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



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Finally, brethren

**WHATEVER
THINGS**

are true

are noble

are just

are pure

are lovely

are of good report

IF THERE IS ANY VIRTURE AND IF THERE IS ANYTHING PRAISEWORTHY –
meditate on these things.

PHILIPPIANS
4:8

You can download this month's Meditate On These Things as a PDF file by clicking [here](#). Also, an archive of past MOTT issues is available at christstheway.com.

Questions from Nigeria about Women

I have some questions that I will like some clarity and biblical position:

Question

The Bible in 1 Cor 14:33-34 says women should learn in silence. Is silence absolute silence?

Answer

First Corinthians 14:34-35 states:

Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says. And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church.

The Greek word translated "keep silent" is "*sigao*," which means "*say nothing, keep silent*" (W.F. Arndt and F.W. Gingrich, **A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament**, 757; Cf. Luke 9:36; 18:30; 20:26; Acts 12:17; 15:12-13; 1 Corinthians 14:28,30). Whatever kind of speaking the apostle has in mind, the woman may not do it at all.

Does this mean no woman may utter a word in the public worship assemblies? If so, women cannot sing (Ephesians 5:19), confess their faith (Romans 10:9-10), or confess sin (James 5:16) in church.

The contrast in First Corinthians 14:34 establishes what kind of speaking women are forbidden to do. Opposite to this kind of speaking, "they are to be submissive." The apostle prohibits women from engaging in the kind of speaking of the context - authoritatively addressing the public worship assembly. By doing this women cast off their role of subjection to man. From the very beginning the principle of feminine submission has been true (verse 34; cf. Genesis 3:16). The lack of subjection demonstrated by the women in Corinth was shameful. The principle is that women must not speak in the assembly in such a way that their subjection to man is violated.

Question

Can a woman ask question in bible class or she has to write her question in note and pass to the teacher as some brethren insist?

Answer

In a Bible class where both men and women are present, she may ask a question or make a comment as long as she remains submissive. She should receive permission from the male teacher in charge of the class to speak, and not dominate the class (1 Corinthians 14:34-35; 1 Timothy 2:11-12).

Question

Paul said he suffer not a woman to speak in all churches, does this apply to church business meetings. can a woman be part of, contribute or make suggestion in Church Business meeting.

Answer

There are to be elders in every church (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5). Of course, there must be men who meet the divine requirements selected and are appointed to this office (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). Elders are to rule the local church (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:1-4; 1 Timothy 5:17). To rule is to make decisions that those who are ruled are obligated to follow (Exodus 18:21-26; cf. 1 Kings 20:40).

In matters of opinion the elders should learn and consider the needs and opinions of the entire congregation, both men and women (Acts 6:1). How this is done is a matter of opinion. It could be a congregational business meeting. The elders should make decisions for the church (Acts 21:8, 23-24) and should inform the whole church of decision that affect the whole church (Acts 6:3; 15:19-20).

In matters of faith elders should decide privately what they believe is scriptural in order to have a united eldership (Acts 15:5-6; Galatians 2:2). They should inform the church of their position and the reasons for it and give the entire church opportunity to discuss the issue and to express approval or disapproval (Acts 15:7, 12, 22).

The whole church is to select its own officers (Acts 6:3), and the method is a matter of liberty.

The whole church is to withdraw from impenitent sinners in the public worship assembly (1 Corinthians 5:4-5).

A church may not have men qualified to be elders (1 Timothy 3:2, 11; Titus 1:7). In such a situation men still make decisions for the church (Acts 13:1-3). Women may not rule over (help make decisions for) men

in the church (1 Timothy 2:12). The younger should submit to the elder (1 Peter 5:5), but no one should seek or be allowed to have preeminence (3 John 9-10). All members of the church (including women) have the rights to have their opinions and needs considered (Acts 6:1), be kept informed (Acts 6:2-4), and have their approval sought (Acts 6:2-5). This could be in a congregational business meeting or another arrangement. We must all should strive for unity and peace (Ephesians 4:1-3) and strive to please others and not to cause anyone to stumble (1 Corinthians 10:31-33).

Question

Deut 22:5 talk about women not putting on what men cloth, IS this forbidden women from putting on trouser?

Answer

Deuteronomy 22:5 is part of the Law of Moses and is no more binding on Christians than is the Sabbath (Colossians 2:13-17). However, the apostle Paul commands, "... give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all" (Romans 12:17, **English Standard Version**). Neither men nor women should ruin their influence for good by the way they dress. Furthermore, women should "adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation" (1 Timothy 2:9, **New King James Version**). Godly women do not dress in such a way as to tempt good men to lust. They do not call attention to their appearance by being fashion trend setters.

Questions from Nigeria about Being A Musician

Question

Can a Christian be a secular musician as a profession?

Answer

The New Testament command is to labor in order to provide for our material needs and those of others (Ephesians 4:28; 2 Thessalonians 3:10). No particular kind of labor is specified, so it is completely generic as long as it is legal (Romans 13:1) and moral (Ephesians 5:11). Many musical careers involve immorality, such as playing in bars, or false religion, such as playing for a church worship service. Obviously these are wrong (Ephesians 5:11).

Question

If so a christian opted to sing gospel song, will he/she be violating the commandment on non-instrumental music if he/she chooses to using musical instrument in his/her choosing career outside the worship?

Answer

Worship in song can be in the worship assembly of the church (1 Corinthians 14:15-19), in a group outside the worship assembly (Acts 16:25), or completely individual (James 5:13). Regardless, the only kind of music the Lord has authorized is vocal, singing (Acts 16:25; Romans 15:9; 1 Corinthians 14:15; Ephesians 5:18-19; Colossians 3:16; Hebrews 2:11-12; James 5:13).

Question

When are we in worship? Does what we do in our career part of worship?

Answer

Our careers should be part of our service to God (Romans 12:1-2; 1 Corinthians 10:31), but worship is that part of our lives where we act for the purpose of showing our love and reverence for God (cf. Genesis 22:5; Psalm 95:6).

"Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen."

Is anything too hard for God? Do you ever encounter a situation which seems hopeless? What does "pray without ceasing" mean, to you?

Sometimes, we are confronted with a reality of life that leaves us really perplexed: perhaps sickness of a loved one, of a dear friend, or of ourselves, and it is dire: what about that? Well, first we need to look to the One "who is able."

