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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 VIRTUE 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 revelation of God is the first step toward the attainment of eternal life. The inner reception of that revelation by a daily conformity to it is the second step. As we actually live God's life we come to know him; but we cannot attempt to live his life without a revelation." (J.W. McGarvey, **Fourfold Gospel**, 679 [comments on John 17:3]).

"Today we are the living monuments to the glory of Christ, as we wear his name, confess his Lordship, live according to the dictates of his Word, sing his praises, and offer up in his name our prayers to the Father." (Daniel H. King, **Truth Commentaries: The Gospel of John**. 344 [comments on John 17:10]).

"In prayer a man enters heaven that he may face the battles of earth." (William Barclay, **The Daily Study Bible: The Gospel of Matthew**. 2.386).

She Was Not A Christian

William J. Stewart | Kingston, Ontario, Canada

The end of June and beginning of July has been a difficult time for me. My mom passed away on June 28 from complications after colon cancer surgery. She was not a Christian. As it became apparent that she was not going to survive, all my family were sorrowing over her impending death. I was too, but in addition to that, I was grieved by the knowledge that she was not ready to meet the Lord. I sat by her side in the hours leading up to her death, helpless to do anything for her. My family must have thought, *"See how much he loved her,"* when I broke down in tears at her last breath. Luke 16:23-24 has never been so real to me as it was in that moment.

I have experienced regret and guilt – I did not do enough to admonish her. I'd invited her to study, but not near enough. I've spoken about the Lord with her around, but not as firm, not as assertive, not as boldly as I needed to do. She knew where I stood on choices she'd made in her life, but I failed to adequately warn her of the eternal consequences of those choices. And now there is no longer an opportunity to admonish her, to invite her, to speak about the Lord to her, to warn her about the judgment and hell.

In her will, she stipulated that she wanted me to preach her funeral. How sadly ironic. She wasn't interested in hearing me preach while she was alive, but she gave me a podium and an audience to preach Christ to in her death. We remembered the dead, and we preached to the living. I doubt most of the people there ever heard the gospel proclaimed before. I don't know if they'll have the opportunity to hear it again. So I made sure that as we buried my mom, who was not ready to meet her Maker, no one who was present could claim before God when they die – I didn't know.

Time will take away the grief of losing a loved one; but there is no remedy for the pain caused by knowing someone died outside of Christ. May this heart wrenching loss produce greater zeal and urgency in me to warn people before it is eternally too late.

Who are the people in your life who are not ready to meet the Lord? Proclaim Christ to them. Warn them. Admonish them. Whether to obey or not to obey is their decision, but make sure you do your part. May no one be able to say in eternity, "You never mentioned Him to me."

Questions from Kenya

Question

1. What about rebaptism?

Answer

When the apostle Paul came to Ephesus on his third journey to the Gentiles, he encountered twelve disciples who had only received the baptism of John (Acts 19:1-7). He baptized them "in the name of the Lord Jesus" (verse 5). Regardless of how many times a person has been baptized, he must be baptized "in the name of the Lord Jesus" (cf. Matthew 28:20; Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5), that is, by His authority (cf. Acts 4:18; Colossians 3:17).

Question

2. How many kinds of baptism are authorized?

Answer

There are seven Bible baptisms. Israel was "baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea" when they passed through the Red Sea (1 Corinthians 10:1-2), there were various "washings" (baptisms) under the Law of Moses (Hebrews 9:10), there was the baptism of John (Matthew 3:1-6), there was baptism with suffering (Matthew 20:22-23; Luke 12:50), there was baptism with the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:1-5), the wicked will be baptized with fire (Matthew 3:10-12), and all must be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ to be saved (Acts 2:38). But there is now only one baptism authorized by the Lord (Ephesians 4:5), and it is the one which is authorized by Jesus Christ (Acts 2:38).

That baptism has one element, water (Acts 8:36; 10:44-48); one action, a burial (Acts 8:36, 38-39; Romans 6:3-4; Colossians 2:12); one subject, a penitent believer (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38); and one purpose, the remission of sins (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38). All other baptisms are spiritually worthless (Acts 19:1-5).

Question

3. If we do things by the law, can it save us?

Answer

"You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace" (Galatians 5:4).

Question

5. What is the baptism of repentance by John?

Answer

John prepared the way for Christ by demanding that the Jews repent of their sins in order to be prepared for the coming kingdom of Christ, confess their sins to be baptized, and bring forth the fruits of repentance in a changed life (Matthew 3:1-12; Mark 1:1-8; Luke 3:1-18).

Question

6. Who is a heretic in the bible?

Answer

But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction (2 Peter 2:1).

The word "heresy" is a transliteration of the Greek term "hairesis." W.E. Vine thus defines the word: *denotes (a) "a choosing, choice" (from haireomai, "to choose"); then, "that which is chosen," and hence, "an opinion," especially a self-willed opinion, which is substituted for submission to the power of truth, and leads to division and the formation of sects (Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words).*

Thus, the root meaning is simply an opinion. All people have opinions, things they think but cannot prove by Scripture. If they treat these opinions as if they were divine truth and teach them as the Word of God, they are heretics. These opinions may be false doctrine (2 Peter 2:1), or the teachers may be dividing the brethren with their opinions (Titus 3:9-11). We must speak as the oracles of God (1 Peter 4:11). The groups that are formed around these opinions are sects (same Greek word, cf. Acts 5:17; 15:5; 24:5; 26:5). The Jews falsely viewed the church as a sect (Acts 24:14; 28:22). Heresy is a work of the flesh that will cause one to lose his soul (Galatians 5:19-21).

