimed to have been visited by the angel Gabriel (Qur'am - Surah 96:1-5). In the Arab countries, from where he lived, first in Medina, then in Mecca, he established himself as a religious, political, and military leader and began converting tribes and cities to the religion he started by using the threat of war and conquest. During this time he assassinated several Arab leaders who opposed him.

Since the beginning of Islam, Muhammad's followers have followed his path of using force to convert people to Islam. This has been their history. They invade a country, and as they gain a majority, the people in the country are given a choice, submit (convert) to Islam or suffer the consequences, which in many cases means death. This concept is borne out by the name “Islam,” which means “submission” to the will of Allah. A “Muslim” is “one who submits.” Islam's goal is to physically bring the whole world into submission to their religion of Islam and their god, Allah. They seek to control every aspect of a person's life. This is stated clearly in a book, **Why I am not a Muslim**, written by Ibn Warraq. He writes:

“There may be moderate Muslims, but Islam itself is not moderate. There is no difference between Islam and Islam fundamentalism: at most there is a difference in degree, but not of kind...Islam fundamentalism has global aspirations: the submission of the entire world to the all-embracing Shari'a, Islamic Law, a Fascist system of dictates designed to control every single act of all individuals”

(I don't have the page number, t.t.).

Muslims try to defend their concept of a physical kingdom established by warfare and conquest by saying

Jesus was no different from Muhammad, pointing to a statement Jesus made in Matthew 10:34, 0 “Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth, I did not come to bring peace but a sword.” Then they refer to the Medieval Crusades of the Dark Ages, ca.1000-1200 AD, and the later holy(?) wars between Protestants and Catholics during the Reformation period, ca.1500-1600 AD. They then say, “See, Jesus’ followers used the sword in their conquests.”

In Matthew 10:34 Jesus is not calling for a military Jihad (holy war). When one honestly reads the context, one sees that the sword in the passage is used in a figurative way to describe how Jesus’ teaching would divide families. Some would receive it while other would reject it. In fact, the one time a disciple tried to defend Jesus with a sword, Jesus rebuked him and told him to put the sword away Matthew 26:52. Jesus did teach that when His followers were mistreated they were to turn the other cheek not take up a sword (Matthew 5:38-39). A few verses later He said they were to love their enemies, do good to them and pray for them, not hate and seek to retaliate against them (5:43-47). They were to let God take care of the vengeance in His time (Romans 12:18-19; Hebrews 10:30).

While it cannot be denied that the Crusades and the Protestant/Catholic wars were fought in the name of Christ, they were fought without His authority or blessings. Read Matthew 7:21-23 and you will see what Jesus thinks of those who do things in His name that He has not authorized. It is “lawlessness” (a work of iniquity). What the Crusaders and Reformers did by physical war and bloodshed was in direct opposition to what Jesus taught. It was acting without law (lawlessness) Jesus never endorsed the use of physical weapons and warfare in spreading His kingdom. Jesus rejected the use of carnal weapons to advance His cause, because the nature of His kingdom was not physical but spiritual. As Jesus stood before Pilate He revealed the nature of His kingdom. “My kingdom is not of this world, If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews, but now My kingdom is not from here” (John 18:36).

His disciples knew the battle was spiritual. “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against... spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 6:12). So the weapons used would not be carnal. “For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God ...” (2 Corinthians 10:4). Their defensive armor was spiritual and their offensive weapon was “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Ephesians 6:17).

The word of God was the only thing that could penetrate the heart of man as we see it doing on Pentecost (Acts 2:36-37). Physical threats may cause a person to outwardly change his words or actions, but it cannot change the inner man of the heart. A physical weapon may touch, wound, and even kill a person physically, but it cannot change what an individual really thinks. Only the word of God can do that (Hebrews 4:12). That is why Jesus said, “Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both body and soul in hell” (Matthew 10:28).