Paul speaks of God's being able to do **what** we ask or think; **more** than we ask or think; **Far more** than we ask or think; in fact, far more **abundantly** than all we ask or think. This verse says, there is nothing too hard for God.

There are other passages to consider. Jesus said, Matthew 7:7, 8, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and to the one who knocks it will be opened." Another, Matthew 21:22, "And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith." Or again, "do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God" (Philippians 4:6).

These passages seem to be unlimited: whatever you want, just ask and you've got it. The problem with that is, "another scripture saith" – which is to say, God had more to say on the subject. The solution is First John 5:14-15:

"And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have made of him."

If we ask **according to his will** he hears us. This is why, as we make requests, we should approach Him with the submissive spirit, "thy will be done."

It is not a matter of, can He do it, as verses 20 and 21 make clear. The question is, is what we ask in harmony with His will? We cannot know His will, in such matters; so our petitions must ever be, "thy will be done" – the point being that we will willingly, joyfully submit to Him.

Praise God, Who is able and willing.

Seeking the Old Paths

Jefferson David Tant | Roswell, Georgia, USA

"Thus saith Jehovah, Stand ye in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way; and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls: but they said, 'We will not walk therein'" (Jeremiah 6:16).

Introduction

Our age seems to be chiefly interested in new things. Watch the TV, see the billboards, as "This is the latest...the hot...the new and better" is touted. Things that are outdated and old-fashioned, are passé and of little worth. We are conditioned to want what is newer, bigger, and better.

This tendency carries over into the realm of religion. The popular churches and preachers are often those that appeal to fluff and excitement. The more flashing lights, the louder the band, the funnier the preacher, the bigger the church.

This causes men to reject the true for the new. Who wants to follow a 2,000-year-old religion? In fact, why not just do away with religion altogether for mankind's sake? Recently, Harvard evolutionary biologist E.O. Wilson declared that "for the sake of human progress, the best thing we could possibly do would be to diminish, to the point of eliminating, religious faiths."

The fact is, the earth is old, all truth is old, & religious truth is old because it's from God.

Seeking the Old Paths in Doctrine

There is a popular dislike for "doctrinal preaching." One preacher explained why he didn't preach doctrinal sermons in words like this: "Our people are out in the world and getting beat up every week. I want to make them feel good on Sunday. I want to encourage them." Other preachers want to preach more on grace, and want freedom more than rules.

Doctrine is the backbone of God's relationship with both Israel and God's people today.

Moses – "Give ear, ye heavens, and I will speak; And let the earth hear the words of my mouth. My doctrine shall drop as the rain; My speech shall distil as the dew, As the small rain upon the tender grass, And as the showers upon the herb. For I will proclaim the name of Jehovah: Ascribe ye greatness unto our God (Deuteronomy 32:1-3).

David – "The law of Jehovah is perfect, restoring the soul: The testimony of Jehovah is sure, making wise the simple. The precepts of Jehovah are right, rejoicing the heart: The commandment of Jehovah is pure, enlightening the eyes" (Psalm 19:7-8).

Solomon – "Hear, my sons, the instruction of a father, And attend to know understanding: For I give you good doctrine; Forsake ye not my law" (Proverbs 4:1-2).

Isaiah – "They also that err in spirit shall come to understanding, and they that murmur shall receive instruction" (Isaiah 29:24).

Christ – "And they were astonished at his teaching: For he taught them as having authority, and not as the scribes" (Mark 1:22).

Apostles – "And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2:42).

Paul – "But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you" (Romans 6:17).

Timothy – "Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear you" (1 Timothy 4:16).

Who said doctrine was not important? How about Joel Osteen, famous "feel good" preacher for a 40,000 member Houston church. "I don't preach on sin. God hasn't called me to do that. I want my people to feel good." (From a TV interview during an Atlanta meeting where you had to pay \$10 to get in the door.)

Doctrine determines our deeds. Jacob was told the "doctrine" that his son Joseph had been eaten by a wild beast, and he grieved because he was given a false "doctrine." "So Jacob tore his clothes, and put sackcloth on his loins and mourned for his son many days. Then all his sons and all his daughters arose to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. And he said, 'Surely I will go down to Sheol in mourning for my son.' So his father wept for him" (Genesis 37:34-35).

How about the doctrine of "Once in grace, always in grace" or "Once saved, always saved."

"We take the position that a Christian's sins do not damn his soul. The way a Christian lives, what he says, his character, his conduct, or his attitude toward other people have nothing whatever to do with the salvation of his soul... All the prayers a man may pray, all the Bibles he may read, all the churches he may belong to, all the services he may attend, all the sermons he may practice, all the debts he may pay, all the ordinances he may observe, all the laws he may keep, all the benevolent acts he may perform will not make his soul one whit safer; and all the sins he may commit from idolatry to murder will not make his soul in any more danger. The way a man lives has nothing whatever to do with the salvation of his soul. The way I live has nothing whatever to do with the salvation of my soul" ("Do a Christians Sins Damn His Soul?", Sam Morris, Baptist preacher, Stamford, Texas)

So, if people believe this "doctrine," why bother to avoid any kind of sin? All the sins, from idolatry to murder won't make any difference in my eternity.

Then there is the doctrine of predestination and election. This teaches that before the foundation of the world, God looked down through time and pre-ordained certain ones to salvation, and certain ones to damnation, and nothing we can do will change that. Following such a doctrine, what difference does it make what kind of life I lead—whether filled with evil deeds or every sin imaginable?

I had a conversation with a Presbyterian preacher who admitted his belief in election. I asked him why he bothered to preach, as nothing he said would make a difference. He admitted, "I have wondered myself. All I know is I was told to preach."

This shows the need for true doctrine. "Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen" (1 Peter 4:11).

All "doctrine" is not on the same level. "For if one comes and preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted, you bear this beautifully" (2 Corinthians 11:4). "I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed!" (Galatians 1:6-8) "Whoever transgresses, and abides not in the doctrine of Christ, has not God. He that abides in the doctrine of Christ, he has both the Father and the Son" (2 John verse 10). Thus there is "doctrine" that is not true doctrine, just as there can be other "gospels."

The New Testament reveals all true doctrine. "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17) If this is true, then there is no new truth to be revealed.

