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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.

*"While we know better than to rely upon the aid of the sword for the advance of truth, we are often tempted to put undue trust in other "carnal weapons" which are equally futile. Wealth and eloquence and elaborate church buildings have but little saving grace in them. It is the truth which wins." (J.W. McGarvey, **Fourfold Gospel**, 692).*

Question About Judas and Jesus

Question

You can't show Jesus existed. There is no historical record. Judas is the 'sacrifice' in the Gospel of Judas, so what does it say about Jesus being sacrificed? It was just a scam to start a new religion.

Answer

Of course, the canonical gospels, those accepted by believers in Christ for twenty centuries as the inspired, accurate record of the life of Jesus, present Judas as the evil (John 6:70-71), covetous (John 12:5-6) betrayer of Christ (Matthew 26:14-15, 21-25, 47-50; Mark 14:10-11, 18-21, 43-46; Luke 22:3-6, 21-22, 47-48; John 13:10-11, 18, 21-30; 18:2-5) who subsequently committed suicide (Matthew 27:3-5; Acts

1:16-18) and is lost (Acts 1:25).

Should we believe the canonical gospels or the "Gospel of Judas"?

Luke, a physician, was Paul's traveling companion (Colossians 4:14; 2 Timothy 4:11). He probably wrote the account of the life of Christ that bears his name in A.D. 60, toward the end of Paul's imprisonment in Caesarea, when he had the opportunity to interview Judean eye witnesses of the life of the Lord (Luke 1:1-4). Early Christians characteristically considered the account by Matthew to be the earliest record of Jesus' life, so the apostle Matthew probably wrote before A.D. 60.

Mark was as close to Peter as Timothy was to Paul (1 Peter 5:13). Writers of the second century believed that Mark recorded Peter's sermons about the life of Jesus Christ. In fact, Peter's sermon on Jesus to the Roman centurion Cornelius is almost a very brief version of Mark (Acts 10:36-43). Early Christians generally believed his account of Christ was third in time order.

John lived longer than the other apostles, though he was exiled to Patmos for the cause of Christ (Revelation 1:9). He wrote five New Testament books: John, First, Second and Third John, and Revelation. They were probably written toward the end of the first century.

We have the first hand testimony of Matthew and John (Matthew 28:16-17; John 20:1-10, 19-29; 21:1-24), who were intimate with the Lord during His ministry. We have the historical record of Luke, who researched his subject by interviewing the eyewitnesses (Luke 1:1-4; **New American Standard Bible**; Luke chapter 24; Acts 1:1-11), and the testimony of Mark, who was probably the spokesman for Peter, the eye witness.

In history as well as in a court of law, the most powerful witnesses are those who, while confirming the testimony in question, are either disinterested or hostile. The apostle Paul qualifies as a hostile witness, for, as Saul of Tarsus, he "persecuted ... to the death" the disciples of Christ and, before those who could refute his testimony if it were false, called upon the high priest and elders of the Jews as his witnesses to this fact (Acts 22:4-5). Yet, Paul's own letters confirm the truth of the gospel story (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:1-8).

Josephus, the great Jewish historian contemporary with Paul, qualifies as a neutral witness. Leaving out the part of his notice of Jesus that negative critics claim Christians later added, Josephus testified:

At this time there appeared Jesus, a wise man ... For he was a doer of startling deeds, a teacher of people who receive the truth with pleasure. And he gained a following both among many Jews and among many of Greek origin... And when Pilate, because of accusations made by the leading men among us, condemned him to the cross, those who loved him previously did not cease to do so... And up until this very day the tribe of Christians, named after him, has not died out. (Johnson. 114)

The parts of the quote from Josephus which are omitted confess Jesus to be more than a man, to be the Messiah, and to have appeared to the disciples after His death in fulfillment of the Old Testament prophets. The quote actually reads smoother with those portions still intact, and there is just as much textual evidence for them being the words of Josephus as to the portion quoted. But the quote which even the negative critics allow testifies that Jesus lived, was a wise teacher who worked great deeds, taught the truth, gained a wide following, was crucified by Pilate at the instigation of the Jewish leaders, and still had a wide following of people named after Him.

Finally, the unbeliever cannot account for the most important fact of all concerning the witness of the gospel writers. Why were they willing to be savagely persecuted and even killed for their testimony, when they had nothing earthly to gain for telling it? (cf. Acts 4:1-31; 5:17-42; 6:8-8:4). Not even one of the apostles of Christ ever changed or recanted His testimony, although tradition assigns a violent death at the hands of persecutors to all but John, who was exiled to a lonely, barren, rocky ancient Alcatraz (the island

of Patmos) for his faith.

The writing of many early Christians and heretics, particularly Gnostics, from the second and third century have been preserved, are available in English translation, and bear witness to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John as the true historical records of Jesus. In the first generation after the apostles there is Clement (letter to Rome, A.D. 95), Ignatius (martyred before 117), Polycarp (letter, 108-117), Basileides, a Gnostic (117-139), and the Epistle of Barnabas (not the New Testament Barnabas, sometime between A.D. 70 and 130). The second generation includes Marcion, a Gnostic, before 140, Papias, about 140, and Justin (martyred in 148). Other early witnesses to the New Testament canon of Scripture are the Muratorian Canon (about 170), the Peshitto (Syriac New Testament, mid-second century), and the Old Latin Version (second century). By the year 170, there is credible witness to the existence and acceptance of every one of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament and to no others. As Professor R. Laird Harris has written:

It seems clear that the New Testament books arose in the latter half of the first century A.D., and almost all of them were clearly known, revered, canonized, and collected well before a hundred years had passed (202).

This is almost incredible, when we consider that Christians were a small, persecuted, group of social outcasts without means of publishing books, communicating, or enforcing a standard on all believers of Christ. Furthermore, the various books were originally hand written parchments produced in a single copy.

By the middle of the third century (about A.D. 250), all the books of our present New Testament and no others were known and accepted as Scripture. Origen (185-253) "names the books of the New Testament as we recognized the canon now" (Frost, 12). This was a life time before the Emperor Constantine or any church councils.

The Gospel of Judas was developed by a Gnostic sect in the second century A.D. and was originally written in Greek around 130-170. This fact alone tells us that it was not authored by Judas himself. The oldest extant copy is a Coptic manuscript written in Sahidic (last phase of ancient Egyptian) in the fourth or fifth century.

The Gospel of Judas apparently depicts Judas in favorable terms and commends him as doing God's work when he betrayed Christ to the Jewish religious leaders. This, of course, contradicts what was written by the apostles in their gospels of Matthew and John as well as those gospels written by Mark and Luke who are under the direction of Peter and Paul.

The Gospel of Judas falls into the category of pseudopigraphal writings. This means that the gospel is not authentic but is a false writing. In fact, the gospel was not written by Judas, but by a later Gnostic sect in support of Judas. Gnosticism was an ancient heresy that taught salvation through esoteric (understood by or meant for only the select few - K.S.) knowledge. Gnosticism was known at the time of the writing of the later epistles in the New Testament and was rejected by the apostle John.