Question

7. What was the sacrifice for permanent atonement?

Answer

By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool. For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified (Hebrews 10:10-14).

Question from Sri Lanka

Question

Dear sir,

“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created He Him ; male and female created he then.” (The Old Testament /Genesis /chapter 01). We know the God created man in his own image. Why didn't He supply all of His great qualities to man? I think If He did that the earth becomes a good place like the Heaven.

Answer

Thank you for your question.

All we can know about God's will and purpose is what He has revealed for us in the Scriptures. “The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law” (Deuteronomy 29:29). We must not go beyond what the Lord has revealed. “Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God. Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son” (2 John verse 9, **English Standard Version**). God could not have given us one of His perfections – eternal existence. “Before the mountains were brought forth, Or ever You had formed the earth and the world, Even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God” (Psalm 90:2). Rather than speculating about the unrevealed, believe and obey the Word of God. “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven” (Jesus, Matthew 7:21).

By What Authority?

Jefferson David Tant | Roswell, Georgia, USA

Now let's make an application.

Some churches do not partake of the Lord's Supper, including the Christian Science Mother Church. One of their members may ask me: “By what authority do you take the Lord's Supper in the church of Christ?” Among the passages I would refer to would be Luke 22:19: “This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.”

Then I would ask my questioner, “By what authority do you omit observing the Lord's Supper?” If he has knowledge, he would cite the following: “Article XVIII. **Communion**. No more Communion. Section I. The Mother Church of Christ, Scientist, shall observe no more Communion Seasons” (**Church Manual**. 61).

Now, which “authority” should you choose? Christ gives some information to help us make a wise decision. He rebuked the Jewish leaders in Matthew 15:7-9: “You hypocrites, well did Isaiah prophesy of you, saying, This people honors me with their lips; But their heart is far from me. But in vain do they worship me, Teaching as their doctrines the precepts of men.”

Would the quote from the Church Manual be a doctrine by God's authority, or a doctrine by men's authority? The distinction cannot be made any clearer.

Consider the matter of how baptism is to be administered. All historians and Greek scholars are in agreement that the New Testament practice was immersion in water. When Christ charged the apostles to spread the gospel, he said:

“All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with

you always, even to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:18-20)

Consider what Jesus said. He said he had “all authority,” and then charged the disciples to “baptize” (from the Greek baptizo—to immerse) “in the name of” (by the authority of) “the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit...”

There really is no controversy here. Thus, when people ask why we baptize by immersion, I have several Bible passages to cite. One would be the case of Philip baptizing the Ethiopian eunuch. As they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch said, “Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?” And Philip said, “If you believe with all your heart, you may.” And he answered and said, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.” And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away, and the eunuch no longer saw him, but went on his way rejoicing (Acts 8:36-39).

Then I may ask someone, “Why does your church practice baptism by sprinkling water on the head?” If the one I am talking with doesn’t really know a definitive answer, perhaps I can help by pointing to the following quotation.

“A little known (yet documented) fact of history is that the Church of England (1534), the Presbyterian (c. 1540), and the Congregational (soon after) churches all practiced immersion for about 100 years, or until the Westminster assembly in 1643. At that time, a number of bishops, seeing how much more convenient sprinkling was, came before Parliament insisting that “the devil of immersion ought to be legislated out of the realm it is so troublesome.”

“The Westminster assembly convened July 1, 1643. Very naturally the question was brought before this august body of divines, ‘Shall we continue the practice of immersion or shall we adopt sprinkling instead?’ When it came to a vote, twenty-four voted to continue the ancient and apostolic practice, and twenty-four voted in favor of sprinkling. Dr. Lightfoot was chairman, and it was his duty to give the deciding vote. He cast his vote in favor of sprinkling”

(Edinburgh Encyclopaedia. 3:236).

In 1644, Parliament acted upon this, repealing the laws enjoining immersion, enacting in their place laws enjoining sprinkling. Those who were not sprinkled were to be treated as outlaws.

Thus, the question is, “By whose authority” do I wish to proceed—by the authority of Christ, or by the authority of Parliament which was following a majority vote?

Since many denominations now have women pastors, my question would be: “By what authority do you have women preaching to the congregation?” No one has to this date given me a Bible verse that gives God’s approval to this. I can refer to a verse that prohibits this practice, but have not seen one that authorizes it. “But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet. For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve.” (1 Timothy 2:12-13) This does not forbid a woman to have a part in teaching a man in private, for we have an example of that, but it does not give authority for a woman to preach to men publicly.

If someone were to ask why we use unleavened bread and fruit of the vine in partaking of the Lord’s Supper, we can refer to several passages that give details of what was used in the Jewish Passover feast. It was during observance of this feast that Christ used the Passover ingredients to inaugurate what we know as the Lord’s Supper. See Matthew 26:18-29, Mark 14, Luke 22, John 13; and First Corinthians 11.

And some ask why we, in the churches of Christ, observe the Lord’s Supper every Sunday. I would cite Acts 20:7, where the disciples met for this purpose. Early church writings all agree that this was a weekly observance, and thus it was a practice taught by the inspired apostles.

Then I might ask those in various denominations why they partake once a month, or once a quarter, or once a year, or every day? Where in the Word of God is this authorized? They can point to their various denominational creed books that authorize this, but not to the Bible.