Jude agrees with the idea that there is no new truth to be revealed. "Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints" (Jude verse 3).

God's revelation, his doctrine, has been revealed once for all people for all time. No church manual, creed, catechism or book of doctrine reveals anything new, but rather contradicts God's law. If they say the same as the Bible, we already have the Bible, but if they say something, different from the Bible, it is a different gospel, and therefore false doctrine.

Seeking the Old Paths in Worship

“God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:24). Worship is a vital part of our lives. We can read through the Psalms and note the worship in praise. “I will give thanks to the LORD according to His righteousness And will sing praise to the name of the LORD Most High” (7:17). “I will be glad and exult in You; I will sing praise to Your name, O Most High” (9:2). “I will tell of Your name to my brethren; In the midst of the assembly I will praise You” (22:22).

Note the scene in heaven. “And the four living creatures, each one of them having six wings, are full of eyes around and within; and day and night they do not cease to say, ‘**Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty, Who was and Who is and Who is to come.**’ And when the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, to Him who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders will fall down before Him who sits on the throne, and will worship Him who lives forever and ever, and will cast their crowns before the throne, saying, ‘Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created’” (Revelation. 4:8-11)

We might wonder about those who are bored with church services here, as to what they will think about heaven. Well, maybe they won't be there, so they won't have to endure being bored.

Consider some false ideas about what worship is.

1. **Merely an emotional experience.** The rock concerts, the flashing lights, with bodies swaying in the pews mirrors this.

2. **All within man himself.** “When we obey God, we're not doing it for God. I mean, that's one way to look at it. We're doing it for ourselves, because God takes pleasure when we're happy. That's the thing that gives him the greatest joy this morning. So I want you to know something this morning—just do good. For your own self. Do good 'cause God wants you to be happy. When you come to church, when you worship Him, you're not doing it for God really. You're doing it for yourself, because that's what makes God happy. Amen?” (Victoria Osteen, wife of Joel Osteen, co-pastors of 40,000-member church)

It's hard to believe people can have such a self-centered view of worship.

3. **Anything helpful is permissible.** A preacher in Ohio decided to ride a bull in the church building to get people to services. “Lawrence Bishop, co-pastor of Solid Rock Church in Monroe, Ohio announced...that he was going to ride a bull in the church building to get people to services. ‘What God has laid on our heart to do is to buck two wild rodeo bucking bulls inside the church sanctuary as a tool to get people to come to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ...’” (He lasted about three seconds and was thrown off and trampled.)

Or how about a “Church in a Movie Theater?” ad showing a little girl with popcorn and soda.

Then there is the “Bar Church of Christ,” a satellite church of the Southern Hills Church of Christ in Abilene, Texas. Why a church in a bar? They want to make make non-church goers more at ease. Yes, instrumental music will accompany their singing. Will alcohol be served? The website says: “Sermons will be short and alcohol will be served only when the service is over.” (I'm sure they will check IDs.)

Now someone might say, “That's really going overboard and too far.” But without a doctrinal standard, who's to judge what's too far or not far enough? This is what happens when the proverbial camel gets his nose in the tent. In time he'll move in—hump and all.

And now we have churches of Christ with instrumental music and women preachers and elders. When one preacher told me he could not preach against instrumental music because the Bible didn't condemn it, I asked about potato chips and Coke for the Lord's Supper. (I told him about a young woman I baptized

whose former Methodist Church did use those elements.) He couldn't condemn that for the same reason, but would question motive.

What worship really is.

If worship is to be directed towards our Creator, Sustainer and Savior, then why not listen to what God wants, not what tickles our fancy? "Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe" (Hebrews 12:28).

Remember what happened to Nadab and Abihu when they worshipped God according to what pleased them, rather than do what God said. "Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took their respective firepans, and after putting fire in them, placed incense on it and offered strange fire before the LORD, which He had not commanded them. And fire came out from the presence of the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD. Then Moses said to Aaron, 'It is what the LORD spoke, saying, 'By those who come near Me I will be treated as holy, And before all the people I will be honored.'" So Aaron, therefore, kept silent" (Leviticus 10:1-3).

What was the problem? They may have reasoned that one fire is as good as another, so what difference did it make? The difference was that they "offered strange fire before the LORD, which He had not commanded them." If that's not an argument to be made from silence, then I don't know what you would call it.

The truth is, emotion follows and accompanies true worship. ("Moreover, Jehoiada placed the offices of the house of the LORD under the authority of the Levitical priests, whom David had assigned over the house of the LORD, to offer the burnt offerings of the LORD, as it is written in the law of Moses--with rejoicing and singing according to the order of David" (2 Chronicles 23:18). "The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes" (Psalm 19:8).

Pray, tell me what "precepts and commandments" are. Are they not doctrine? What emotion is felt following baptism? Is it not rejoicing following obedience? Do tears ever come from some song we sing? Or strong emotions when reflecting on the Lord's Supper? True worship produces the right emotions.

We must walk in the old paths in our worship, because that is the way God has shown us.

Seeking the Old Paths in Living

The present age has little regard for the old paths. We live in an age of liberty and license. 60% of couples live together before marriage, up from 40% 20 years ago, and up 900% from 50 years ago. Melissa Melms said, "I think it would be weird to me to have a friend who would wait to move in together until after they got married."

Consider divorce rates – 7% 1900, 22% 1960, today 53%. Premarital sex – Over 80% of teenagers are sexually active. The growing pressure to accept homosexuality. The pageantry of nakedness – Magazines, TV, movies, beaches, near nakedness in the mall. We've come a long way since 1900 when skirts were measured for modesty.

The result is cynicism and despair. Yes, it is discouraging to see the state of the world and our nation. But is it any worse than the 1st century world the Christians faced? "Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God" (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

What is the remedy? Paul encouraged the Christians in wicked Corinth to look up. "For momentary, light

affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:17-18).

As Christians we must point the way up. "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 5:13-16).

We must return to the old paths of moral behavior. Paul urged young Timothy to lead an exemplary life. "I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who testified the good confession before Pontius Pilate, that you keep the commandment without stain or reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Timothy 6:13-14).

Conclusion

In the final analysis, there is only one path to heaven—through Jesus Christ. "Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me" (John 14:6).