The ancient writer Irenaeus (A.D. 130-202) in his work called Refutation of All Heresies said that the gospel of Judas was a fictitious history...

We can conclude that the Gospel of Judas is not authentic, is not inspired, and was properly rejected by the early church as an unreliable and inaccurate depiction of what really happened concerning Judas.

Of course, the complaint is often raised that this opinion, like that of the early church, simply rejected anything that opposed a preconceived idea. But, this complaint falls by the wayside when we understand that the early church knew which documents were authored

by the apostles and which were not. God did not make a mistake when he led the Christian Church to recognize what is and is not inspired. The Gospel of Judas was never recognized by the church as being inspired (Slick).

The skeptic through prejudice rejects the only primary source we have for the historical Jesus and is thus both confused and ignorant of Christ, He does not accept the facts of Jesus' life, does not understand their significance, and fails to acknowledge who the Lord is. His stubborn adherence to unbelief leaves him incapable of knowing the real Jesus.

The informed Christian accepts the Jesus of the gospels, not through blind, unreasoning faith, but because of the evidence from multiple, unimpeachable, primary sources. Thus, Christians alone truly know the historical Jesus, the real Jesus, the risen Lord of glory. He is the Christ the Son of the living God, God who became flesh and dwelt among us.

Skeptics vainly inquire, Will the real Jesus please rise? Christians triumphantly declare, He is risen!

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Question from Alabama about the Term "Believer"

Question

Is there anywhere in the scriptures that use the term "believer" and it means something other than someone who has been obedient to God's word? More specifically "believer" meaning someone who has been baptized?.

Answer

Thanks for your good question about the scriptural use of the term "believer." The term "believer" is used in the singular in 2 Corinthians 6:15 and in the plural in Acts 5:14; 1 Timothy 4:12; and 1 Timothy 6:2 in the **New King James Version**. The word translates the Greek term "pistos," which is found 69 times in the New Testament and used in various ways. The primary meaning of the word "pistos" is "trustworthy, faithful, dependable" (W.F. Arndt and F.W. Gingrich, **A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament**. 670). The term "believers" is found in the **New American Standard Version** in Acts 5:14; 10:45; 1 Thessalonians 1:7; 2:10; 1 Timothy 4:10; 6:2; and 1 Peter 1:21. The singular "believer" is found in Acts 16:1; 2 Corinthians 6:15; Galatians 3:9; and 1 Timothy 5:16. Galatians 3:9 is a reference to Abraham, who obviously was not baptized, because he lived and died many centuries before baptism was commanded, but most certainly was an obedient believer (Hebrews 11:8). Acts 5:14 seems to be the key passage. "And believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women." Believers are added to the Lord. But one gets into Christ through baptism (Romans 6:3; Galatians 3:27). This harmonizes with the fact that the jailor in Philippi and his household are not said to have believed until they were baptized (Acts 16:34). As far as I can tell, in the New Testament age the term "believers" consistently refers to baptized believers, and in fact is used as a synonym for "Christians," as Arndt and Gingrich note (page 671).

Fathers, Divorce, and Brethren

Gary P. Eubanks | Piscataway, New Jersey, USA

In the past several years, I have shared some of the trauma of divorce and alienation suffered by three fathers in churches of Christ. In thirty-seven years of preaching, in general, perhaps nothing has shaped

my opinion of my brethren more than these experiences.

As challenging as it is to keep long and complicated stories brief, I will try to limit myself to what is verifiable without sacrificing clarity. Of course, the individuals directly involved will remain anonymous.

These three stories share some commonalities. All six members of these divorced couples were members of the church with which I work as a preacher, though two of the couples had moved to other churches before they divorced. In each case, it was the wife who obtained the divorce. (This agrees with the information provided on the website, "Divorce Lawyer Source," which reveals that, among couples with children, two-thirds of the time it is the wives who initiate the divorce. Such statistics soar to seventy percent in some states with no-fault divorce and even ninety percent among college-educated couples.) Also, in each case, the wives made no claim, or offered no evidence, that they were motivated by adultery on their husbands' part. Furthermore, in each case, the wives received custody of the young children and alienated them geographically, if not emotionally, from their fathers, who ultimately were given relatively little time with them. (Each mother eventually sought, and received, permission from the courts to move, or leave, the children out of state.)

In addition, as part of the settlements imposed on the fathers, the wives received at least half of the common property and were able to get substantial sums given to them in the form of child support and alimony (or the equivalent thereof) at least until the children reached majority. (Child support is effectively money given to the mothers since, as the direct caregivers of the children, they also stand to benefit from its usage. For instance, she will also get to live with her children in any house the father's child-support payments enable her to provide for them.) As if such losses were not financially eviscerating enough to these men, their lawyer's fees reached five-digit figures. (One defendant recently told me that paying his lawyer to act in his behalf was like "flushing money down the commode." Every action undertaken by a lawyer on behalf of his client comes with a high price tag and typically accomplishes little.)

I was naïve. I never imagined that our judicial system would allow such ravaging of husbands and fathers. It did not occur to me that American courts could have so very little interest in justice for fathers. It is no wonder that substantially more women seek divorce. No-fault divorce has deprived women of a significant incentive to work through problems with their husbands rather than resorting to divorce. When wives combine hatred of their husbands, whom they regard as the source of their misery, with the realization that the courts will not take their children from them but, instead, require the husband to continue providing for them, divorce does not seem like such a bad alternative to an unhappy marriage. (When I tried to persuade one wife to try seeking marital help first, she immediately quashed the idea with the words, "Counseling is not an option.")

A recent newspaper article headlined, "Perfect together? Jersey holds distinction for having the lowest divorce rate," underscores the monetary factor. That New Jersey would have a divorce rate lower than that of any other state runs counter to the stereotype, but perhaps even more surprising is the reason for it. "People assume that people in the Northeast divorce easily because they're less religious, but that's not the case," said Deborah Carr, a professor of sociology at Rutgers University. New Jerseyans may also stick together because here, well, it's just too expensive to break up.... When Rutherford [NJ] attorney Evangeline Gomez tells clients how much they will have to pay in alimony, 'their faces turn stone white and they look at me as if it's the second coming,' she said" [Newark (NJ) Star-Ledger, Sept. 26, 2011, pp. 1,6].

As deplorable as it is that divorce has been incentivized by making it easier for wives, the difficulties faced by the judiciary are understandable. No-fault divorce was supposedly put in place because divorces which required the plaintiffs to prove their cases could be emotionally traumatic, nasty, prolonged, and expensive affairs. Moreover, there are the children. Maternal-attachment, economic, and child-care factors typically make the mother the more reasonable choice as the day-to-day care-giver. If the children must be separated from one parent, courts almost always prefer that parent to be the father. (One lawyer told me

that a mother would have to be something like a drug-addicted prostitute to have the courts take away her children.) All of this works in the favor of the wife, who knows that she can bend or break the rules and generally make it difficult for the father, with impunity. After all, judges are loath to put the mothers in jail or fine them. Such would only hurt the children, who then become to the mother the ultimate “human shield.” Furthermore, any father who wishes to seek redress through the courts has to dole out more money to a lawyer and listen to more counter-charges argued against him before jaded judges who have been wearied by hundreds, if not thousands, of such cases and may just want the “squabbling” to stop. This creates “no-win” conditions for the fathers, who soon yield to despair and resign themselves to the inevitable.