Some time ago I had a study with a young woman from the Methodist Church. She told me they were using potato chips and Coke for the Lord's Supper. Why? I guess that appealed to people in this modern age. Maybe it was "hip." Question: Where is the authority for that? The only authority would be from the doctrines of men, which Jesus said was worship "in vain."

Consider this: All denominational creed books employ the authority of men. It matters not whether it is the **Catholic Catechism**, the **Baptist Manual**, the **Methodist Discipline**, the **Episcopal Book of Common Prayer**, etc., etc., etc. God did not write these books. The Bible says that "God is not a God of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints" (1 Corinthians 14:33). But with 40,000 denominations all teaching and practicing different things, what would you call that but confusion?

Consider Christ's prayer for his disciples in John 17:20-21: "I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me."

Are the "Christian" denominations the answer to Christ's prayer? Obviously not, for they represent division rather than unity and oneness. Christ prayed that all who believed on him might be one—not divided. Consider the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, are they united—one? Could we think the Father might be of the Jehovah's Witness group, the Son be of the Salvation Army group, and the Holy Spirit of the Pentecostal Holiness group? If the answer is negative, then we must conclude that what we have on the earth is not from God.

Can one become a Methodist by following the teaching of the **Baptist Manual**? Can one become a Jehovah's Witness by following the Catholic **Catechism**? Can one become an Episcopalian by following the **Book of Mormon**? "That's nonsense," someone would say. And that's right.

Can one become a Christian by following just the Bible? The answer is obvious. Since that was sufficient in the 1st Century, it just makes sense that if God's wisdom could provide all that was necessary in the 1st Century, it surely should be sufficient for the 21st Century. If not, why not?

Then the question is, "Why all the confusion? Why all the division?" The obvious answer is—Satan. So how does he accomplish his mission of division and confusion? He has his ministers and prophets whose mission is to deceive.

Consider Paul's response to some who were causing trouble at Corinth.

"For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds" (2 Corinthians 11:13-15).

If I got in the pulpit on Sunday dressed in a red suit, with horns sticking out of my head, with a tail wagging around and holding a pitchfork in my hand, I'm not sure people would believe what I was saying. (You've seen the caricatures of Satan, haven't you?) But if I appear dressed in nice pastoral garments and preach a good-sounding message, I am more likely to be believed.

It is these latter men that Paul warned about. And John also gives a caution. "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1).

What's the solution? Luke gives a clue when he commended certain people when they heard the apostle Paul preaching.

"Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so"
(Acts 17:11).

These people in Berea searched for themselves to check out Paul's preaching, and they were commended for doing so.

I am afraid in the majority of denominations today, the people in the pews just accept what comes from the pulpit and do not search the Scriptures for themselves. I find that so many do not even know the books of the Bible, which indicates they certainly do not study it.

So the question is: "By what authority..."? If the teaching and practice of any church cannot be found in the Scriptures, then it is by the authority of men, which in reality is by the authority of Satan. And Satan is a liar, and the father of lies (John 8:44).

Many were claiming they were doing great things, but note what he said about them.

"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter." Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you who practice lawlessness'" (Matthew 7:21-23).

What was the problem? They were doing things for which there was no law/no authority. Notice that they were doing "good things" (things which seemed good to them), but they were not according to "the will" of God. So, where do we go to find "the will" of God? I think we would agree that we would go to the Bible. Therefore, if we can't find our practice in the Bible, then it is not authorized, and therefore not acceptable to God, no matter how pleasing it may be to us.

Don't be deceived by smooth-talking preachers. They may be Satan's ministers. Paul warned Timothy:

"For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths" (2 Timothy 4:3-4)

In conclusion, I would urge all who read this to prayerfully consider the question, "By what authority?" Our hope of heaven depends on the answer we give.

"This Gospel" | Ephesians 3:7

Pat Farish | Lancaster, Texas, USA

Through "this gospel" the Gentiles were made "heirs, members of the same body and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 3:6). Paul says, I was made a minister of this gospel. He must remember his former life, as a persecutor of the church. Twice in this passage (in the seventh and eighth verses) he refers to the grace of God. We understand his references to grace. After his conversion the report was, "He who used to persecute us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy" (Galatians 1:23). From this background, to be put in a position of great responsibility and opportunity as a preacher of the gospel, is stunning. But by the grace of God he was there, to preach to the Gentiles; to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ, to illuminate the plan of the mystery, and to make known the manifold wisdom of God (verses 8-10).

Put yourself in Paul's shoes: with a history like his (confer Philippians 3:5-6; and Acts 8:1-4), now that you

have been enlightened, what does your memory do to you? Paul said, Philippians 3:13-14, “forgetting what lies behind and stretching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” This is the formula: forgetting, and pressing on.

Some are disturbed by “forgetting.” They think it means only to erase from the memory, and they are troubled because they cannot do that. That, however, is not the only meaning of “forget.” We can, of course, lose something from our memory. That is unintentional – and not what Paul has in mind. To “forget” may mean to deliberately refuse to go back and dwell on the things – especially the unpleasant things – that have occurred in our lives. Forget them; move on.

All of us have blundered – perhaps not as emphatically as Paul, but whatever it was, we did it; and we are at least embarrassed by the recollection, if not deeply ashamed. Paul has shown the way back: if the Christian has repented and appealed to the Father, He has forgiven you: forget it, and set yourself to the tasks that are at hand (Philippians 3:13-14).

