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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

PHILIPPIANS
4:8

are of good report
IF THERE IS ANY VIRTURE AND IF THERE IS ANYTHING PRAISEWORTHY –
meditate on these things.

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.

Question from Nigeria about a Christian Married to an Unbeliever

Question

Good afternoon my preacher. I worshipped today at ... and I was shocked at the lesson taught by the preacher on marriage. Text: 1 Corinthians 7:39. The summary of the lesson was: (1) Any Christian and not just widows who marry an unbeliever would be disfellowshipped. (2) He no longer is a Christian. I asked two questions in writing (1) If a Christian marries an unbeliever and he is disfellowshipped, what would be his fruit of repentance for him to be restored? (2) If the unbelieving wife of this brother wants to be a Christian and request baptism, would she be baptized? His answer: (1) He needs to do away with the wife before he is restored and (2) the unbelieving wife cannot be baptized. Brother for me this is serious because it seems to be a well established practice among them. Any material on this will help. Thanks.

Answer

Thank you for your good question. Yes, I agree this is a disturbing situation, and the position of the preacher in Port Harcourt directly contradicts the inspired advice of the apostle Paul in First Corinthians chapter seven.

"But to the rest I, not the Lord, say: If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she

is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her. And a woman who has a husband who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her, let her not divorce him" (1 Corinthians 7:12-13).

The apostle is not denying his advice from the Lord. It's just not advice the Lord gave while He was upon earth. Paul concludes his advice about marriage by stating, "...And I think also I have the Spirit of God" (1 Corinthians 7:40). What Paul wrote was given by the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 Corinthians 2:12-13), and the Holy Spirit revealed to the apostles the will of the Lord (John 16:13-15). A Christian must not divorce his unbelieving mate.

Furthermore, the apostle Peter advises believing wives how to live with unbelieving husbands (1 Peter 3:1-2). Why didn't he just tell them to divorce the unbelieving husbands?

Question from Samoa about Jesus Coming in His Kingdom

Question

Just wondering if you can comment on these two verses. One says Jesus is coming in His kingdom, and the other the kingdom is coming with power (Matthew 16:28 and Mark 9:1).

Answer

Also parallel is Luke 9:28. Each is a reference to Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4). His coming was not literal but representative, through the Holy Spirit, whom He sent to take His place (John 15:26; 16:13-15). He promised His apostles, "I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you" (John 14:18). He did come to them (Acts 3:26), through the person of the Holy Spirit, whom He sent to take His place with them (John 14:16-17, 26; 16:7).

Question from Sri Lanka about John 5:25

Question

John 5:25 - Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live.

Is that true, all dead people will live in the future?
What is the deep meaning of 'the hour is coming'?

Answer

In John five Jesus teaches His equality with the Father (John 5:17-18). His Father is God (John 5:18). Whatever the Father does, the Son does (John 5:19). The Father loves the Son and has committed all things to Him (John 5:20; cf. Matthew 28:18). The Father imparts life to the dead, and so does the Son (John 5:21). One work the Father has committed to the Son is judging, so that all should honor the Son, just as they honor the Father (John 5:22-23). To fail to honor the Son is to fail to honor the Father Who sent Him (John 5:23). Then and now the Son imparts eternal life to the spiritually dead who hear His word and believe (John 5:24-26, "the hour is coming, and now is - verse 25). That is the present role of the Son, to be the Savior, to impart eternal life to those who are dead in sin, separated from God (cf. Isaiah 59:1-2; John 8:24). This is spiritual rather than physical, reconciliation to God (2 Corinthians 5:18-19). But when He comes again, it will be as Judge, at which time all shall be raised from the dead to stand before Him in judgment (John 5:27-29). His judgment is just, because He always does the will of the Father (John 5:30).

The Fullness of Time

Jefferson David Tant | Roswell, Georgia, USA

In two passages, the apostle Paul uses the expression "the fullness of the time," and this expression is very "full" in its meaning. Among other things, it shows God's wisdom in preparing the world for the coming of his Son, and as we look at the condition of the world in the first century, we are made to appreciate the

marvelous way in which God's plan was perfectly executed. Consider the two passages where Paul uses the expression.

"He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him with a view to an administration suitable to *the fullness of the times*, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth" (Ephesians 1:9-10).

"So also we, while we were children, were held in bondage under the elemental things of the world. But when *the fullness of the time* came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons" (Galatians 4:3-5).

Christ himself had used a similar expression in Mark 1:14-15: "Now after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.'"

Just what is meant by "the fullness of the time"? A look at the world at that time helps us to understand the wisdom of God, and the unfolding of his plan at just the right moment in the history of the world. Just what was the world like at that time?