It is not the popular way, nor the easy way, and it may be an old path, but it is the way. "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it" (Matthew 7:13-14).

There are always two choices –Which way do you choose? If you choose Christ, he has given a very simple plan to begin the journey. "He that believes and is baptized shall be saved; but he that does not believe shall be condemned" (Mark 16:16).

"Have You Not Made A Hedge Around Him"

Jim Mickells | Lewisburg, Tennessee, USA

"So Satan answered the LORD and said, 'Does Job fear God for nothing? Have You not made a hedge around him, around his household, and around all that he has on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land'" (Job 1:9-10).

The word "hedge" is defined as, "has fenced him about (protectingly)" (**The New Brown-Driver-Brigg-Gesenius Hebrew-English Lexicon**. 962). **Wilson's Old Testament Word Studies** says, "to hedge in, to hedge about; either in a way of protection or to prevent escape" (214).

I certainly believe Satan was correct in his observation of what God had done for Job; just like He protects all those who belong to Him. There are promises the Father has made to all who believe and obey Him which helps us to remain faithful and loyal to Him. The devil was trying to destroy this great man of faith, just like he is seeking to devour Christians today (1 Peter 5:8). The Lord will always do his part in our protection and deliverance, yet we must fulfill our responsibilities as well. Let me suggest just a few hedges placed about us by Jehovah to protect us.

He will not allow us to be tempted above our ability to bear it. "No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it" (1 Corinthians 10:13). We may not know exactly how God will accomplish this, yet by faith, we understand He will do it. In Job's case, He limited what Satan could do (Job 1:12; 2:6). What a wonderful thought knowing

Jehovah is always mindful of me and my struggles; of the confidence, He has in me that I can overcome and be successful with His help.

He will provide a way of escape when tempted. “No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it” (1 Corinthians 10:13). The way is there. We simply must seek to find it, and once found, use it to escape. Joseph, when tempted by Potiphar’s wife to commit sexual immorality, reminded her that such would be a sin against his earthly master and above all a sin against God (Genesis 39:7-9). Eventually he had to literally flee from her (Genesis 39:12). There may be the need to run, sever some relationships in life, change jobs, turn off the TV or computer, etc., yet the way to avoid the temptation to sin is there. The Lord has provided it for us.

His word is given to help us evade sin. “Your word I have hidden in my heart, That I might not sin against You!” (Psalm 119:11). I can know what sin is because of His word (Romans 7:7). The consequences of iniquity are revealed to me in the Scriptures (Romans 6:23). The high price paid for my faults and failures are made know to me in the Bible (2 Corinthians 5:21). His precepts are given so I might be stronger, able to resist Satan’s temptations (Acts 20:32). The testimonies of the Lord are given to direct and lead me in the path of righteousness, helping me to avoid sin (Psalm 119:105). Is it any wonder why the Psalmist said, “More to be desired are they than gold, Yea, than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb” (Psalm 19:10).

He will hear and answer our prayers when we need help. “And do not lead us into temptation, But deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen” (Matthew 6:13). What a privilege we have as Christians, to be able to call upon our Lord in prayer any time, day or night, knowing He is ready and willing to help. We must humble ourselves before the throne of our Father to find grace and mercy in time of need (Hebrews 4:16). He can and will deliver us from Satan if we allow Him. What an awesome God we serve.

Has God placed a hedge about us? Yes, indeed! Will He do His part in protection and preserving those who belong to Him? Absolutely! Will we do our part? That is the question we all must deal with. He is always faithful even when we are faithless (2 Timothy 2:13). Thank you, Lord, for your protection!

Why I Believe the Church Is Essential (Part 1)

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From reading such passages as Second Corinthians 13:5, “Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves...” and First Peter 3:15, “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that in you, with meekness and fear,” I thought it wise to spend some time examining what I believe. So, for the past few months I have been preaching a series of lessons entitled, “Why I Believe.” All of the lessons preached are available on DVDs for any that might want them. They are free of charge to all who ask for them.

I began the series pointing out the fact that my faith (the things I believe about God, the Bible, Jesus Christ, the plan of salvation and the church) are not blind faith, based on speculation and imagination. Rather my faith is based on solid evidence, that is rational and reasonable, even if the things believed are not visible to the naked eye. Hebrews 11:1, “the evidence of things not seen”; Second Corinthians 4:18, “we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen...” The evidence is there for one willing to discern the truth, as Paul stated in Rom.1:21, “For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His everlasting power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse.”

Even though many of us have been Christians for a number of years, it doesn’t hurt to go back and discuss the basics, to reexamine the things we believe and teach. Even though we feel we are firmly

established in the truth, we can easily forget it if we are not constantly reminded (2 Peter 1:12-16). Can we be sure we are not following cunningly devised fables? Are we certain? Note two words in Second Corinthians 13:5, “examine” and “prove.” They basically mean the same thing – to test, to try. There is a constant need for us to do this in our lives, even with what we consider the basics. It is wise to recheck the foundation to make sure it sits securely on the rock, and not shifting sand (Matthew 7:24-28). At this time I am not going to reprint all the material I have written on this series, but I do want to study on why I believe the church of Christ is an essential and necessary part of God’s plan of salvation.

Today, the church of Christ is belittled and despised by many because they do not have a proper understanding of God’s plan for the church in His scheme of redemption. In the Bible we read that the church is the city of God, the new Jerusalem, the spiritual Zion, the house of God (Hebrews 12:22; 1 Timothy 3:14-15). The church of the New Testament is protected by the bulwarks of faith discussed in past lessons (The being of God, the inspiration and integrity of the Bible, the deity of Jesus Christ are some of those bulwarks of faith). While many in the religious world will believe and accept the things just mentioned, they do not believe the church is necessary in salvation. Many well-meaning people tell us the church is not important and believe it has nothing to do with our salvation. I strongly disagree with them. They are mistaken in this. That is why I am writing these articles to prove the church is a necessary and integral part of God’s plan of redemption.

Let’s start with a careful reading of Ephesians 3:10-11: “To the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.” These verses make it clear that the church is designed by God to make known (reveal) His manifold wisdom, His eternal purpose in Christ, to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places (I will study these heavenly places in a future lesson). But, suffice it to say, that without the church God’s plan would not be made known to mankind. The Ephesian passage shows the importance and necessity of the church for those who are being saved. Without the church we cannot be saved. In fact, I will go so far as to say that one must be a member of the church of Christ to be saved, but in doing so I must first qualify the statement. Making such a statement without qualification will only create prejudice and a closed mind. So, before getting mad, please read what I write.