John addressed this situation in his first epistle, writing in chapter three, “Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth. By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him; for whenever our heart condemns us God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything” (verses 18-20). Loving in deed and truth, John writes, is the key to reassurance. It is not super-piety to continue being guilt-stricken after we have done what God requires to be forgiven; rather it is to doubt, even to deny, Him. Again, forget it! Get on with pressing on toward the goal, by doing that for which you were created in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2:10).

He told the Philippians that the peace of God “surpasses all understanding” (4:7). This speaks of the unsearchable riches of Christ (confer Romans 11:33).

To “bring to light ... the plan of the mystery” was achieved, and so we know “the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise of Christ” (Ephesians 3:6; and look at Colossians 1:25-26).

This blows away the notion that the kingdom was opposed, “so the church was brought in as a substitute, since the purpose of God was defeated by men.” No. The kingdom came as promised, Mark 9:1; and its citizens were the saved people (Colossians 1:13-14) – who were the church (Acts 20:28 with Revelation 5:8, 9).

The manifold wisdom of God has been revealed through the church. This does not allude to the church as speaking these things, but as an integral part of the unfolding of the plan of God, hidden through ages. The church was part of the eternal purpose of God; and Christ Jesus came, to “seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). In Christ we can be confident; we can know of our access by faith into the grace of God (Romans 5:12, 2).

Is Islam Compatible With Christianity? No. 7

Tommy G. Thornhill | Etna, Arkansas, USA

In previous articles on “Why Islam is not compatible with Christianity,” we have seen the glaring difference between the Islamic god, Allah, and Christianity’s God, Jehovah. In another lesson we saw how Islam distorted Jesus Christ as Deity and the Son of God by saying Jesus was one of Allah’s prophets, but certainly not as great as Muhammad. In this article I want to briefly mention what might be called, Islam’s “Articles of faith” and “The five pillars of Islam.”

The Islamic Articles Of Faith. These are the things Muslims are taught to believe from early childhood and they must be accepted without question or argument. Since Muhammad was acquainted with Roman Catholicism you will notice that some of these articles are entwined with some Biblical misconceptions.

You will also notice some parallels with the false religion, established by Joseph Smith, “The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints” (commonly known as Mormonism or The Mormon Church).

1. Faith in Allah – This article is called the doctrine of *tawhid*. It is a strict form of monotheism. To the Muslim there is no God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit. Muslims believe Allah is the only one who possesses deity (Surah 112:1-4). He is the only true God and that His name is Allah. His will is supreme. Allah is his personal name as used in the Koran (Qur’an). He has no gender, so Allah can be either male or female, i.e. god/goddess. Allah is one, and literally means, “the god.” This is the first article of faith, now let’s notice five more such articles.

2. Angels – Muslims believe there are multitudes of angels, both good and bad, who are invisible, yet constantly dealing with mankind. For example, the angel Gabriel transmitted the Qur’an to Muhammad, their prophet and founder of Islam.

3. The Holy Books – Muslims believe that Allah has given a long series of revelations, including the Old and New Testaments. But these revelations end with the Qur’an, which supersedes and essentially abrogates the others. Muslims claim that the Qur’an is incorruptible, whereas the Bible has been corrupted in ages past. The Mormons make the same claim to justify the need for new revelations. Both the Muslims and Mormons make this claim without offering credible evidence. Even if they proved the Bible has been corrupted, that would not prove their writings are genuine.

4. The Prophets – Muslims believe that God has sent inspired prophets to men. Six of the principle prophets are Adam, the chosen of Allah, Noah, the preacher of Allah, Abraham, the friend of Allah, Moses, the speaker for Allah, Jesus, the word of Allah, and Muhammad, the apostle of Allah. Muhammad is the greatest of all prophets.

5. Predestination - Muslims believe that all events, whether good or evil, have been foreordained by Allah, consequently every act done by a Muslim, regardless of what it is, he is simply carrying out the will of Allah.

6. The Day of Judgment – Muslims believe that everyone’s good and evil deeds will be placed on a “scale.” Those having sufficient personal merit, righteousness, and the requisite favor of Allah, will go to eternal heaven, all others will go to an eternal hell.

The Five Pillars of Islam. A pillar is a foundation principle upon which the house is built. Islam has what is called “the five pillars of Islam.”

1. The first pillar is more or less a repeat of the first article of faith. This is what they confess over and over, even while they are committing acts of terrorism. The *shahada* or profession of faith is the sincere recitation of the twofold creed: “There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is his prophet.”

2. The salah or formal prayer must be performed at five points during the day while facing toward the holy city of Mecca.

3. The zakah or alms-giving is the duty of sharing one’s wealth out of gratitude for Allah’s favor, according to the uses laid down in the Qur’an.

4. The sawn or fast during the month of Ramadam commemorates the first revelation of the Qur’an that Muhammad received in 610 AD. Although eating is permitted at night, Muslims must fast during the day for the entire month.

5. The hajj or pilgrimage to Mecca is to be performed, if at all possible, at least once during one’s lifetime. Muslims consider the *Ka’aba* – a small sanctuary near the center of the Grand Mosque in Mecca – to be

the most sacred spot on earth.

About this fifth pillar. Abraham and Ismael are said to have built the foundation of the *Ka'aba* (Surah 2:127). Islamic tradition says that the *Ka'aba* was first built by the first man, Adam. Abraham and Ismael rebuilt the *Ka'aba* on the old foundation. In addition, the Qur'an states that Abraham was commanded to sacrifice his son. The son is not named in the Qur'an (Surah 37-113) and in early Islam, there was a controversy over the son's identity. However the belief that the son was Ismael prevailed, and this view continues to be endorsed by Muslim scholars. Consequently, Ismael is a prophet in Islam and is considered the father of the Arabic people (cf. Genesis 17:20).