So, following Jesus’ orders to carry the gospel to the whole world (Mark 16:15; Matthew 28:19; Acts 1:6-8), using only the word of God, they went out and turned the world upside down (Acts 17:6). In ca. 30-35 years they had carried the gospel into the whole world (Colossians 1:5-6, 23). Think of that, they did it without using physical threats and force, nor maiming or beheading anyone. (to be continued)

Life's Race

Jim Mickells | Lewisburg, Tennessee, USA

“Therefore we also, since we surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us” (Hebrews 12:1)

The writer of this book describes life as a race which is to be run. The type race is a long distance run, a marathon, not a short sprint. Think of the training involved in such an effort. Those who participate, if they

want to succeed, must train for months or even years. It certainly takes endurance, not only to win, but also to finish such a grueling event. Life can be an extremely difficult experience at times as well. It certainly can be filled with all kinds of problems that require a sustaining faith to remain loyal to the Lord. We can depend upon our God to help in running this race, yet there are some things which can only be done by us.

We are told to “lay aside every weight” so we can successfully run the race of life. The word “weight” is defined as, “Rend, “encumbrance,” according to the figure of the racer who puts away everything which may hinder his running. So the readers are exhorted to lay aside every worldly hindrance or embarrassment to their Christian career” (**Word Studies in the New Testament**, Vincent, vol. 4, p. 537). These weights spoken of in this verse are not necessarily things that are sinful within themselves. They become sin when we allow them to hinder us from faithful service unto the Lord. A good illustration of weights which hinder is given by Jesus. “Now the ones that fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity” (Luke 8:14). Worldliness is an albatross around the neck keeping the runner from being successful.

The writer also warns about “sin which so easily ensnares us.” Those living in sin cannot and will not succeed in running the race of life. As we look about, we see masses of people living for themselves, guilty of all kinds of sin. There are many who try to justify the sinful lifestyles of others as well as their own, even twisting and distorting the word of God, in their efforts to excuse such behavior. As the servants of God, you and I cannot practice sin. It will destroy us. We must now live for Him who gave His life to save us from such terrible acts. God supplies our needs so we can overcome sin. Notice some things He provides for the child of God: The Bible (Psalm 119:11), the avenue of prayer (Matthew 6:9-13), a way of escape (1 Corinthians 10:13), forgiveness when we fail (Acts 8:18-24), examples of people succeeding (Hebrews 11), brethren who watch for our souls (Hebrews 13:7), the promise of heaven (Revelation 22:14), etc. We can put off sin and successfully run the race set before us.

We are also made aware of being “surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses.” This has reference back to all the men and women of faith in chapter eleven. This section of the Bible is often referred to as the “Hallmark of Faith.” There are some remarkable things said about each of these individuals. Yet there is one thing which really stands out, they all were successful in running their race of life. They all succeeded by faith in God.

As we complete the final lap of our race of life, upon entering the stadium, we see the stands filled with people cheering us on. As our eyes glance toward those individuals who are applauding and encouraging us to keep running, it is then we notice who these folks are. It is Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Rahab, etc. Once we see who it is, then we begin to hear a little more clearly what they are saying. The words echo in our ears, “You can do it.” “You can succeed just like us, keep the faith, keep pressing on, and continue to trust in the God of heaven.” All of us can succeed, with God’s help, in running life’s race through faith.

Father, Reverend, or Mike?

Mike Thomas | Beaver Dam, Kentucky, USA

In many religions it is disrespectful to not address their ministers by their religious titles, like Father, Reverend, or Your Holiness. There are even certain procedures devotees must follow in greeting their spiritual leaders. From a website on clergy etiquette, orthodoxinfo.com, the site states, “When we approach an Orthodox Presbyter or Bishop (but not a Deacon), we make a bow by reaching down and touching the floor with our right hand, place our right hand over the left (palms upward), and say: ‘Bless, Father’ (or ‘Bless, Your Grace,’ or ‘Bless, Your Eminence,’ etc.).” Wow, so all these years I’ve been insulting these dignified, pious leaders by greeting them with, “What’s up, Jack.” Little did I know I was supposed to fall to the floor and praise them in the same manner I would God!

Jesus had a different approach to men who wear spiritual titles in religion. He said, "But all their works they do to be seen by men...They love...greetings in the marketplaces, and to be called by men, 'Rabbi, Rabbi'...Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven" (Matthew 23:6-9). Hmm, grovel at the feet of these religious leaders and act like a fool or listen to Jesus. I think I'll side with Jesus and ignore these arrogant, praise-hungry, ungodly, self-promoters who "thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing" (Galatians 6:3). Anyone who would let another human praise him (or her) as a special, religious figure is acting like the devil and his angels, who have been competing for God's prominence from the foundation of the world (1 Timothy 3:6; Jude 6). They all will eventually receive a strict judgment—deservedly so.