Perhaps we should not be surprised by such injustice from human courts, but we might expect better of our brethren. However, it deeply saddens me to say that this has largely not been the experience that I, and the divorced brethren I have tried to help, have had. Instead, most churches with which these brethren have had to deal have only added to the moral outrage foisted upon them by either ignoring, or even abetting, the abuse heaped on them by their disgruntled wives.

In the first case, the wife moved with her husband and their two children to another state, where, within a year, and after about twelve years of troubled marriage and two children, she declared that she was in an unscriptural union. The reason she cited was that she herself had committed fornication between separation from her first husband and the finalization of their divorce, which she had contended she got because he had “cheated” on her. She had theretofore claimed an inability to remember whether her fornication had occurred before, or after, the divorce.

However, months after their relocation, she suddenly, and without explanation, “remembered” that the fornication had occurred before the court issued the divorce decree. Yet, as if completely oblivious to the highly suspicious nature of the wife’s claims, the preacher and ultimately most of the church supported her, though not before she cited a second (lack of proof of her first husband’s adultery), and then the brethren finally settled on a third (her legal status as a defendant in her first divorce) reason as to why her second marriage was unscriptural. She subsequently removed herself and the children from the home and successfully sued her husband for divorce, child support, possessions, and every cent of their \$30,000-plus retirement savings. Thus, in the course of about one year, this beleaguered brother lost his wife, his children, his father (who was his primary source of support before he died early in the ordeal), his car, half his property, his life’s savings, and his job (a part-time one which he had while he attended school). For fathers, divorce gives something of a literal meaning to the phrase, “taken to the cleaners.”

Then, it was the church’s turn. When this brother followed the disciplinary process the Lord outlined (Matthew 18:15-17) by challenging the local preacher for blithely supporting his wife’s claims, not only was he withdrawn from for supposed slander, but so were his two supporting and well-regarded witnesses, one of whom was the church’s treasurer.

It is not my purpose to prolong a complicated story by assessing the different reasons given to justify this divorce nor to defend every action of the husband. I very much appreciate the courage and conscientiousness exhibited by a spouse who is willing to leave an unscriptural marriage (Matthew 19:1-9).

Yet, I am indignant beyond words when anyone advances, under the guise of the gospel, any personal agenda which is actually motivated by selfish ambition (cf. Philippians 1:15-18; Galatians 5:20). The fact that a woman is able to maneuver herself into marriage and motherhood by misconstruing her marriage eligibility status does not entitle her many years later to usurp a father’s authority over his children and remove them from the home he has provided for them, thus creating the situation which she then seizes as an opportunity to divest him of his property and obstruct his relationship and responsibilities to his children.

The Scriptures are even plainer than the initial reason cited by this wife for wanting a divorce, about the

fact that, while divorce may end a wife's obligation to submit to her husband, it changes nothing about God's arrangements regarding her obligation to honor his authority over his children rather than arrogating to herself the right to deprive him of his control over them and displace him in this position. No one denies that children are to obey their mothers, but it is to "fathers" that God explicitly gives the ultimate responsibility to "bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4).

Upon the one who would be an elder, the Lord also imposed the requirement of "...keeping his children under control with all dignity..." and "... to manage his own household..." (1 Timothy 3:4-5). This is not a responsibility a brother gets only if, or when, he becomes an elder, any more than a brother has the responsibility to be "temperate" or develop any of the other qualifications of elders only if, or when, he becomes an elder. He has that responsibility already. The only question raised by the prospect of him becoming an elder is whether he has properly exercised it --- which he could not have done had it not first been recognized that he had it. (Would brethren allow a brother to become an elder if his wife treated his headship over his children the way they are pleased to allow her to do if she just divorces him?)

Furthermore, in most emphatic terms, God gave to "earthly fathers" the duty to give necessary discipline to their sons. "For what son is there whom his father does not discipline..., [without which they] are illegitimate children and not sons?" (Hebrews 12:7-10). The father remains just as much the "head of his home" as he was before his wife left it.

The mission of John the Baptist reflects how critical the headship of the father over his children is. He was sent to "...restore the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers ..." (Malachi 3:6; cf. Luke 1:17). Yet, these divorcing mothers have seemingly done everything within their power, including manipulating both courts and churches, to reverse John's efforts by ensuring that the hearts of the children are turned against their fathers.

It requires something more than a wife's own temerity for her to claim that the fact that she is an adulteress or wants out of her marriage to the father grants her the right to nullify these Scriptures and proceed with the approval and aid of the church to remove his children from his home. She may succeed in using the courts to seize his fundamental, divinely-given rights and duties toward his children and ultimately do all she can to reduce him to the level of a sperm-donor and human ATM, but let no one dare say that she accomplishes such evil with the blessing of the church!

Furthermore, the means by which brethren have allowed divorcing wives to wrest fathers' authority over their children from them could not be more plainly contrary to Scripture. These fathers did not yield this authority to their wives; they had it forcibly taken from them by the collaboration of courts, wives, and brethren themselves. These wives have been able to manipulate the discriminatory practices of the judicial system essentially to kidnap their children and plunder their husbands of their possessions. Paul explicitly addresses this when he says, "Does any one of you, when he has a case against his neighbor, dare to go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints? ...I say this to your shame...On the contrary, you yourselves wrong and defraud, and that your brethren" (1 Cor. 6:1,5a, 8). Yes, a woman must appeal to a court to obtain a decree to dissolve a marital relationship to which she is not entitled. Paul is not addressing such a situation. What he does expressly forbid is the use of divorces and unbelieving judges to deprive their husbands of their possessions and children. It requires no lawyers and very little money to obtain just the divorce. However, when wives hire lawyers at exorbitant prices (perhaps effectively, if not directly, paid by their husbands) to litigate their cases and press for divorce arrangements optimally favorable to themselves, they are on the moral level of the kidnapper and thief (1 Timothy 1:9-11), and those brethren who "give hearty approval to those who practice" such (Romans 1:32) are no better and will meet with no better judgment.