Most Muslims don't believe these things, because they have read the Koran (Qur'an). Most have not read it. They rely on clerics to tell them what it means. One Muslim from Turkey expressed it clearly. "Now we are in Ramadan, I fast and practice, but I have never thought of reading the Qur'am anyway. I would not understand any of it. " (to be continued)

"Walk In Newness Of Life"

Jim Mickells | Lewisburg, Tennessee, USA

It amazes me how many people deny that baptism has any connection with salvation. In a recent conversation I had with an individual, he very plainly stated he had been saved before being baptized. "One should be baptized," he said, "Because Jesus was." His contention was that it had nothing to do with the forgiveness of sin.

Peter said, "There is also an antitype which now saves us--baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 3:21). Was Peter telling the truth? Can you trust his words? Where those words inspired by God? The correct answer to each of these questions would be yes. Baptism does save us. Yet not baptism alone.

Paul made this statement when writing to those at Rome:

"Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin" (Romans 6:3-6).

If one was saved before being baptized, the apostle's analogy about the death, burial, and resurrection in these verses would not be valid. Who is the person to be buried in the watery grave of baptism? It is the old man of sin (verse 6). If one is saved at the point of faith, the person buried is the one has been made alive. Do you bury a person who is alive or one who is dead? Surely one would not contend we bury people who are alive.

Paul's contention in verse 4 is that just as Christ was raised from the dead, those who have been buried in the waters of baptism, will rise as well. He further stated they would rise to walk in newness of life. This new life is experienced when one comes forth from the grave. The old man of sin has been crucified. The person saved has died to sin and is now set free (verse 7). If one is saved at the point faith, he would have already been walking in newness of life.

In verse 3, the writer says that we are baptized into the death of Christ. What does he mean by this statement? Look what happen in the death of Christ. In the gospel of John, it says, "But when they came to Jesus and saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs. But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out" (John 19:33-34). His blood was shed in

His death. It is when one is baptized into the death of Christ he receives the benefit of the blood shed by our Savior. The blood has been applied. If one is saved at the point of faith, then they are saved without applying the blood of Christ.

Jesus, when He gave the great commission to His apostles, said, "And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:15-16). Peter's sermon recorded by Luke on Pentecost was very similar, "Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). If I am to be saved by God's grace, having my sins remitted, then I must be baptized.

Baptism does not nullify the grace of God; it is how through faith I receive the benefits provided by Him (Romans 5:1-2). How could these inspired men of God speak in these verses in a way where one could have more easily understood them? It seems pretty simple to me. Why not just do what the Lord says? No matter the great effort to explain these verses away by some, they will still face them in judgment.

Faith Only for Salvation

Mike Thomas | Beaver Dam, Kentucky, USA

One of the more popular doctrines in our world is Faith Only for Salvation, which teaches salvation in Jesus at the point of faith. Joel Osteen, the famous preacher from Texas, says: "Here's a simple prayer you can say: 'Dear God I know I'm a sinner, I know I am not where I want to be, and I want your forgiveness! I believe that Jesus died on the cross to pay the price for my sins. Please wash me clean from all sin, shame, and guilt, come into my life Jesus to be my Lord and Savior. I ask this in your name Jesus. Amen!' If you prayed that prayer then we believe you are saved." Many others teach the same thing.

So what about it? Can a person be saved from sin just by believing in and confessing Jesus as the Son of God? It is important that we know what to do because we each have sinned (Romans 3:23) and are in need God's mercy (Romans 6:23). And it is certain that salvation is only in Jesus Christ, "in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins" (Colossians 1:14). So is Faith Only all we need to practice for salvation?

The only time the phrase "faith only" is mentioned in the Bible is in James 2:24, which says, "You see then that a man is justified by works, and **not by faith only**." In the context, James was referring to Abraham's willingness to obey God when he was told to sacrifice his son (verse 21). Fortunately, God stopped Abraham before he carried out that task (Genesis 22:10-12). But his faith was strong enough to make this tremendous sacrifice because of his determination to obey God. James then asks, "Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect?" (James 2:22). Had Abraham lived by the philosophy of Faith Only, he would have refused to obey God's command and still felt justified. The Joel Osteens of his day would have convinced him he did not have to sacrifice his son and that he could ask God into his heart instead. But in doing so, Abraham would not have had true faith in God because "faith without works is dead" (verse 20). Everyone who believes God must be willing to perform the works of obedience to His will, whether it be offering up family or being baptized in water. The Lord is the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him (Hebrews 5:9).

The New Testament teaches sinners to do more than just believe in Christ to be saved. We must also repent of sin (Acts 2:38; 17:30), confess faith in Jesus (Romans 10:9-10), and be immersed in water for salvation (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 22:16). This is how we enter the body of Christ (Galatians 3:26-27). This does not warrant salvation since we are saved by grace through faith in Jesus (Ephesians 2:8-9; Acts 19:3-5), but it does show we have a faith similar to Abraham's in meeting the conditions God has placed on salvation. There is no such thing as Faith Only, Grace Only, Works Only, God Only, or Me Only in going to heaven..

The Way of the Wicked

Sean P. Cavender | Bald Knob, Arkansas, USA

Psalm 1 is an encouraging psalm since it teaches us a great lesson of what it means to be a godly person, one who is blessed in all he does. The godly man is righteous and the Lord knows him (Psalm 1:6). However, that is not the only person pictured in this particular psalm. In contrast to the actions of the godly man, the godless person is described as well.