It should be evident to us that Jesus was not forbidding the use of "father" in the earthly, paternal relationship. Even He used the term that way (Matthew 10:21; 19:29). Instead, He condemned religious titles of exaltation, which is why His apostles did not wear them. Paul may have been a spiritual father to those he converted (1 Corinthians 4:17), and even a mother (1 Thessalonians 2:7), but he never let people honor him in sacred ways. He took the same approach Peter did when men tried to exalt him, "Stand up; I myself am also a man" (Acts 10:26). That is the only etiquette we are to remember whenever we are tempted to "reverend" men with names that only belong to God (Psalms 111:9, **KJV**).

Why Did Jesus Not Sin?

William J. Stewart | Kingston, Ontario, Canada

In 2 Corinthians 5:21, the apostle Paul refers to Jesus as "*Him who knew no sin.*" The apostle John concurs, saying "*in Him there is no sin*" (1 John 3:5). Jesus lived thirty-some years on this earth, and did so without sin. He is the only responsible individual to have done so. Paul says of everyone else, "*all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*" (Romans 3:23). How is it that Jesus was able to keep Himself free from sin, but all others have succumbed to temptation and transgressed God's law?

Some will point to the fact that Jesus was "*God with us*" (Matthew 1:23), "*God manifest in the flesh*" (1 Timothy 3:16), and thus He could not sin, for He is deity. Indeed, Jesus is God, but I submit to you that He did not overcome temptation and sin because He is God. He could not. James 1:13 says,

Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone.

Since God cannot be tempted by evil, Jesus could not have faced temptation as God. If He did, then His temptation really was not a temptation, for God cannot be tempted. But even if it were possible for God to be tempted, if He kept Himself from sin because He is God, then He is disqualified as my example. I cannot imitate that! If Jesus overcame temptation and sin by divine prowess, there is not a being on this earth who is able to follow His example.

Hebrews 4:15 reads,

For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.

Jesus knows what it means to have desires, and to be enticed to misuse them. Some will get their back up at the idea that Jesus could have sinned and will declare it a moot point, since He did not. Friends, if sin was not possible, then His temptation was not temptation. If He could not have chosen to do wrong, then He was not really tempted. And yet the Scriptures plainly say that He, as our High Priest, is able to sympathize with us, for He shared in our weaknesses - He was in the flesh as we are. He faced temptation as we face temptation, as a human. The difference is He overcame 100% of the time - we have not.

A few chapters earlier, the Hebrew writer is clear that Jesus was as we are, and that having overcome temptation as a man, He is able to supply help to us (Hebrews 2:14, 17-18).

So, how can Jesus help us overcome temptation? In Luke 4, we find Jesus being tempted in the wilderness. Jesus' answer to temptation each time began with three words, "*It is written*" (Luke 4:4, 8, 10). His knowledge of Scripture was key to overcoming temptation. If we are not diligent students of the word, then we are defeating ourselves in the battle against temptation. If we don't know what God's word says, we cannot answer, "*It is written*" to the devil when we are tempted to do wrong. Peter tells us that God's word gives us "*all things that pertain to life and godliness*" (2 Peter 1:3), so let's get busy and find out what it says. It is called "*the word of life*" (Philippians 2:16) for a reason.

In addition to His knowledge of God's will, Jesus also had an exceptionally clear understanding of who He was and what He was called to do. Recall at the age of 12, Jesus remained behind in Jerusalem following the Passover, where He listened to and asked questions of the teachers, but also demonstrated His own understanding of the Law. When Mary finally found Him, He said to her, "*Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?*" (Luke 2:49). Verse 50 says she and Joseph didn't understand what He meant by this. Friends, Jesus was focused. He was intent on pleasing His heavenly Father. From such an early age, He knew who He was and what He was here to do. Do we know who we are and why we are here? We are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27), called to obey Him (Ecclesiastes 12:13) and to live in holiness (1 Peter 1:13-16).