While the statement is true, it is not the place to start in converting people to Christ. A person must first be converted to Christ, not the church. The place of the church will become evident afterward. In my earlier years I, and a host of other gospel preachers, would challenge people to “investigate the church of Christ,” “attend the church of Christ,” or “become a member of the church of Christ.” These thoughts were at that time and still are well-intentioned. They are not wrong in themselves, but such statements are placing the emphasis in the wrong place. I say this, for the statements place more emphasis on the church Jesus built, than upon the One who built the church. Jesus Christ is the Savior, not the church. Note Hebrews 3:3b-6. “Inasmuch as He who built the house has more honor than the house. For every house is built by someone, but He who built all things is God. And Moses indeed was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which would be spoken afterward. But Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end.” As can be seen in the verses, the one who built the house is to receive the honor. One may admire the building, but the architect that designed it is of greater importance. So it is with the plan of salvation. In teaching people, emphasize the Savior. Let Him place the saved in the building, after they have been saved (Acts 2:41, 47).

Instrumental Music in the Book of Revelation

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In the religious world, there is a basic cognizance of the need to conduct ourselves within the confines of God’s authority. The apostle Paul, when writing to the brethren at Colosse implored, “...whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him”

(Colossians 3:17). Such demands that we search the Scriptures, to know what is and what is not acceptable to the Lord so far as religious practice and doctrine.

When we come to the subject of proper worship in song, just as with any other topic, we must seek to know what pleases the Lord. A practice or teaching may delight us, but we are not the object nor the designer of worship. How does God instruct us to worship in song? Are we to use mechanical instruments, are we to use our voices, or a combination of the two?

Our primary focus in this article, as evidenced by the title, will be the occurrence and use of instrumental music as found in the book of Revelation. A detailed discussion of the use of instrumental music in the Old Testament, and the pattern of vocal music in the New Testament will be reserved for another occasion. However, permit just a few comments on these important aspects of music in the Scriptures.

That instrumental music was used in worship in Old Testament times is sure. There are numerous texts which speak of instruments being employed in the praise of God, of which Numbers 10:10 and 2 Chronicles 5:11-14 are examples. However, the use of such by those who were then subject to Moses' law does not condone the use of the same today by those who are under Christ's law. God's acceptance of a practice under the former covenant does not ensure His acceptance of the same under the New covenant. We must learn what God has commanded in the New Testament so far as worship in song.

Very briefly, the consistent testimony of the New Testament is that Christians should worship God with singing (Acts 16:25; 1 Corinthians 14:15; Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16; James 5:13). Not once do we find in the epistles an example of or instruction to use instrumental music in worship. If we are going to do and say according to name of the Lord (ie. by His authority), then we will worship God with the use of our voices, and not mechanical instruments. To go beyond this is to act without authority.

Some might be inclined to contend, there are musical instruments mentioned in the book of Revelation, employed in worship of God Almighty. Indeed, that is the case. In fact, there are three occasions in the book of Revelation where instruments of music are mentioned in conjunction with worship. Let us use the remainder of our time considering these texts.

REVELATION 5:8-10

Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song, saying: You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth.

Beginning in chapter 4, John presents to us a heavenly scene, as he was granted to see the throne room of God. When we consider the text, it must be with the understanding that the events depicted are not upon the earth, but in heaven. As such, the worship which is described in the text does not serve as an example of the worship to be engaged in by the New Testament church.

If this were Biblical instruction for worship in the Lord's church, then it would be necessary for ALL worshippers to have and play an instrument. And not just any instrument, but the text specifies that ALL twenty-four elders and ALL four living creatures had a harp. But of course, the text is not to be understood literally, for even in verse 8 itself, John identifies the figurative manner of his words. The "golden bowls full of incense" were not in fact vessels of gold containing fragrance, but were emblematic of "the prayers of the saints". This text does not teach us regarding the appropriate practice for worship by God's people upon the earth.

REVELATION 14:2-3

And I heard a voice from heaven, like the voice of many waters, and like the voice of loud thunder. And I

heard the sound of harpists playing their harps. They sang as it were a new song before the throne, before the four living creatures, and the elders; and no one could learn that song except the hundred and forty-four thousand who were redeemed from the earth.

Again, the text makes it evident that these are scenes and descriptions of the heavenly realm, not the worship practices of the Lord's church. The absurdity of a literal application of the text to New Testament worship is quickly seen. Verse 3 speaks of a new song being sung (not in a local assembly of Christians, but "...before the throne, before the four living creatures, and the elders..."). This song was exclusive; only the 144,000 were able to learn it. Is there a song upon the earth which none other than Christians can learn? No, but in the heavenly realm, this song is found, and likewise in the heavenly realm (not in the assembly of God's people) these harpists play their harps.

REVELATION 15:2-3

And I saw something like a sea of glass mingled with fire, and those who have the victory over the beast, over his image and over his mark and over the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, having harps of God. They sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying: 'Great and marvelous are Your works, Lord God Almighty! Just and true are Your ways, O King of the saints!'

Once again, we are privy to "...another sign in heaven..." (v 1) which was revealed to John. And, once more, the efforts of any who seek to use the appearance of musical instruments in the book of Revelation as justification for such in worship today, are confounded.

The description given is not like any meeting place I have been to. These harpists who were singing stood upon "...something like a sea of glass mingled with fire..." But remember, this is an image which John saw in heaven, not upon the earth. And, the harpists are those who "...have victory over the beast, over his image and over his mark, and over the number of his name..." (v 2), not those who still "...endure temptation..." (James 1:12), and "...wrestle... against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places." (Ephesians 6:12).

Do musical instruments appear in the book of Revelation? Absolutely. Do these instruments appear in the context of worship? Absolutely. Is this justification or authority for the use of instrumental music in worship today, in the assembly of God's people? No. Each instance identifies heaven as its setting, and incorporates figures in John's vision. As the incense vessels (5:8), the exclusive song (14:3), and the glassy sea (15:2) are signified images, it is equally plausible that the harpists and their harps are figures and not literal.