In the second case, the wife, her husband, and child relocated to another part of the state and another church. As marital difficulties moved to a head, she ceased attending this church and began attending, at least sporadically, with yet another church. (It is not uncommon for unfaithful brethren to "hit the road" in

order to “tie the hands” of the church they left and avoid its discipline. In this case, brethren allowed this misconduct on her part with nothing more than a letter of exhortation, which left her in the limbo where she had the freedom she evidently sought to pursue her next step.) About this time, she filed for divorce. Desperate to avoid this eventuality, the husband reached an agreement which would allow her to move to a distant state with their child, while he remained behind to sell their house and find a job in that state, in exchange for her willingness to keep the marriage intact to “the best of [her] ability.” However, after getting settled in the state to which she had moved with their child, she broke her agreement and eventually refiled for divorce in the state from which she had moved and where her husband still resided. As if such actions on her part were not scurrilous enough, she was apparently able to become a member in good standing in the local church and received the support of her parents (who were members of the church), the preacher, the elders, and the church. After the preacher argued for the right of his wife to divorce him, the man sent to this preacher a sermon outline from which I had preached to the contrary. Yet, when I called the preacher by way of trying to help, the only response he had to make about it was that we would “have to agree to disagree.” In the end, he and the (other) elders allowed the wife to proceed with her divorce and divestment of her husband, as well as his deprivation of his child. The two churches of which they were members largely ignored his pleas for help.

In the third case, which occurred here, the wife first quit attending the assemblies and refused to give an explanation for her absences. However, her motive soon became apparent when her husband informed me of her intention to divorce him. When I called her, she confirmed this, but was unable to provide evidence, or even an affirmative answer, as to whether her husband had committed adultery. When she persisted in pursuing this course, we withdrew from her. Very shortly after the divorce was finalized, she remarried another man, from whom she also obtained a second divorce about a year later. She then asked the court to allow her to remove herself and her two children to another state. Faced with the threat of a decision favorable to his ex-wife, and financially and emotionally drained, the father acceded to what he feared would be inevitable, with the court-mandated proviso she would return the children to him every third weekend for visitation. However, as was predictable, it is the father who has lately had to make the trip to see his children.

This report describes only a small part of the misery these poor men, all of them brothers in Christ, have had to endure at the hands of their wives, all of them sisters in Christ. The only explanation possible for such selfish, cold, and cruel treatment is a bitter hatred which is utterly irreconcilable with Biblical love and defies the observation that “every one who hates his brother is a murderer...” (1 John 3:15). As for the courts, we may expect such unconscionable conduct from a judiciary who have relatively little knowledge or care about justice, morality, and compassion. Those who regard it as a “right” for mothers to rip their children from their wombs think nothing of allowing them to rip their children from the arms of their fathers. Like Pilate or Gallio, they are “not concerned about any of these things” (Acts 18:17).

The last substantial hope two of these fathers had for the preservation of their relationship with their children was their own brethren. Yet, who would have believed that they would find in their brethren the same callous insensitivity that had plagued them in the world? Time after time, they sought help from brethren only to be met with cold indifference, if not hostility.

This realization is all the more painful considering that it is not inconceivable that, had brethren acted in united and solid opposition to the sin of these wives, travesty and tragedy might have been averted. However, this did not happen. Instead, in the two cases where such opposition might very well have been effective, brethren ignored or abetted the nefarious activities of the wives.

Even brethren not directly involved, but who still might have aided, made excuses or virtually lied to avoid helping. When finally pressured into applying their influence toward a rectification of wrongs done to a brother, they went about it in such a dilatory and ineffectual manner as to leave the impression of disinterest, laziness, dishonesty, reluctance, and cowardice. To put it plainly, they do not want to be bothered. Despite assertions of brotherly love and compassion, brethren generally do not want their hearts

disturbed or their hands dirtied by such matters. Instead, they find it easier to tell the suffering brother, “Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,’ and yet...do not give them what is necessary” With James, I say, “What use is that” faith? (2:16).

Brethren must do better than this! Given the liberalism, feminism, and worldliness threatening churches, we can expect more divorces. If a sister has a complaint against a believing husband, let her seek the help of counselors, family, friends, brethren, and the church, if necessary. Divorce is not the solution and certainly not the first step toward rectification of unhappiness. If the charge is adultery, then let her produce compelling evidence. Otherwise, no sister should enjoy the approval of the church in removing her children from the home, care, and control of their father. Judges may enforce her desire to divorce her husband and take his children, but that does not relieve the church of its responsibility to oppose her. Brethren have a grave duty imposed on them to investigate, and judge, her claims (Matthew 18:15-17; 1 Corinthians 6:1-11). Family, preachers, elders, and the church must resist her insistence on destroying her home and repudiating the Scriptures. Of course, they cannot make a sister, whose greatest love is for herself, honor God’s word, but they can, and must, rebuke her shameless conduct and, if she persists, withdraw from her, as the Scriptures require (2 Thessalonians 3:6).

Dreaded Words

Jefferson David Tant | Roswell, Georgia, USA

There are certain words in the English language that we don't like to hear, in fact, we dread to hear them. Probably, the most dreaded words would come from the doctor's mouth to the family in the waiting room: "I'm so sorry. We tried our best, and there is nothing more we can do." Next in line might be the words spoken by a teenage daughter: "Mom, Dad, I'm pregnant."

With these words comes a flood of emotions evidenced by tears, anger, recrimination, fear and sometimes condemnation. Of all the challenges facing parents of teenagers, the only news that is worse than that of death, is the news that a daughter has become pregnant, or that a son has impregnated a girl.

For many years, my wife Flora and I have been closely involved with teenage pregnancy, with many girls living in our home for a period of time ranging from weeks to months, and subsequently helping them place their babies for adoption, or, in a few cases, helping them to adjust to being a full-time mother. From this perspective, perhaps some words can be offered that can help families that find themselves in this situation.

To start with, let me clearly state that abortion is not the answer. This is not a treatise on the sin of abortion, but we need to understand that the Scriptures clearly state that what is in the womb is a living being, not just a blob of tissue. When Mary came to visit her kinswoman Elizabeth, the child Elizabeth was carrying in her womb responded to Mary's voice: "For behold, when the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby leaped in my womb for joy" (Luke 1:44). Besides the sin of murdering a baby, the abortionists do not warn their clients of the emotional scars that many women carry for years, even for a lifetime, after an abortion.

Dr. David C. Reardon, of the Elliott Institute in Springfield, IL did a study of hundreds of women 10-20 years after an abortion. Over 50% of the women reported feelings of betrayal of their beliefs and ideals, agony, guilt, sorrow, depression, grief, bitterness, regret, despair, shame, unworthiness, severe weeping, and a loss of self-confidence, among other things. These are just some of the emotions that followed for years. A Canadian study showed 25% of women who had an abortion made visits to psychiatrists, compared to 3% of a control group. A Danish study showed a 53% higher rate of psychiatric admissions for women who had abortions compared to those who delivered their children. A study in Finland reveals a suicide rate among those who had abortions to be 300% greater than all women of reproductive age, and 600% more than women who gave birth. Other studies find an increased risk of breast cancer (50%) and other medical complications.

I have known of parents who “solved” the problem of a daughter’s pregnancy by pressuring for an abortion. But they were not the ones who received a call at 2 a.m. from a nearly hysterical teenager distraught over her abortion. I have spent years trying to bring this particular young woman back to the Lord. I strongly suspect that she feels unworthy.