The Political Situation

This was the Golden Age of Rome, as Caesar had unified the world. After some 500 years of war, there was peace - "pax Romana." Thus there was freedom of travel, and travel was facilitated by an excellent system of roads and shipping. Those who went about preaching the gospel had no difficulty in crossing borders or having to deal with different governments, visas or passports. The gospel freely went into Europe, Africa, India, etc..

This peace and union also facilitated the universal language - Greek. Alexander the Great had encountered a problem in giving orders to his generals as he was on his world conquest, for he had to give orders in five languages. From these five dialects he constructed a verb system which in time became the Koine Greek - the common language of the first century - the New Testament time. Thus when the gospel went into the world, language was not a problem, for Greek was spoken in every nation along with the native dialects.

The Jewish Dispersion

Not only had the Jews been scattered to some extent under the Assyrian and Babylonians, but Alexander also contributed to their spread. He was impressed with their culture and system, and took Jews with him as his administrators into the cities and nations which he conquered. One historian tells that Ananias, a Jewish High Priest, went to Alexander outside Jerusalem and showed him the prophecies about Alexander.

With this dispersion, wherever the apostles went, they had a ready audience with the Jews. We are reminded that when Paul went into a city, he usually went first to a synagogue of the Jews. "But going on from Perga, he arrived at Pisidian Antioch, and on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down. After the reading of the Law and the Prophets the synagogue officials sent to them, saying, 'Brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say it.' Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand said, 'Men of Israel, and you who fear God, listen...'" (Acts 13:14-16. See also 14:1; 17:1, etc.).

The Geographic Location

When one looks at map of the world in the first century, it is impressive to note what was at the center of civilization - Palestine, the land of Canaan, Israel. Europe was to the north, Asia to the east, and Africa to the south. In tracing the routes of trade and commerce, it is noteworthy that they ran right through the Land of Promise that God had given to Abraham centuries before. This further facilitated the spread of the gospel, as tradesmen and other travelers would have certainly had some contact with Christians as they passed through on the trade routes.

There are at least 16 nations mentioned that had gathered at Pentecost in Acts 2. The central location of the temple in Jerusalem certainly made it more convenient for the scattered Jews to come for the appointed feast. It would have been much more difficult for those from Africa and Arabia to come to Rome or Spain.

Evidently the new converts on Pentecost remained in Jerusalem for a time, being instructed and grounded in this new faith. But in time they needed to go back home and take the gospel with them. This came about upon the persecution that came in Acts 8 following the stoning of Stephen. "Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to death. And on that day a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles ... Therefore, those who had been scattered went about preaching the word" (Acts 8:1, 4).

God certainly knew what he was doing when he brought Abraham to the land of Canaan some 1900 years before. He had it all planned out, even before the creation. Indeed, Paul wrote of the fulfillment of God's plan which "was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Ephesians 3:11).

The Economic Situation

The Roman Empire had the appearance of wealth and luxury, but down below that façade there was great unrest and extreme poverty. Two of every three men on the streets of Rome were slaves - mere chattel. Indeed, in many areas of the realm things were at a crisis level. The aftermath of the war, the colossal extravagance of Herod the Great in Palestine, the heavy burden of taxation, coupled with overpopulation and the lack of adequate food supplies in many areas, brought about a great depression.

Life was bleak, and there seemed little hope that things would improve.

The Moral Condition

In one of Swinburne's poems, he claimed that Christ was a spoil-sport and a wet blanket on the happy, innocent and carefree world of his time. He thought the world was content in its worship of nature and the gods Zeus, Dionysus, Aphrodite, etc.. "Thou hast conquer'd, O pale Galilean; the world has grown grey from thy breath."

From an historical perspective, such a statement is nonsense. The real condition of the world is reflected in Paul's description in Romans 1 - a world sunk in the depths of moral hopelessness. Paul cites the world's mess in a long citation of the sins of the world at that time.

"For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures. Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the women and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error. And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; fully of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful; and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the

same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them" (Romans 1:21-32).

Throughout the empire, nobler souls viewed the world as pursuing its riotous way to disaster and ultimate destruction.

The Religious World

The gods of Rome were either dead or dying. The people were experimenting with new ideas and religions. On one hand they had imported an outlandish batch of gods from the East, until they had so many that the philosophers joked about the overcrowding on Mt. Olympus, the dwelling place of the gods. During this time, the religion of Caesar worship appeared. The Christians in the seven cities of the Revelation letter were suffering for their refusal to bow down to "Lord Caesar." This was the center of the cult of emperor worship.