If one desires to know how we should praise God in song, such will be accomplished, not by turning to the book of Revelation, or to the Old Testament, but to the epistles of the New Testament, wherein we are given examples and commands with regard to musical worship. Consistently, the testimony of the New Testament epistles is that we should sing; no mention is made of the use of instruments of music. Such as the case, if our desire is to follow the word of God, we also will not use instrumental music in worship.

The Privilege of Worship

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We may not realize it now, but one of our greatest privileges in life is the opportunity to worship God. Those in eternity certainly realize its importance. A touching scene from the Bible is when "the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying: 'You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power'" (Revelation 4:10-11). Certainly this illustrates what is true of all who understand the honor of worshipping God.

Unfortunately, however, we as God's people lose sight of that as we meet the issues of life. We let the

slightest incident convince us to disobey God's command to "not forsake the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some" (Hebrews 10:25). Ironically, we would not let those same excuses keep us from doing other things we deem important.

What chance would we have of keeping a job if we showed up only 20% of the time or stayed home to watch television and spend time with family instead? And what if when we did show up we were always running late or the first to leave? Any chance of keeping a job with that attitude? Would we let our children miss school most of the time or attend only when they felt like it? Could we honestly expect them to pass their tests if they missed more classes than they attended? If our children missed games and practices as much as they miss services (because of our dereliction), would they get cut from the team? Chances are that will not happen in our entertainment-driven society. We will give up time and money to improve our child's spot on the team, but show little concern for their spiritual development.

It is a tragedy when God's people are more afraid of losing their job, failing a class, or missing the team than forsaking God in public worship. Is He not greater than any earthly assignment? Is the eternal soul not of more value than earthly gain? Then why put on a charade about missing church, especially when God wants us to build each other up in public worship (Colossians 3:16)? Do we honestly think we are fooling Him when we say we're too tired, sick, or busy to go to church, yet not let those same excuses keep us from going to the stores, games, and restaurants? Are we that deceived by the world and its lust? Yes, some are unable to attend because of legitimate hindrances with health, work, or other obligations, which keep them from doing other things as well. But God knows if we are unable to attend worship or if we are unwilling. The key is understanding that difference ourselves before we meet Him in judgment.

An Evangelizing Church

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The words of Jesus are clear, convicting, and concise: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). The gospel is meant to be taught to everyone who is under bondage to sin. Clearly this commission was given to the apostles in the immediate context of Mark 16, yet it was also embraced by the early church throughout the book of Acts. We see that the church in Antioch openly accepted this commission.

In Antioch, Christians began to take that mission quite seriously. They did not just preach the message to people of the same social-economic class, nor did they preach to only people that were "good, moral people." They did not simply talk to people that believed similar things as they did. They went to preach to the Greeks (Acts 11:20). The Greeks thought differently than the Jews did. The Greeks had various philosophical ideas and religious superstitions that would have been difficult for the church to correct their thinking — but that did not stop them.

What happened when the church preached to people? A great number of people believed and turned to God (Acts 11:21). If we heartily and enthusiastically did the same, would the results be different? Of course not.

If the church is not growing in number, why is that? Even in some of the most difficult of places the gospel was preached, a few people's interest was piqued (Acts 17:32-34). Perhaps it is that we have failed in our obligation to evangelize like the early church did.

My fear is that sometimes we feel that as long as we have a preacher who stands in the pulpit at our meeting place then we are fulfilling the great commission. My fear is that sometimes we feel as long as we host a gospel meeting a couple of times a year then we are doing our duty of evangelism. Notice one verse in the book of Acts which describes the working of the early church.

"And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ," Acts 5:42

Examine a few things from this verse. First, teaching was done daily, not just on Sundays when the entire congregation assembled. Second, teaching was done in the temple where spiritually-inclined people gathered and they could ask questions. Third, the teaching was also done in houses. This does not suggest the church never assembled together at a common location, nor does it suggest that there were several “house churches” in Jerusalem. What this does suggest is Christians opened up their homes on a daily basis, consistently teaching their friends, family, neighbors, co-workers, and acquaintances. Fourth, they did not cease teaching. Many times we give excuses why this is not the right time of year to have meetings, or do “extra” evangelistic work. Should the work of the church ever stop?

Imagine if members of the church cooperated together, opened up their homes, had Bible studies, Bible readings, and Bible discussions and invited their neighbors, or friends to join in these discussions. Would the number of disciples be multiplied greatly, bringing about a number of people to be obedient to the faith (Acts 6:7)? The New Testament church is our example to follow if we want to demonstrate New Testament Christianity in its purest form. As we follow the approved examples of the apostles’ and their teachings, we see that the earliest Christians embraced the work of evangelism with exceeding zeal. The church was an evangelizing church!

“Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word,” (Acts 8:4). The early church certainly had capable teachers — the 12 apostles, Stephen, and Philip the evangelist to name a few. However, the church did not solely depend upon those teachers and preachers to spread the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ. All of the Christians participated in teaching the word!

What are you doing to help the church grow?

Righteous versus the Ungodly

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Psalm 1

- (1) Blessed is the man Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, Nor stands in the path of sinners, Nor sits in the seat of the scornful;
- (2) But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night.
- (3) He shall be like a tree Planted by the rivers of water, That brings forth its fruit in its season, Whose leaf also shall not wither; And whatever he does shall prosper.
- (4) The ungodly are not so, But are like the chaff which the wind drives away.
- (5) Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, Nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.
- (6) For the LORD knows the way of the righteous, But the way of the ungodly shall perish.

In the first psalm, the inspired writer contrasts the character and lot of the righteous person with those of the ungodly (wicked). He first describes the character of the righteous both negatively, what he does not do (verse 1), and positively, what he does (verse 2). Then he shows the results in the life of the righteous (verse 3). Next he examines the character of the ungodly (verse 4) and the results (verses 4-5). Finally, he states the reasons for the differences (verse 6).

The righteous is blessed (verse 1). The **New American Standard Bible** translates this “How blessed.” He has great happiness.

We will return later to look at verse one in detail.

Positively, the righteous delights in and meditates on the law of the Lord (verse 2). Love for the word of God is the foundation and starting point of righteousness. To love to read, study, understand, and apply to our own lives the Scriptures is the first step to a character that is right with God.