Neither is rejection the answer. Many years ago I was in a gospel meeting in a small town in Indiana when a family approached me with their 14-year-old daughter. Vickie was pregnant, having been seduced by Mr. Cool Joe. Vickie’s father’s anger prompted him to say he never wanted to see her again. So this frightened child came home with me, having been rejected for the third time in her life. She had been literally abandoned as a baby and left in a deserted house. Then Mr. Cool Joe abandoned her, refusing any responsibility after assuring her that all would be OK. And now the father who had adopted her. So a frightened little girl came home with me. Thankfully, Dad later relented.

So, what are parents to do? If there is ever a time in a girl’s life that she needs love and support, this is the time. It is not a time to smooth over sin, but it is a time to embrace, as the prodigal son’s father did (Luke 15:20).

If possible, the father of the child should be involved in discussions. If the couple is mature enough, do they want to marry? If not, the decision must then be made whether or not the girl wants to keep the baby, or place it for adoption. Out of some 80 cases we have been involved in, only a handful have kept the baby. Sometimes that has worked out well, and sometimes not. There is normally an emotional attachment to this child that has been carried in the womb for nine months, and it may be hard to part with the child. But a realistic assessment of what is best for the child may determine that adoption is the best course. A child’s ideal situation is to be raised by two loving parents.

If adoption is the decision made, then where is the girl to live? In several cases, the girl has continued to live with her family. This may not always work out, and this is why many have come to live with us, or with other families in our congregation. It may be that the girl has so much shame that it is an emotional strain for her to be around people she knows. It may be that there is some harassment from the father of the child or his family. They may try to persuade her to have an abortion.

The reason these girls choose a private adoption is because they want to be sure the child goes to Christians. State agencies will certainly provide families that are of good character and financially able to care for the child, but the families the state chooses probably won’t be Christians, as we understand the Biblical definition. Private adoptions are legal in most states, but of course the adoption itself must comply with regulations. The girl must be interviewed to be sure she is not being coerced, and the adopting family must be approved by the state through a “home study.” So there are costs involved—medical bills, attorney’s fees, state fees, etc.

Another consideration is whether the adoption is “open” or “closed.” And open adoption allows the birth mother to have some contact with the child, and this needs to be agreed upon before the adoption process proceeds. In most cases, the adoption is closed.

In the adoption process, the father of the child should be involved. The last I heard, it takes two to get pregnant. Too many times, the young man walks away from all responsibility. He may have to be responsible for some medical bills, and if the girl keeps the baby, some states are now requiring that he pay child support. This is good. If adoption is chosen, he will have to sign a release before the state will approve the adoption.

Whatever decision is made with respect to adoption or keeping the baby, the girl needs love and support. Her emotional well-being has a direct affect upon the well-being of the child she is carrying in her womb. This child will be a blessing to someone and needs to have a good head-start.

Praying for the Ephesians | Ephesians 3:14-19

Pat Farish | Lancaster, Texas, USA

"For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith – that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God."

This sentence resumes the thought interrupted at the end of the first verse of this chapter, where Paul identifies himself as a prisoner, because of "you Gentiles". In verses 2 through 13 he is reciting the things he did as a steward of God's grace for the Gentiles – which include revealing the mystery that the Gentiles are partakers of the promise in Christ, and preaching the gospel to the Gentiles; he concludes these words with verse thirteen, "So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory." His next statement begins, "For this reason...", picking up where he had left off earlier.

Paul is praying for the Ephesians, praying to the Father. He is submissive, "I bow my knees before the Father...". Our God is worthy of our praise, and we should consider our debt, "he did not leave himself without witness, for he did you good ..." (Acts 14:17).

Spiritual strength comes from ingesting the word of God; Peter said "long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation" (1 Peter 2:2). The Psalmist said, "I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you" (119:11). Spiritual strength is of the "inner being;" Paul wrote that "our inner self is being renewed day by day" (2 Corinthians 4:16). So Paul prayed to God for the spiritual growth of the Ephesians.

He wanted them to grow so that they might approach an understanding of the immensity of the love of Christ. The love of Christ is seen in His willingness to come to earth, He "became flesh." Then, He lived as man, experiencing things common to man: temptation, weariness, hunger, etc. Knowing what was in store for Him, for the sin of mankind He suffered, bled, and died; now He "always lives to make intercession" for us (Hebrews 7:25).

The effect of such growth and strength would be "that you may be filled with all the fullness of God."

Incidentally, we are to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17) and be "constant in prayer" (Romans 12:12). How often does Paul speak of prayer? (Romans 1:8; 1:21; 6:17;7:25; 10:1; 15:3; 1 Corinthians 1:4; 14:16, 17,18; 15:57; 2 Corinthians 1:11; 2:14; Ephesians 1:16; 5:20; Philippians 1:3; 4:6; Colossians 1:3; 1:12; 2:7; 3:15-16; 4:2; 1 Thessalonians 1:2; 2:13; 3:9; 5:18; 2 Thessalonians 1:3; 2:13; 1 Timothy 2:1; 4:4; 2 Timothy 1:3; Philemon 4. If I have not miscounted, there were thirty three (in Galatians and Titus none); so, in thirteen epistles Paul uses "thanks" or "thanksgiving" as expressive of his gratitude or as instruction to the people he was writing thirty three times. I write this as an outpouring of a thought that has been bouncing around in my head for a long time: the failure to say "thank you." Why is this? It may be motivated by ignorance, not having been taught; perhaps by shyness, though that seems unlikely; and it may be the product of an unwillingness to admit obligation, however insignificant, to anyone. My Dad used to say, "much obliged" to those who befriended him, and I never understood that as a youngster; now I do.

Now – if we can just get them to go back to "thank you" when they are helped, rather than "no problem," us old geezers can rest easy. (Amen! - KS, another "old geezer")

Is Islam Compatible With Christianity? No. 8

Tommy G. Thornhill | Etna, Arkansas, USA

In my last article I gave a brief summary of what the Muslims are taught to believe from the Koran (Qur'an). This just touched the hem of the garment for what is found in their holy book which few Muslims actually read. I closed the article quoting a Muslim from Turkey who summed up the fact that most Muslims do not really read the Koran (Qur'an). They rely on their Mullahs and Clerics to tell them what is in the Koran and what they are to believe. In many respects the same thing could be said of many who claim to be Christians. They say they believe the Bible, but few actually take the time, or expend the effort, to read it carefully. They may have read parts of it from time to time, but what they actually believe is based more on what they have been taught by their preachers and teachers, rather than what they have actually studied for themselves. Let me encourage you to please take time to read (2 Timothy 2:15; Acts 17:11-12).

The word "Qur'an" means "the reading" or "the book" and is divided into 114 "Surahs" (chapters), series which contain 6,225 verses. These surahs are generally divided or arranged by length from longest to shortest. For anyone who takes the time to read (it will be tedious) will find the Koran full of fabrications, many taken from myths, fables, and fairy tales, thoroughly mixed with various world religions. Muhammad was an illiterate man, so all the revelations he claimed to have received over a 20 year period of time, were spoken from his recollection of things, rather than being written down. After his death, his aide, Zayd Ibn Thabit, collected the various fragments he had used to record Muhammad's words. He had written on such things as parchment, smooth stones, palm leaves, and other objects. Twenty five years later he was given the task of bringing all these fragments together and producing an authoritative, universal version known today as the Koran (Qur'an).