But in various parts of the empire, men were looking for a vision, as if peering into the dawn for the first glimpse of the brilliant sun. When John came preaching the message of the Kingdom, many were asking, "Is this the Messiah?" Were there not others in the world like the Wise Men, who came from afar to see the wonder that God had sent into the world?

There is evidence that even Buddha had prophesied of this momentous coming. Buddha (Siddhartha Gautama) was a contemporary with the prophet Daniel, and most certainly would have had knowledge of Daniel's escape from the lions, as King Darius issued an edict to the lands under his jurisdiction. "Then Darius the king wrote to all the peoples, nations and men of every language who were living in all the land: 'May your peace abound! I make a decree that in all the dominion of my kingdom men are to fear and tremble before the God of Daniel; for He is the living God and enduring forever, and His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed, and His dominion will be forever. He delivers and rescues and performs signs and wonders in heaven and on earth, Who has also delivered Daniel from the power of the lions'" (Daniel 6:25-27). Buddha lived in the region we now know as Nepal, which was a part of the Medo-Persian kingdom.

It is recorded that a priest asked Buddha the way of salvation. "The Old Brahman priest asked first, 'So what should we all do?' The Buddha answered, 'Keep on making merit and look for another Holy One who will come and help the world and all of you in the future.' Then the old Brahman priest asked, 'What will the characteristics of the Holy One be like?' The Buddha answered him, 'The Holy One who will keep the world in the future will be like this: in the palm of his hands and in the flat of his feet will be the design of a disk, in his side will be a stab wound; and his forehead will have many marks like scars.'" Is this not an accurate description of the wounds Christ suffered when he was crucified?

The area in which Buddha lived is the same general area from which the Magi came to worship the Christ-child. The point is that there were people in the world looking for someone to come besides just Jews.

The world was ready for this momentous event! It was truly "in the fullness of the time."

Keep Your Fork

Jim Mickells | Lewisburg, Tennessee, USA

A story is told of a young woman who was dying with a terminal illness. She was making arrangements for her funeral and requested that her preacher make sure she had a fork placed in her right hand in the casket. The young woman explained, "My grandmother once told me a story, and from there on out, I have always done so. I also, always tried to pass along its message to those I love and those who are in need of encouragement."

"In all my years of attending socials and dinners, I always remember that when the dishes of the main course were being cleared, someone would inevitably lean over and say, 'Keep your fork.' It was my

favorite part because I knew that something better was coming ... like velvety chocolate cake or deep dish apple pie. Something wonderful, and with substance! So, I just want people to see me there in that casket with a fork in my hand and I want them to wonder "What's with the fork?" Then I want you to tell them: "Keep your fork ... the best is yet to come" (Author Unknown).

For the faithful Christian, this is so true. The best is yet to come. It seems this is hard for some to imagine, considering the way they live, trying to hold on to the things of the world. John says, *"And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever"* (1 John 2:17).

The body in which my spirit is housed is slowly but surely decaying. I don't see as good as I once did; I don't hear as good as I once did; I am not as physically strong as I once was; I don't sleep as good as I once did; and I have many more aches and pains than I once did, etc.. Someone has said "growing old is not for wimps." Notice how the wise man describes getting old in Ecclesiastes 12:1-8. The best is yet to come. Paul said, *"who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself"* (Philippians 3:21)

In taking up our cross, following Jesus day by day, we are faced with those who may mock and ridicule us. Persecution in some parts of the world are very severe, maybe even costing one his/her life. Paul warned, *"Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution"* (2 Timothy 3:12). But the best is yet to come. The word of Jesus assure us of this great truth. *"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you"* (Matthew 5:10-12).

Disease ravishes the body of many before they leave this world for their eternal rest. How many times have we stood beside a fellow Christian, a friend, or a relative at the funeral home staring in the casket at a dead body and heard the statement, "At least they are not suffering now." It could have been you standing there and it could have been you making that statement. Over the past few years of my mom's life I watch her deteriorate both physically and mentally. Some days she was in so much pain she could hardly function. The best is yet to come. *"There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away"* (Revelation 21:4).

The sinful conduct of those in the world is extremely troubling to the person who is trying to live godly. The news is filled with stories of death, violence, kidnapping, rape, abuse, immorality, etc.. Do you ever get tired of hearing these type stories? Even as we reflect upon our own lives, during moments of weakness and temptation, when we are guilty of acts of sin, it is disturbing to us. The best is yet to come. The time is coming when we will be through with sin. *"And there shall be no more curse..."* (Revelation 22:3).

Eyes are filled with tears, hearts are broken, and lives are empty and lonely because of the death of someone we love. I can still visualize my parents and grandparents, hear their voices, remember the way they walked, even laugh when I think of some of the things they said or did. Sometimes I think I can smell and taste my mom's homemade rolls. I sure miss those times. We are all drawing closer to death each day. But the best is yet to come. *"And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying"* (Revelation 21:4).