Another key to Jesus successfully enduring temptation is that He was "*filled with the Holy Spirit*" (Luke 4:1). I suggest to you it doesn't mean that Jesus was performing miracles while He was in the wilderness. Being filled with the Spirit is used in the New Testament at times when one speaks on behalf of God (Luke 1:41, 67; Acts 2:4; 4:8; 13:9), but also in a more general sense of one's relationship to God and the Spirit's presence in our life (Acts 6:3, 5; 11:24; 13:52; Ephesians 5:18). Jesus did not face the devil alone; the Spirit of God was with Him. Likewise, you and I do not need to face temptation alone. We have access to the same Spirit. The problem is, if we are quenching or resisting the Spirit, then we are not going to be equipped to adequately deal with temptation.

Something else to notice from the beginning of Luke 4 - Jesus was not given three token temptations and that was all. Luke tells us He was "*tempted for forty days by the devil.*" What we have in Luke 4 (and Matthew 4) is a brief summary of what happened. Having failed to cause the Son of God to sin, verse 13 says the devil "*departed from Him until an opportune time.*" Satan would seek to entice Jesus again, some other place, some other time. The same is true for you and I. If we have successfully overcome temptation, good. The devil may leave us alone for a time, but know that temptation will come again. and so we must always be ready, always focused, always be walking securely in God's way.

John 8 speaks of a woman caught in adultery who was brought before Jesus. After He defused the fiery contingent of Pharisees who dragged her to the temple, Jesus spoke to the woman. The last words He said to her were "*God and sin no more.*" Sadly, it seems that some would rather portray this as "go and sin less." Jesus wants us to be sinless, not to sin less. But wait, that's not possible! Everybody sins! Yes, Romans 3:23 tells us "*all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*" Friend, that was our past. It does not have to be our future.

In 1 John 2:1, we're told that Jesus is our Advocate if we sin. May I emphasize, IF we sin. In the same verse, the apostle identifies part of his purpose in writing in these words, "*these things I write to you, so that you may not sin.*" That is the goal. Paul wrote the same to Corinth, "Awake to righteousness, and do not sin" (1 Corinthians 15:34). We do not have to sin. God's word tells us time and again to refrain from sin. When we do sin, it is a failure on our part. God does not want us to fail.

1 Corinthians 10:13 tells us we can overcome temptation, that God has given the way of escape. The way of escape is found in Christ, who was tempted as we are, yet without sin. So, let us be imitators of Christ.

Fruit to Your Account

Sean P. Cavender | Bald Knob, Arkansas, USA

In Philippians four, the apostle Paul writes a very personal account of his feelings of deep gratitude for the brethren at the church in Philippi. Paul said, “no church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only” (Philippians 4:15). The church in Philippi was not only interested in the spread of the gospel, but they were financially invested in the welfare of the apostle.

Their gracious attitude of giving was not just a one-time affair either. They sent “once and again” for all of Paul’s needs (Philippians 4:16). Seeing this church’s example of giving to Paul so that he could spend less time making tents and spend more time converting souls was a real blessing for the apostle. While in Thessalonica Paul did not “charge” the church for his care; he worked, as an example of what they ought to do (2 Thessalonians 3:7-9). While in Corinth, Paul said he robbed other churches so that the Corinthians would not be burdened (2 Corinthians 11:8).

The church in Philippi wanted to see the gospel spread throughout the world. Those brethren in Christ wanted the seed to be planted, the ground cultivated, and wait for the increase that would come from God. They awaited the harvest of the bounty. Jesus said the harvest is plentiful (Matthew 9:37-38). The church of the Philippians was part of the workers who were praying for a bountiful harvest. The apostle Paul was able to work in the fields due to the blessing from the Philippians.

However, Paul did not take the credit for his work. In his deep appreciation for the care of his needs, he gave the Philippians the credit. They did not seek vain glory; Paul was honest enough to recognize they needed to be honored. Paul was not using flattery to try and “milk them for more money.” He was rendering honor to whom honor was rightly due (Romans 13:7).

“Not because I desire a gift: but I desire fruit that may abound to your account,” (Philippians 4:17). One of the greatest rewards you can ever have in life is to enjoy the fruit of your labor. You work hard, or you make it possible for others to work hard, and you see the blessing in giving, rather than receiving. Or using another illustration, if you make an investment you want to see the investment grow. You want to enjoy the earnings of your commitment and discipline.

Paul recognized the commitment and investment the church at Philippi made and he wanted to give them a bit of the credit. He wanted to make sure they are aware of the yield of their investment.