Even though the Koran has since been translated into various languages, the only one accepted as true is in Arabic. All translations in other languages are suspect. If one points out a discrepancy or contradiction in the Koran using these versions it is discarded by the Muslims as a faulty translation. This is almost laughable since most of the clerics who teach the Koran here in America do not know Arabic themselves and have to rely on English versions of the Koran for what they teach.

Muslims claim that everything in the Koran is taught in the Old and New Testaments of the Bible. From the Gainesville Sun, Gainesville FL, 2-25-11, in a speech by Ahmed El-Mahawy, "There is not a single thing that you will find in the Koran that is not in the Old Testament or the New Testament." But an examination of the Koran proves this is a lie.

The book contains elements of paganism (2:142, 158, 196; 3:97; 8:34; 22:26; 106:3), things that were already being practiced in the Arabian culture years before Muhammad was even born. Islam would like you to believe otherwise, but the rituals taught and practiced in Islam are of earthly and devilish, not heavenly, origin. Middle Eastern scholars have proven beyond all doubt that the rituals taught in the Koran can be traced back to pre-Islamic days, thus it was not something new.

The Koran also includes elements of Judaism. Muhammad took some of his teachings from the Jewish Talmud, the Midrash and other Jewish apocryphal works that were available to him and made them into confusing narratives by blending various stories together without regard to context.

As one reads the Koran one will find some elements from the "Christian" Gnostic gospels which were available to Muhammad through the apocryphal and heretical sources of that day. Along with these things one will also find some elements of the Eastern religions such as Zoroastrianism and Hinduism. Many of the sayings attributed to Muhammad were previously known stories of these Eastern religions.

We also find some elements of the Sabeen religion mixed in with other pagan rituals.

Muhammad adopted the pagan ritual of worship at the Ka'aba, praying five times toward Mecca, and

fasting for part of a day for an entire month from the Sabeian religion. These elements existed before Muhammad. Along with adopting things from the Sabeian religion, Muhammad also included such elements of apostate Catholicism as the perversion of Jesus' Sonship (6:101) and the worship of Mary (5:116).

And we find many elements of fleshly sensuality. They practice polygamy, allowing up to 4 wives (4:3), easy divorce for any cause (2:229-232), paradise with virgin maidens (44:54) like as is promised to those who commit holy jihad (holy war or acts of terrorism), able to drink alcoholic beverages without fear of a hangover (56:18-19). Along with the above mentioned things it has come to light that a man can marry and have sex with a girl as young as 9 years old. They can also practice pedophilia. These things have been recently revealed in present day writings and speeches of Muslim clerics. I do not have those verses from the Koran, but much of it comes from the Hadith, a book they hold almost as sacred as the Koran. Much of these teachings comes from the clerics in the Mosques, established in many of our major cities.

"Be Holy"

Jim Mickells | Lewisburg, Tennessee, USA

Peter, in his first epistle, writes to those of the dispersion (1:1) instructing them on how to live. He said, "Be holy, for I am holy" (1 Peter 1:16), quoting from Leviticus 11:44-45. God, in both the Old and New Testaments, required that His people live different from the rest of the world. The same is true today just as it was during the days when the apostle Peter penned this letter. The Father expects us to be a holy people.

The word "holy" is defined as "Metaphorically it means morally pure, upright, blameless in heart and life, virtuous, holy" (The Complete Word Study Dictionary – New Testament). We are to be a separated people from the world, from sin, and from all unrighteousness. Not only are we to abstain from sin, we are to offer up spiritual sacrifices unto the Lord (2:5), being filled with good works so that others might glorify our Father (2:12).

Imitation

We have the greatest example to pattern our lives by, God the Father. We are told to be holy because He says "I am Holy" (1:16). Likewise, Paul said, "Therefore be imitators of God as dear children" (Ephesians 5:1). Think of the characteristics possessed by Jehovah that we should reflect in our lives. John says God is light (1 John 1:5); Jesus instructs us to be the light of the world (Matthew 5:14). This same apostle says that God is pure and we should purify ourselves (1 John 3:3). He also says that our Father is love, and, if we do not love, we do not know the Father (1 John 4:8). Jesus tells us God is perfect and we should be striving for perfection ourselves (Matthew 5:48). We learn of God's holiness through the life and words of Jesus Christ. If you have seen Him, you have seen the Father (John 14:8-11). Who better to imitate?

Inspiration

We should want to live holy lives unto the Lord when we think about the great price which was paid to save us from our sins. Peter said, "knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Peter 1:18-19). I should have been scourged, spit upon, beaten, mocked, ridiculed, and should have worn the crown of thorns etc. I'm worthy of death, not my Lord. Yet He became sin for each of us (2 Corinthians 5:21). The chorus of "Mended And Whole," in Hymns For Worship, says,

*"You were threatened for me, You were slandered, for me.
Ev'ry thorn, ev'ry nail, ev'ry tear was for me.
Sweet the tho't that my soul may be mended and whole
by my Lord who was broken for me."*

What a beautiful thought which should inspire us to live holy lives for Him every day.

Motivation

The apostle warns about the judgment which is to come. He said, "And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear" (1 Peter 1:17). He also speaks of the day of the Lord in his second epistle, saying it will come like a thief in the night, the heavens will pass away and the elements will melt with fervent heat, etc. (2 Peter 3:10). This is the end of time as we know it on earth. All people will now appear before the Lord to answer for their conduct. Look at what he says in verse 11, "Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness." God is giving everyone time to come to repentance; He is longsuffering not wanting anyone to perish, losing their soul in the fires of hell (2 Peter 3:9). If that does not motivate someone to be holy, I don't know what will!

Because of the abundant grace of God, the precious blood of Jesus was shed on the cross so that our sins could be washed away (1 Peter 1:19; Revelation 1:5) Yet the blood must be applied. One can make application of it by his obedience to the gospel, becoming pure and holy (1 Peter 1:22; notice also Romans 6:3-6). Let us imitate our Lord in our conduct, being inspired because of the great price paid for our sins, while knowing that judgment awaits. I have nothing to fear if I have faithfully followed my God. "Be holy, for I am holy."

Children Born in Sin?

Mike Thomas | Beaver Dam, Kentucky, USA

Every parent's fear is that they will outlive their children. Burying a child (at any age) has to be the darkest of burdens to endure, which is why my heart breaks for those who experience it. I hope I never know that pain. When David lost his infant son, he took comfort in knowing his child was in the presence of God. He stated, "But now he is dead; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me" (2 Samuel 12:23). This should give comfort to any parent who buries a young child. They may have missed out on this life's opportunities, but they will be in heaven for eternity, which is far better.