The godless associate with the godless. The opening verse describes how the blessed man “does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers.” Men of integrity know to avoid ungodly associates. “I do not sit with deceitful men, nor will I go with pretenders,” (Psalm 26:4). Those who are ungodly drive each other to worse behaviors. “The companion of fools will suffer harm” (Proverbs 13:20).

Wicked people are easily persuaded, like the chaff by the wind (Psalm 1:4). The wind drives the chaff away because there is no root, and it ultimately has no purpose. This is the way of the wicked. They have no root system. They have no solid ground. There is no supply for life or growth. The wicked have rejected godliness and have despised the way of the Lord. “The way of the Lord is a stronghold to the upright, but ruin to the workers of iniquity” (Proverbs 10:29). The godless have no conviction, no standard of morality, and no righteousness. They will be easily persuaded and influenced by those who do evil. They will grow worse and worse as the days progress. Interestingly (and sadly), the wicked are deceived by their associations (cf. 2 Timothy 3:13).

The wicked will not stand in the judgment (Psalm 1:5). This is not suggesting they will not appear before the judgment seat of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:10). It is suggesting they will not pass that final exam; they will not stand upright. They will hear the Lord say “I never knew you; depart from me you who practice lawlessness” (Matthew 7:23).

Knowing the way of the wicked and how they refuse to associate with the righteous, knowing they will be deceived to progress in their sinful ways, and their eternal judgment, why would we want to “test the waters” of wickedness? Why would we want to keep strong ties of friendship with the ungodly? Evil company does indeed corrupt good morals (1 Corinthians 15:33).

Why Do You Believe?

Martin "Marty" Pickup

(The late Martin "Marty" Pickup had a series of articles in "Biblical Insights" Magazine on evidences for faith. They were collected into an unpublished book called "Making A Defense." This is the first of the articles. - K.S.)

The apostle Peter tells Christians always to be “ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you” (1 Pet. 3:15). In other words, there should be valid reasons for why you and I believe in Jesus Christ, and we should be able to explain these reasons to other people.

What reasons did Peter expect Christians to give for their faith? What explanation would you offer for why you believe the Bible is God’s word and Jesus is the Son of God? In my years of discussing this subject with students and older Christians alike, I have noted two common reasons why most Christians first obeyed the gospel and why they continue to live a Christian life: (1) Upbringing, and (2) Religious Experience. I do not think that either of these reasons is a sufficient basis for faith, nor do I think they are what Peter had in mind. Let me explain.

Upbringing

Most of us were raised by parents who were New Testament Christians or members of a “Christian denomination.” That means that we probably do not remember a time when we did not believe in God or the Bible. From early childhood we went to church regularly and listened to sermons and Bible class lessons that affirmed Christianity to be true. We eventually obeyed the gospel because we were brought up believing.

There is nothing wrong with this scenario. It is right and proper for parents to raise their children in keeping with their religious convictions, and the Bible itself commands Christian parents to do so (Eph. 6:4). But would not a Muslim give the same explanation – his religious upbringing – for why he believes in the Koran and practices Islam? If you asked a Mormon, a Hindu, a Buddhist, a Taoist, or anyone of any other faith system why they believe in what they believe in – wouldn’t most of them say that this is how they were raised? So what makes your upbringing right, and theirs wrong? If your Christian upbringing is all you can appeal to in order to explain your beliefs, then you are what you are religiously simply because of an accident of birth.

Religious Experience

“I know that Christianity is true,” someone says, “because I’ve seen it work in my life. When I was baptized into Jesus Christ I felt the weight of my sins lifted off my shoulders. And the Lord has answered many of my prayers and the prayers of my brethren. Many is the time we prayed at church for some sick person to be healed, and the Lord restored him to health. So don’t tell me that the Bible isn’t the word of God. I’ve seen the power of the gospel in my life.”

Again, there is nothing wrong with such statements. If indeed the Bible is true, then we would expect a person to have experienced its effect in their life. But wouldn’t people of other religions also appeal to religious experience in support of their faith? Wouldn’t a Buddhist say that he knows Buddhism is true because he has felt the benefits of Siddhartha Gautama’s teachings in his life? Wouldn’t the Muslim say that Allah has answered his and other Muslims’ prayers just as the teaching of Islam promises? So what makes the religious experience of these people wrong and yours right? How do you know that they are being deceived by their subjective feelings but you are not?

It may be a hard pill for us to swallow, but we need to admit the inadequate basis for faith that most of us have. If we reflect for a moment on what the Bible says, we will realize that no New Testament evangelist ever asked people to believe in Jesus simply because their parents did. Nor does the Bible suggest that we can prove Christianity true by experiencing it in our lives. Instead, the earliest gospel preachers “reasoned . . . from the Scriptures, explaining and giving evidence” (Acts 17:2). Evidence – hard, objective evidence – is what caused people in the first century to believe in the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is that same evidence that will convert people today and bolster our faith for a lifetime.

This evidence is what the future articles of this column will address. We will also respond to modern skeptics who try to argue against Christianity. In short, this column will deal with Apologetics, a subject formally defined as “the branch of theology that deals with the defense and proof of Christianity.” But do not make the mistake of thinking that such matters are highbrow issues of relevance only to academics and theologians. The support of faith is vital to the spiritual stability of every individual. New Testament Christianity is a defensible faith both philosophically and objectively, and that is what distinguishes it from other religions. I hope that by reading these articles your faith will grow and that you will become better equipped to “make a defense.”