The apostle had fellowship with the brethren at Philippi. He had fellowship with the brethren in Antioch. You see that he cultivated those relationships with like-minded brethren, visiting them, and reporting to them on the work of the gospel (Acts 14:27; 18:22).

Let’s give thanks and honor to the brethren that support preachers of the gospel since they provide the necessities of these laborers in the fields of harvest. Those churches are gracefully deserving to enjoy the fruit of their work and commitment, just as much as anyone else.

Lip Service VS Repentance

The Two Sons

Matthew 21:28-32

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

From the beginning of His ministry the Lord had spoken of “His hour,” the time of His sacrifice. Previously His hour had not yet come (John 2:4; 7:6,8). Now it had come (John 12:23). Previously He had withdrawn from confrontations that would lead to His death (Matthew 4:12; 12:14-15; 14:13; 15:12,21; John 6:15;10:31,39-40). But now He presses His claims and His denunciations of the leaders of the Jewish nation with the devastating and infuriating force that would lead the scribes, Pharisees, and chief priests to carry out their plot to kill Him.

The purpose of this, His last trip to Jerusalem, was to die for the sins of the world. So He brazenly entered

Jerusalem in the role of Messiah (Matthew 21:1-16), asserted His authority by cleansing the Temple of commercial trade (Mark 11:15-18), publicly exposed the moral inability of the chief priests and elders to deal with the question of authority in religion (Matthew 21:23-27), and immediately denounced in a parable their refusal to believe John and obey God (Matthew 21:28-32).

The Master began the parable by letting the Jewish leaders know He wanted them to pass judgment on a case. Of course, in their arrogance, they were more than willing. The result is that they announced their own guilt before the multitude.

Christ spoke of a man who owned a vineyard and had two sons. He told the first son to work in His vineyard, but he rebelliously refused, not even bothering to make an excuse. But afterward this son regretted his sin and went and worked in the vineyard. The father went to the second son and told him the same thing. This son politely, respectfully agreed to work but didn't do so.

Then the Master sprang the trap. Jesus simply inquired, "Which of the two did the will of his father?" What could the Jewish leaders say? Everyone knew the answer. Perhaps they were too blind to realize the second son was an exact parallel to them. They replied, "The first."

The Lord immediately and with devastating force applied the lesson of the parable. The tax collectors and prostitutes would enter the kingdom of God rather than the proud, self-righteous Jewish rulers. John the Baptist came preaching the way of righteousness (Matthew 3:1-2). The tax collectors, known for their extortion (Luke 3:12-13), and prostitutes, believed him and were baptized, confessing their sins (Luke 7:29; Matthew 3:5-6). They had been openly defiant of God, but at the preaching of John they repented.

But the self-righteous Jewish leaders, who claimed to love and obey God (Matthew 15:7-8), rejected the preaching of John and refused to obey God by being baptized by John (Matthew 21:25; Luke 7:29-30). Thus, in exonerating the first son and implicitly condemning the second, they publicly proclaimed themselves guilty.

Incidentally, it is interesting that Christ does not employ the usual word for repentance in verses twenty-nine and thirty-two. The same Greek word, "*metamellomai*," is translated "regretted" (verse 29) and "relented" (verse 32) in the **New King James Version**. In the **King James Version** it is rendered "repented" in both verses. Although this word can be used for "repentance," this word especially stresses the emotions (Hendriksen. 779). It can be used of regret that leads to despair rather than true repentance (Matthew 27:3-5). Here the Lord obviously uses it to mean real repentance, for the first son went to the vineyard after he "regretted" his rebellion (Matthew 21:29), and if the Jewish leaders had "relented" they would have believed John (verse 32). The Master's use of the word in this parable describes the emotional regret of a son for having rebelled against his father.

The usual New Testament word for "repent" is "metanaeo." True repentance always involves three changes. It is a change of mind or will (Matthew 21:28-32; 12:41; Jonah 3:10), preceded by a change of feeling, called "godly sorrow" (2 Corinthians 7:9-10), and leading to a change of conduct (Luke 3:3,8-14).

Repentance is absolutely essential to forgiveness for both an alien sinner (Acts 2:38; 3:19) and an erring child of God (Acts 8:22).

We can talk all we want about loving the Lord, but if we fail to obey Him, regardless of our claims, we will not enter the kingdom of God.

Work Cited

Hendriksen, William, New Testament Commentary (Exposition of the Gospel of Matthew).



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