The righteous is like a tree planted next to the water (verse 3). Palestine resembles Southwest Texas,

where I was born. The hill tops are barren, but next to the spring in the valley grow live oaks. When dry season comes, all the scrub brush on the hills withers, but the live oaks in the valley next to the spring are lush. Their roots go deep into the soil and receive water and nutrients. The righteous endure the same troubles and problems of life that the ungodly do, but with faith rooted deeply in Christ, and with the soul nourishing spiritual water of the Word, the faith of the righteous remains firm.

Nothing that has been said of the righteous is true of the ungodly, whether as to character or lot (verse 4).

Thus, they are like the chaff, the stalks and husks of grain, thrown by the farmer into the air when he winnows his grain crop (verse 4). As the light chaff is blown in every direction, the ungodly are tossed about by every difficulty, temptation, and false doctrine. The result is the ungodly will not be able to stand before the Lord in judgment nor be accepted into the congregation of the righteous (verse 5).

The reasons for the differences in their lots in life is that the Lord looks with approval on the way the righteous live, but the way of the ungodly leads to destruction (verse 6)

Now, return to verse one. This states what the righteous do not do and what the ungodly do.

And it vividly portrays how sinners go progressively deeper into sin. "Walks" indicates repeated action, "stands" portrays habitual activity, and "sits" implies set character.

The nouns also show progression. The "ungodly" has a bad attitude toward God. He may be morally upright, but he's not interested in serving the Lord. "Sinners" engage in evil conduct. "Scoffers" have lost their faith and ridicule our faith.

A man (or woman) doesn't fall away from Christ overnight. It begins with a lack of interest in worship and Bible study - ungodliness. Sins begin to creep in - bad language, pornography, immodest dress, dishonest practices. Eventually the sinner loses his faith and ridicules those who serve the Lord.

The same thing happens to churches. When I was a child, churches of Christ debated church support of the orphanage, the sponsoring church, and church "fellowship halls." Now "mainline" churches of Christ engage in every social gospel activity the denominations practice and support myriads of "para-church" organizations. The debates are over instrumental music in worship, women preachers, and divorce and remarriage for any and every reason. And "mainline" Churches of Christ are losing the battle to remain distinct from denominations. This year the Highland Church of Christ, Abilene, Texas, which led the way into institutionalism in the 1950s by begging money from churches of Christ throughout America for their Herald of Truth TV program, had an Easter celebration service complete with instrumental music in worship.

You've probably heard the old tale about how to boil a frog alive. Don't throw it into a pan of boiling water- it will jump right out. Gently set the poor creature into a pan of room temperature water. Then slowly turn up the heat until the water boils. The frog won't move until it's cooked.

That's the way Satan operates. Both individually and as a congregation, we must be wary of becoming boiled frogs.

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 Divine Plan of the Ages

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On July 20, 1969, Neil A. Armstrong, American astronaut, became the first human to set foot on the moon. The plan devised by scientists at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration to get him there was truly remarkable for its technical complexity and accuracy and is indeed a monument to the skill of American technology. Yet, the plan that God devised for the salvation of mankind is as much higher in grandeur than the program devised by NASA, or any other human scheme, "as the heavens are higher than the earth" (Isaiah 55:8-9). What is God's plan of salvation?

God's scheme of redemption first existed in **purpose** (Ephesians 3:8-12). That purpose was in the mind of God "from the beginning of the world" (verse 9), indeed, it is an "eternal purpose" (verse 11). Before there even was a man, an earth, moon, or universe, in eternity before time, God purposed His plan for our salvation.

God created all things and set the first man and woman in the garden of Eden to keep it. But they sinned and fell. God was forced to bring curses upon them. But even with the curses grace was manifested as God promised that the seed of woman (one born of a virgin) would bruise the serpent's head, i.e., destroy the power of Satan (Genesis 3:15). Thus, the scheme entered the state of **promise**.

After many centuries had passed, God appeared to Abram in Ur of the Chaldees, commanded him to depart from there to a country He would show him, and delivered to Abram a grand three part promise (Genesis 12:1-3, 7). The Lord pledged to make Abraham "a great nation" (verse 2), to give his descendants the land of Canaan (verse 7), and through him to bless "all the families of the earth" (verse 3). When Abraham's descendants, Israel, were in Egypt, God fulfilled the first part of the promise by making them "a nation, great, mighty, and populous" (Deuteronomy 26:5). Under the leadership of Joshua Israel received in fulness the land of promise, for "All came to pass" (Joshua 21:43-45). But the spiritual promise, "in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed," remained unfulfilled.

Then the plan entered the stage of **prophecy**, as prophets foretold the coming salvation. For example, Isaiah prophesied of a Savior to come (Isaiah 9:6-7), of a Way of Salvation to be revealed (Isaiah 35:8-9), and of a Realm of Safety to be built (Isaiah 2:2-3).

After more centuries had gone by, John the Baptist came preaching repentance and baptizing in the wilderness of Judea in fulfillment of the prophecy:

Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You. The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; Make His paths straight' (Mark 1:1-8).

Thus, the plan entered the stage of **preparation**. All things were in readiness. Indeed,

after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand' (Mark 1:14-15).

Even the angels in heaven waited anxiously the revelation of the wonderful plan of the ages (1 Peter 1:10-12).

Then, "when the fullness of the time (the time foreordained by God) had come, God sent forth His Son" (Galatians 4:4). He was the Savior prophesied before by Isaiah (Luke 1:30-33; 2:11). Salvation is only through Him (Acts 4:10-12). He is the fulness of God's plan for man (Colossians 1:19). God's eternal plan of human redemption had entered the phase of **perfection**, when the divine plan was brought to completion.

In God's infinite wisdom, He used whole peoples and nations to prepare the world for "the fulness of the time." The Romans helped prepare the world by developing a sense of the unity of mankind under universal law and by establishing the Pax Romana (Roman Peace) whereby preachers of the gospel could travel to all parts of the Empire on Roman roads protected by Roman soldiers. The Greeks helped by giving people a common language, Koine (common) Greek, in which they could hear the Word and, negatively, by being at a low spiritual ebb, leaving a void for the gospel to fill. The Jews also helped by holding up the one true

God to the world, by keeping alive the hopes of the Messiah (“Anointed,” promised Savior), by providing the Old Testament, which paved the way for God’s plan, by giving the pure morals of the Law of Moses, and by providing the synagogue as a place the Gospel could be preached. How glorious “the manifold wisdom of God” is shown to be (Ephesians 3:10).