Present Truth

“For this reason I will not be negligent to remind you always of these things, though you know and are established in the present truth.” (2 Peter 1:12)

The Greatest Book in the World

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

If ever there were a people endangered of being buried alive beneath the mass of their own writings, it is we Americans. We are today overwhelmed by an almost infinite number of books about an almost unlimited variety of subjects. The Library of Congress, the world's largest library, contains approximately 33 million books and other print materials, and this number grows daily. One is reminded, "of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh" (Ecclesiastes 12:12).

This is a book report. But the volume I am to describe is completely unique in all history. This one book has had more influence on men and has done more good for mankind than the totality of all other volumes ever recorded. I want to introduce to you the greatest book in the world.

Who wrote this wonderful book? Approximately forty men over a period of around 1550 years, from Moses in ca. 1500 - 1450 B.C. to John in A.D. 64-96, took part in writing "the Book." These men not only lived in various times, they came from exceedingly different walks of life - a great deliverer and lawgiver, a shepherd-warrior-king, a priest, a wise and wealthy king, a statesman, a herdsman, a fisherman, a medical doctor, a tax collector, a lawyer, and so on.

What is "the Book" about? The authors wrote about many different subjects, such as law, history, love stories, poetry, prophecy of the future, biography, evidences, conditions of churches, advice on how to live, and so forth.

Yet these men all wrote with perfect harmony and unity. Impossible? If they had written without divine aid, yes. For example, do you think ten men today, from the same profession and period of time, all writing separately about just one subject, would agree on every detail? What about forty men from various walks of life and separate times, writing about a wide assortment of subjects? Such "unity in diversity" is possible with this great "Book of books," the Bible, because God is its ultimate author.

The Bible was written by inspiration (2 Timothy 3:16-17). "Inspiration" is from a Greek word, "theopneustos," meaning "God-breathed." This means the Bible is the Word of God.

Also, this great volume was given by revelation (Ephesians 3:1-7). A "revelation" is an "unveiling" or "uncovering." The Gospel was a mystery, that is, "a hidden purpose or counsel" (Thayer. 420). But the Holy Spirit uncovered the mystery to the apostles and prophets, who in turn wrote it down for us to read and understand. Every word of this original revelation was God-given (1 Corinthians 2:9-13).

Furthermore, the Bible was given by prophecy (2 Peter 1:19-21). When God commanded Moses and Aaron to go to Pharaoh, Aaron was to be "as a mouth," that is a "spokesman" for Moses, whereas Moses was to be "as God" to Aaron (Exodus 4:15-16). When the command was repeated, Aaron was called a "prophet," while Moses was "as God." (Exodus 7:1-2) Thus, the prophets of God, who wrote the Bible, were God's mouths or spokesmen. "Prophecy" is what is spoken for God.

The Book of God is divided into two great categories: the Old Testament and the New Testament (Hebrews 9:15). The Old Testament consists of thirty-nine separate books which may be placed into five categories: law, history, poetry & wisdom, major prophets and minor prophets. The New Testament is composed of twenty-seven books which may also be divided into five categories: life of Christ, spread of the Gospel, special letters, general letters and prophecy.

But, despite the extreme diversity of this "divine library," it has a steel cable of unity tying it all together. God's twofold physical promise to Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3, 7), that his seed should become a great nation and inherit the land of Canaan, provides the outline for the Old Testament, while the spiritual part of that promise, "in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 12:3), completes the Old Testament and ties it to the New Testament.

This grand promise also helps introduce the very theme of the Bible. In Christ we “are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Galatians 3:26-29). Jesus Christ, the fullness of God's plan to save the world, is the theme of the Bible (Colossians 1:19). Christ is the great Keynote of God's beautiful Song of Redemption, and every note in the song is in perfect harmony with that Keynote.

How good is this book? It is the one perfect book in all the world (Psalm 19:7a), for the Bible is absolutely pure, or flawless (Psalm 119:140) and is absolutely complete (2 Timothy 3:16-17). It is the only book which has the power to save your soul (Romans 1:16; James 1:21). Nor has that power lessened over the centuries (1 Peter 1:22-25). This great book of God stands as the unbreakable anvil that can withstand all the hammer blows of unbelievers. As John Clifford so beautifully penned in his poem, “The Hammer and The Anvil”:

*Last eve I passed a blacksmith's door
And heard the anvil ring the vesper chime,
When, looking in, I saw upon the floor
Old hammers worn with beating years of time.
'How many anvils have you had,' said I
'To wear and batter all these hammers so?'
'Just one,' said he, then said with twinkling eye
'The anvil wears the hammers out you know.'
And so, I thought, the anvil of God's word
For ages skeptics blows have beat upon;
Yet, though the noise of falling blows was heard,
The anvil is unharmed—the hammers gone!*

Will you not make this marvelous book, the Bible, your rule of life and guide to Heaven?

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Parables of the Master Ownership of the Kingdom (The Wicked Vinedressers)

Matthew 21:33-43; Mark 12:1-12; Luke 20:9-19

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

The Master had just led the Jewish leaders to publicly condemn themselves (Matthew 21:28-32). As if that were not enough, the Master then taught the most infuriating parable of all, openly leading the Jewish leaders to pass sentence upon themselves (Matthew 21:33-43; Mark 12:1-12; Luke 20:9-19). The rulers would have arrested Him then and there but for their fear of the multitude (Matthew 21:46; Mark 12:12; Luke 20:19).