This assurance, however, would not have been given to David if he believed like so many today. How could he rise from burying his child if children are born in sin? What comfort is available to any parent if it is true that children inherit the guilt of their parents or of Adam and Eve? Nevertheless, there are many who believe in such a pitiful despair. The Westminster Confession of Faith states:

Our first parents, being seduced by the subtlety and temptations of Satan, sinned in eating the forbidden fruit... By this sin they fell from their original righteousness and communion with God, and so became dead in sin, and wholly defiled in all the faculties and parts of soul and body. They being the root of mankind, the guilt of this sin was imputed, and the same death in sin and corrupted nature conveyed to all their posterity, descending from them by original generation. (Chapter 6)

How fair is that – to indict people with a crime they never committed? Yet, that is what men are saying in claiming sin is inherited. They contradict what is right and good (and what is clearly refuted in the Scriptures). "The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son" (Ezekiel 18:20). Ironically, this is a source of comfort for those who lose their little ones. They can have peace in knowing their children were born morally pure and innocent, and in fellowship with God because they never violated His will. The physical consequences of sin may pass from parent to child, but guilt and spiritual death occur only when one chooses to violate God's law (1 John 3:4).

Furthermore, those who sprinkle children to have their "sins" forgiven are doing nothing but getting their head wet. The gospel's power to save is "for everyone who believes" (Romans 1:16) and who confesses faith in Christ (10:9-10). Children cannot do this, nor can they repent and be immersed for forgiveness (Acts 2:38; 22:16). Even if children had sins to remit, sprinkling them is not the solution. The baptism that saves is an immersion in water for those who want to become Christians (Acts 8:35-39). Children have no

need for this. They are more prepared to meet God than any sinner who is not in Christ.

Truth Matters

William J. Stewart | Kingston, Ontario, Canada

Advertising Standards Canada is a

...non-profit self-regulating body created in 1957 to ensure integrity and viability of advertising in Canada.¹

A recent ASC TV ad has a painter working diligently on a masterpiece. It is later pictured in a gallery, priced at \$14,000,000. It is titled, "The Pensive Blizzard," and is nothing more than a white canvas. The commercial closes with the slogan, "Creativity is subjective, The truth isn't."

What a great statement! As much as we like to be entertained, we want advertisers to be honest with us. We do not want to be misinformed, misled or taken advantage of. We understand there is a difference between truth and falsehood, and we want the truth.

I wish people had the same desire for truth in religion that they have when it comes to advertising. Sadly, many people are accustomed to accepting whatever their religious leaders say without question. And even if they see the differences between what Pastor A and Pastor B say, the majority of religious folks are willing to accept the diversity in doctrine, even to the point of celebrating it. The concept of "truth" in religion is foreign to some.

Consider some characteristics of truth:

Truth is absolute, not relative. It does not change with the turning of the wind. It is not dependent upon or moved by other factors. It is a fact in and of itself.

Truth is universal. Where you are, when you are or who you are does not change truth. The truth is the same for everyone. It is objective, not subjective. What is true for one is true for all, otherwise it is just opinion.

Truth is exclusive. If something is true, it leaves no room for different ideas on the same topic to be true as well.

Consider an example we should all be able to agree on. $2+2=4$. Regardless the direction of the wind, noon or at midnight, in Japan or in Peru, whether you are good at math or not, $2+2$ is always 4. That's the truth.

In John 17:17, Jesus said to the Father, "Sanctify them by Your word. Your word is truth." God's word is absolute, universal and exclusive. God's word is not open to interpretation. We need to "rightly divide the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). The message of the Bible does not change from this group to that group, let alone from this person to that person. There is one truth, of which Jesus said, "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32).

I chatted with a preacher years ago who held some positions that I believe to be unbiblical. As we discussed the nature of truth, I used the $2+2$ illustration. He reasoned, "If we have $2.4+2.4$, each of those round down to 2, but when we add them, we get 4.8, which rounds up to 5. So, $2+2$ can equal 5." Friends, we've got no business rounding off God's word.

How serious is this? If you get taken by false advertising, you may be cheated out of your money. That is certainly no fun, and depending on the amount, can be devastating. However, much worse than that, if you get taken by false doctrine, you will be cheated out of salvation. Listen to Paul,

Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the

tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. ... Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in false humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, and not holding fast to the Head... (Colossians 2:8, 18-19)

1 wikipedia.org

The Parable of the Sower

Sean P. Cavender | Bald Knob, Arkansas, USA

As Matthew begins to record the many parables of Jesus, the first one recorded in Matthew 13 is what we often call the parable of the sower and soils. Of all the parables Jesus gave, this one parable perhaps stands above the rest because we can discern the reason Jesus spoke in parables, and we are able to perceive the hearts of those who hear the gospel. This parable and others were difficult to understand because the words of Christ fell on deaf ears. We must be ready to hear (Matthew 13:9) and open our hearts so we may be converted by the teachings of the Lord (Matthew 13:14-15).

In the parable of the sower, Christ told of a sower who went out to sow (Matthew 13:3). Some of the seeds fell on the wayside, beside the road, where the birds were able to eat the seed. More seed was scattered on the rocky places where there was no depth of soil, so life of the seed was inhibited. Then some seed fell among thorns, that allowed the seed to be choked and destroyed. Still yet, some seed fell on good ground which produced more seed and crops (Matthew 13:4-8). Then Jesus closed his parable with the statement "he who has ears, let him hear" (Matthew 13:9). Jesus intended for his listeners to understand him and make the proper application.

Yet, there were still some questions by Christ's disciples. They needed an explanation of Christ's teachings. Thankfully the Lord explained the parable for them, and Matthew recorded that explanation for us.

Jesus' explanation is fairly simple and straightforward:

The parable is about the sower. He stated, "hear then the parable of the sower" (Matthew 13:18). It is easy for us to dwell on the various kinds of soil that the seed fell on. It is easy for us to ask what sort of understanding and hearts we, and others, have, to see if we are receptive to the word. Yet Christ calls the parable the parable of the sower. The central character of the parable is the sower who went out to sow!

The sower scattered the seed everywhere. In our evangelistic efforts, how often do we not share the gospel because we feel that someone will be unreceptive to the truth? Do we assume that someone has too many thorns in their heart and too many cares of this world to take time to hear the gospel preached? As a result, we do not even begin to try and teach them. This is why the focus of this parable must be about the sower – we need to sow the seed everywhere.

What good gardener does not first prepare the ground before he plants seed? Will there be work we must do as good sowers, to help the lost to see the truth? Absolutely. Must we remove hindrances and distractions as best we can so the seed may fall on the good soil? Certainly.

"To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those who are under the Law ... To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some" (1 Corinthians 9:20, 22).

If we forget that the parable is primarily about the sower, then we may easily give up in our efforts to reach those who are outside the body of Christ. Make no mistake, being a sower is hard work. We must make it

our objective to be knowledgeable in the word of God so we may teach others. Also, we must be ready to get our hands dirty, till the ground, and help hearts turn to the Lord.