God also revealed a Way of Salvation, Christ Jesus (John 14:6), by the Gospel (Romans 1:16). Likewise, He built a Realm of Safety, in Christ (2 Timothy 2:10), His body, the church (Ephesians 1:22-23; 5:23). At last, In Christ Jesus the Savior, the promise to Abraham, “in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed,” is fulfilled (Galatians 3:8, 16). By faith in Christ and through baptism all people can become “Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Galatians 3:26-29).

Indeed, the Way of Salvation is open to you; you are invited to enter the Realm of Safety (Revelation 22:17). Will you come?

Parables of the Master
Faithful Service
(Parable of the Talents)

Matthew 25:14-30

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The word "For," with which this parable begins, connects it to the preceding story, the Parable of the Ten Virgins. That parable teaches us to keep watching to be ready for the Lord’s return; this, the Parable of the Talents, teaches us to work to be ready for His return.

*...the Parable of the Talents serves as a perfect complement to the Parable of the Ten Virgins. In the preceding story the maidens are pictured as **waiting** for their lord, in this story, the servants are represented as **working** for their lord. One stresses the duty of constant alertness, the other the duty of faithful service” (Lightfoot. 172).*

The Story

A wealthy man was making a long trip. He had three servants (slaves) to carry on his business while he journeyed.

Slaves in the Roman Empire were not necessarily “field hands” who couldn’t be trusted with important business. Many were like Joseph in Potiphar’s house, capable and highly trustworthy. An Israelite could not hold another Jew for longer than six full years (Exodus 21:1-2) or until the year of Jubilee (every fiftieth year; Leviticus 25:39-40). Jews were allowed to keep foreigners as permanent slaves (Leviticus 25:44-46). In Roman society slaves might even be able to purchase their own freedom.

This rich man entrusted one servant with five talents to trade with so he could increase his master’s wealth, another with two, and a third with one. In New Testament times a talent was “the Roman-Attic ‘talent,’ comprising 6,000 denarii” (Vine. 617). Since a denarius equaled one day’s wages for a day laborer (Matthew 20:2), a talent was the equivalent of 20 years’ wages. So all three servants received very large sums with which to trade. Of course, the master was wise enough to entrust each man with the amount he was capable of managing.

After a long time the rich man returned and settled accounts with his servants. The man entrusted with five talents had doubled his master’s money. The lord congratulated him, “well done” (good job!) and commended him as “good and faithful.” His character was good, and he was trustworthy in his stewardship as a servant (cf. 1 Corinthians 4:1-2). Although the two talent man had less ability and was entrusted with less money, the lord equally congratulated and commended him. Furthermore, each man was rewarded by being entrusted with even greater sums and being allowed to enter “the joy” of their lord. They apparently were allowed to dine with him at his feast, perhaps implying he was granting them their freedom.

But the man who had received one talent slandered his lord, claiming his master was “hard,” i.e., “harsh, severe, stern” (Mounce. 1271), and greedy. He served his master through fear and was afraid he might lose the money. He just hid the money in the ground and returned it to his master neither increased nor diminished.

If he expected commendation and reward because he hadn't lost his master's money, he was extremely disappointed. Rather than “good and faithful,” he was “wicked and lazy.” If he was really afraid of losing the money, he could have deposited it with the bankers, where he could safely receive interest. He was wicked to fail in his trust, and his fear of his master led him to laziness.

The lord took from him even the one talent he returned and gave it to the man who had been given five. He was cast into outer darkness, excluded from the joy of the feast with his master.

Christ stated an important principle. “For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away” (Matthew 25:29).

Meaning

Of course, the man traveling to a far country represents Christ Jesus Who was about to leave His disciples for heaven. The servants are the disciples of Christ, you and I, brother and sister. His return “after a long time” is the return of Christ to judge the world (Matthew 25:31-32; John 5:26-29).

Lessons

This parable is so well known that the word “talent” has passed into the English language as a synonym for “ability.” But that is not what the talents represent in the story. The master gave to each of his servant talents “according to his own ability” (verse 15). The talents stand for our opportunities to serve the Lord. He gives us opportunities to serve Him in keeping with our abilities. The great lesson of the Parable of the Talents is **Ability Plus Opportunity Equals Responsibility.**

Each of us has different ability and is given varying opportunities. But each of us is equally responsible to use his abilities and opportunities in the service of the Lord. We are stewards, servants entrusted with what belongs to our Lord to be used in His service (1 Peter 4:10). Stewards must be faithful, trustworthy, in the Master's service (1 Corinthians 4:1-2). We must do what we have the ability and opportunity to do (Romans 12:3-8; Ephesians 4:16).

Small ability is no excuse. The Lord is neither harsh nor greedy. He is loving, kind, and generous (1 John 4:8; Luke 6:35; James 1:17). Those who fail to serve Him through fear do not know Him, and if they really fear Him, they should serve Him the more diligently (Hebrews 12:28-29). We should not fear that our diligent service will not be good enough but that our laziness will cause us to be cast into outer darkness. He doesn't care that you lack the abilities some others may have; He cares what you do with the abilities and opportunities you have.

Those who use their abilities and opportunities are granted more opportunities. Those who fail to use them will lose the opportunities they once had. The Lord opens doors of opportunities for each of us to serve (Colossians 4:2-4). If we fail to walk through those doors, they will be closed to us and opened to another. We lose what we fail to use.

We may think one must be a murderer or a thief to be wicked. But a lazy Christian is a “wicked and lazy servant.” He has wasted the abilities and opportunities graciously given him by the Lord.

Why did the one talent man fail? Not because of lack of ability but because of lack of work. Not because of evil intent but because He thought evil of his lord. Not because he did wrong but because he did nothing. He lacked the courage to work. His fear of failure was the cause of his failure.

There is a time of reckoning. The Lord will return and settle accounts. If we have been faithful in our service, He will congratulate and commend us, welcome us into His joy in heaven, and grant us opportunities to serve Him greater than we can now know. If we have been lazy and wasted our opportunities, He will condemn us and cast us into outer darkness. "There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Are you working to be ready for His return?

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