The Master told of a land owner who created a vineyard on His property. After planting the grape vines, he put up a hedge, either a stone wall or a thorn hedge, to protect the vines from thieves and wild animals. He dug a wine press where the workers could tread the grapes, allowing the juice to flow into a vat below. He built a tower of stone in which the workers could rest and on which they could watch for anyone or anything that would damage the vines or steal the grapes. Then he rented out the vineyard to vinedressers and left for another country. The owner had done all he could reasonably do to ensure the renters produced a bountiful crop (cf. Isaiah 5:1-4).

The land owner was an absentee landlord, and the vinedressers were share croppers. This was a common arrangement in Israel, since the country was often in turmoil, and landowners preferred to live elsewhere.

When harvest time came, the owner sent messengers to receive his part of the crop. But the vinedressers were wicked men who abused the messengers, even killing some, and refused to pay the owner his share. Amazingly, instead of immediately destroying those evil tenants, the owner sent other messengers, but the vinedressers treated them just as badly.

Finally the longsuffering owner decided to send his only son whom he loved dearly to them, reasoning that surely they would respect him. But the wicked tenants absurdly reasoned that if they killed the heir, they would get the vineyard themselves. So they threw the owner's son out of the vineyard and killed him.

Then the Master allowed the Jews to pronounce sentence upon themselves. He inquired, "Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vinedressers?" (Matthew 21:40) Some in the crowd answered honestly and justly, "He will bring those wretches (Greek *"kakos"*) to a wretched (Greek *"kakoce"*) end, and will rent out the vineyard to other vine-growers who will pay him the proceeds at the proper seasons" (Matthew 21:41, **New American Standard Bible**). Others, seeing the obvious point of the parable, cried, "Certainly not!" (Luke 20:16) The Parable of the Two Sons judged the Jewish leaders as guilty; in this parable they decide their own punishment.

But the Lord pressed His point and His claim to be the Christ. Quoting Psalm 118:22-23, Jesus claimed to be the stone which the builders rejected but which the Lord made the chief cornerstone upon and about which the whole building is constructed (Matthew 21:42; cf. Acts 4:11; Romans 9:33; 1 Peter 2:7).

Finally, He moved to individual application of the lesson. Christ is the stone that, if people stumble over, refusing to believe in Him, they will be broken, and if He falls upon them in judgment He will crush them (Matthew 21:44; Isaiah 8:14-15).

This parable is almost an allegory. An "allegory" is "a story, play, poem, picture, or other work in which the characters and events represent particular moral, religious, or political qualities or ideas" (Cambridge). Galatians 4:21-31 contains an allegory in which real historical characters and events of the patriarchal age represent the covenants. A parable is usually a story about something that didn't happen but could have happened that has one primary point and the details are just to make it a story. The Parable of the Wicked Vinedressers is both. It has one primary point: "Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it" (Matthew 21:43). But the details of the story are more than just storyline; they represent important aspects of the Lord's relationship with Israel.

The vineyard of the parable represents the kingdom of the Lord. The kingdom of God is His rule (Psalm 45:6). In a sense His rule is universal, for He rules everything (Psalm 103:19) including all the nations of men (Daniel 4:17,25,32). That rule is also eternal (Daniel 4:2-30). It is true that Old Testament Israel was metaphorically the vineyard of the Lord (Isaiah 5:1-7; Jeremiah 2:21), but that is because they were in a special sense the kingdom of God at that time (Exodus 19:5-6). God was King over Israel (1 Samuel 8:1-7), and the throne of Israel was the throne of God (1 Kings 2:12; 1 Chronicles 29:23). The law of Moses was the law of God for Israel (cf. Ezra 7:6,10; Nehemiah 8:1,14; Deuteronomy 5:1-3).

The owner of the vineyard is God. The vinedressers represent Israel as it was represented by its leaders (Matthew 21:45). The messengers represent the prophets of God, whom the Lord sent many times to call the nation to bear fruit for Him, but whom they would not heed (Jeremiah 7:25-26) but mistreated and killed (Nehemiah 9:26; Matthew 5:11-12; 23:34-37). The son represents Jesus, the Son of God. He was not simply one of the prophets but God's only Son (John 1:18) and the heir of the kingdom (Mark 12:6-7; Hebrews 1:1-4).

The parable teaches us about God. It teaches His longsuffering. He was patient with Israel's stubborn disobedience, sending prophet after prophet, though they would not heed (Jeremiah 7:25-26). His longsuffering is an expression of His loving desire for the salvation of every lost sinner (2 Peter 3:9). But the story also declares the severity of God on those who persist in rebellious disobedience (Mark 12:9;

Luke 20:16; Romans 11:22).

There is no excuse for anyone who believes the Scriptures to insist that fleshly Israel is still the chosen people of God. After fifteen hundred years of refusing to heed God's servants the prophets, they killed His beloved Son (Acts 7:52). They exhausted the longsuffering of God, and He removed the kingdom from them and gave it to another nation, spiritual Israel, all both Jew and Gentile who come to Christ in obedient faith (Romans 2:28-29; Galatians 6:16; 1 Peter 2:4-10).

The parable also teaches us the necessity of believing in Jesus Christ. If we stumble over Him in disbelief, we will be broken. If He falls on us in judgment, we will be crushed. He is the cornerstone upon which the kingdom, the church, and salvation rests. Do not stumble at Christ.

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