Parables of the Master
After Death
(The Rich Man and Lazarus)

Luke 16:19-31

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

We are studying the story of The Rich Man and Lazarus among the parables, but it is certainly unique as a parable. The Master does not provide a name for any of the characters in His other parables. And His earlier parables compare scenes familiar to His audience with eternal truths, whereas this story is one of the few biblical passages (cf. Revelation 6:9-11) that discusses the state of the dead, information unknown by experience to any living mortal. It is certainly true that the story begins with precisely the same formula, "There was a certain rich man" (verses 1,19), as the parable that immediately precedes it and with which it is connected. "The story seems to be its own message, one that uniquely comes from beyond the grave. We conclude that it is both history and a special sort of parable (cf. R.L. Whiteside, Bible Studies, Vol. 4, p. 424)" (Earnhart. 149).

Regardless whether it be considered a parable, an historical account, or a unique combination of the two, as the facts of all parables were things that could have really happened, this story is not a fable, and it teaches us important reality about life beyond the grave, facts available only from this short, remarkably compact story.

This is a story in three scenes.

Scene One: Life

In life the rich man had everything good. His daily clothing was purple and fine linen, the clothing of royalty and the extremely wealthy (Luke 16:19).

Along the coast of Tyre there was found a rare shellfish (Murex purpurarius) from which a costly purple dye was obtained, each little animal yielding about one drop of it. Woolen garments dyed with it were worn by kings and nobles, and idol images were sometimes arrayed in them. This purple robe formed the outer, and the linen the inner garment. The byssus, or fine linen of Egypt, was produced from flax which grew on the banks of the Nile. It was dazzlingly white, and worth twice its weight in gold (McGarvey. 511; cf. Esther 8:15; Proverbs 31:22).

He was "joyously living in splendor every day"(Luke 16:19; NASB). If there had been Hollywood tabloids, he would have been on the covers. There would have been a TV series called "Keeping Up with the Rich Man."

In total contrast, there was a very poor man named "Lazarus" who had been laid at the gate of the rich man's compound. I've seen scenes like this in Africa many times. His name is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew name "Eleazar" and means "whom God helps"(Thayer. 367). His life was daily misery. Along with his companions, the dogs, which licked his open sores, he just wanted to eat the scraps thrown out by the rich man.

The text doesn't reveal whether or not the rich man helped Lazarus. Certainly the "law and the prophets" demanded that Israelites assist their impoverished brethren (Leviticus 25:35; Deuteronomy 15:7-11; Isaiah 58:6-7), and Abraham pointed the rich man to "Moses and the prophets" as the way his brothers could avoid eternal torment (Luke 16:29). We certainly must generously help the worthy poor (Matthew 25:31-46; James 1:27).

Scene Two: Death

Then they both died. There is no mention of Lazarus' body even being buried. But the angels of heaven accompanied his soul to Paradise. Angels minister in behalf of the Lord's people (Matthew 18:10; Hebrews 1:13-14). The Master revealed Lazarus was in "Abraham's bosom," a Jewish way of denoting "Paradise" (cf. Luke 23:42-43), since the Jews viewed the coming kingdom as beginning with a great feast at which Abraham, their forefather, would be the host. Lazarus was in the chief place of honor in Paradise, reclining against Abraham. All the care for the rich man in his death was on the earthly side. He was buried, no doubt a grand affair. Nothing is said of any angelic or even demonic accompaniment of his soul.

Scene Three: After Death

Immediately after their deaths their conditions are dramatically reversed. Lazarus is comforted in Paradise (Luke 23:43). The rich man is in torment in Hades (verse 23). Hades is simply the abode of the spirits of the dead, where even the spirit of Christ went at His death (Acts 2:25-31), though He was in paradise. But the realm of Hades where the soul of the rich man went is torment.

Primary Point of Story

Although we remember Lazarus the most from this story, the leading character is the rich man. He went from a life of luxury to eternal, abject misery, but we're not told why. It is not a sin to be rich (cf. Genesis 13:2; Job 1:1-3; 42:12; 1 Timothy 6:17-19), nor is it wrong to enjoy wealth (Ecclesiastes 2:24; 3:12-13; 5:18). It is neither stated nor necessarily implied that the rich man neglected to help Lazarus.

What is the Master's point? Luke sixteen begins with the Parable of the Unjust Steward. Jesus taught the proper stewardship of wealth (verses 10-13). He concluded by warning against serving mammon, material wealth (verse 13). "The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things, and they ridiculed him" (Luke 16:14, ESV). The Lord rebuked them with a series of short admonitions (verses 15-18). Then He taught them that riches now may end in eternal torment. This is the point of the story of the Rich Man and Lazarus. **A life blessed with great wealth and all the joy that accompanies it could very well lead to endless sorrow. Don't trust money!**

Unique Lessons

Because this passage is almost unique in Scripture in that it pulls back the veil to the realm of the dead, it has great lessons for us besides its primary point.

The rich man awoke in torment (verse 23). **After death, the souls of both the righteous and unrighteous continue to have conscious existence.**

The rich man, awaking in torment pleaded with Abraham as his father to send Lazarus to provide the tiny comfort of placing a drop of water on his tongue (verse 24). Abraham didn't deny being the rich man's father, but was unable to help him. **The Jews' descent from Abraham would not save them (Luke 3:8).**

Abraham also pointed out the justice of their respective lots (verse 25). Whereas Lazarus suffered evil in life, but the rich man was blessed with good, now their lots were reversed. **Eternal punishment is just.**

Furthermore, the situation was irremediable. There is a great gulf, or chasm (**NASB, ESV**), between paradise and torment, and none can cross it (verse 26). **At death our fate is sealed.** "It was unchangeable in nature, unalterable in condition, and eternal in its establishment" (Boles. 323). There is no purgatory where sins can be burned away, so the tormented may enter paradise. Our loved ones can neither pray nor pay our way out of that endless misery.

So the rich man pleaded with Abraham, If he could not get relief, then send Lazarus back to warn his five brothers about this torment (verses 27-28). He remembered Lazarus and he remembered his father's house and his brothers. **Death does not destroy memory.**

But Abraham rebuked the request. "They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them" (verse 29). **There is sufficient testimony in Scripture to lead any honest soul to faith and salvation** (John 5:45-47; Romans 10:17; 2 Timothy 3:16-17).

But the rich man was insistent. "And he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent'" (Luke 16:30).

But Abraham was adamant. "He said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead'" (Luke 16:31). Not long after this, Christ did raise another Lazarus from the dead (John 11:43-44). Rather than believing, the chief priests and Pharisees plotted to kill both Jesus (John 11:46-53) and Lazarus (John 12:10-11). When the Lord was raised from the dead, rather than believing, the Jewish leaders sought to silence the witnesses (Acts 4:18). The belief that miracles are needed to cause the lost to turn to the Lord is absolutely false. Never underestimate the power of divine truth. **The logical, moral persuasion of the Word of God is sufficient to lead any honest soul to salvation** (Romans 1:16)..

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