The best is yet to come only for those who have prepared themselves to meet their God in judgment. If you have made the proper preparation, "Keep your fork, the best is yet to come."

Why I Believe The Church Is Essential (4)

Tommy G. Thornhill | Etna, Arkansas, USA

This article continues to study some Old Testament entities that prefigured the church. The physical Israelite kingdom prefigured the church of the New Testament. When the church was established so was

the promised kingdom, prophesied in Daniel 2:44-45; Colossians 1:13-14; and Hebrews 12:23, 28. "Kingdom" means "rule of God," and by extension, refers to the citizens, territory and dominion of His kingdom. In Matthew 16:18-19 when Jesus promised to build His church, He also, by implication, included the establishment of the kingdom by promising to give Peter the keys (authority to open the door) to the kingdom. This church/kingdom is that over which Christ would be head and also reign as king (Isaiah 9:6-7; Daniel 7:13-14; Psalm 2:6). Jesus was born to be king (Luke 1:31-33; John 18:37-38). He now sits on the throne as both priest and king (Zechariah 6:12-13; Acts 2:30-36). One cannot have Jesus as the High Priest over the house of God, or the head of His church, without also accepting Him as king over His kingdom, for the church, His kingdom are composed of the same people.

People find this difficult to grasp, the church/kingdom idea, when they hear people say the church and the kingdom mean the same thing, without qualification. It is true the same people are being described with the terms, but the terms mean different things. As the church, it is the body of people, called out of sin into the service of God. As the kingdom, its members are citizens ruled over by Jesus as king. So, we see the people in one are also in the other. Note Daniel 2:35, 44-45 (mountain - kingdom); Isaiah 2:2-3 (mountain - house of God, the church). Salvation will be in Zion (Isaiah 46:13), which is the temple mount of Jerusalem. Jesus said His kingdom would be established while some of his listeners were still alive, and they would see it come with power (Mark 9:1). But when the power came they would also receive the Holy Spirit (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8). This occurred in the city of Jerusalem, on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4). The church describes a relationship of God's people, the kingdom is the spiritual territory (realm) of which we are all subjects/citizens.

There are at least three fallacies about the kingdom that need clarification. These fallacies are nationalistic, materialistic and futuristic. The first two are kissing cousins, as Robert Turner, now deceased, noted, but there is some variation.

The nationalistic fallacy- God chose the Jews for a specific purpose, to be the fleshly ancestors of Christ through Abraham (Genesis 12:3), narrowed down to Isaac, the child of promise (Romans 9:4-11; Hebrews 2:16), and then to Jacob, whose 12 sons established the nation/kingdom of Israel. God's promise to Abraham included the spiritual promise but the Jews could not understand how Gentiles would be included. So, when Jesus came the Jews were looking for a nationalistic king who would establish a physical kingdom. But Jesus said His kingdom was to be for all people, not exclusively to the Jews alone.

The materialistic fallacy – even Jesus' disciples thought He had come to establish a materialistic, a worldly kingdom, and they wanted to be chiefs in it (Matthew 20:20f); but Jesus taught otherwise (Acts 1:6-8; John 18:36-38; Luke 17:20-21).

A careful analysis of Daniel 2:44-45 cuts out the Futuristic fallacy, that the kingdom is still to be established. Daniel's prophecy shows there will be no succession of rule, for the spiritual kingdom of Christ would become the everlasting kingdom. There would be no more worldwide physical kingdoms. The New Testament teaches that the kingdom/church is already established, and will continue in perpetuity until it blends into the everlasting kingdom of Hebrews 12:28; 2.Peter 1:10-11). When Jesus returns he will turn the present kingdom/church to the Father (1 Corinthians 15:24-29).

The futuristic idea, aka premillennialism, was developed by preachers who mixed the materialistic concept of the kingdom with theories developed by a vivid imagination and the twisting of scripture to fit their preconceived ideas. The premillennial theory teaches that Jesus failed to establish His intended kingdom because He was rejected by the Jews. In its place the church was substituted to exist until Jesus could return and set up His kingdom as originally intended. Those who espouse this theory call the present time the church age, while waiting for the kingdom age. But Ephesians 3:10-11 tells us the church was not an afterthought, but was in the mind of God from eternity, as noted in a previous lesson. The established church gives eternal glory to the Father (Ephesians 3:21).

What does this futuristic theory do?

1. It makes Jesus a failure. John, the forerunner of Jesus, declared the kingdom would soon come (Matthew 3:1-2; Mark 1:14-15). After Jesus was baptized of John He began preaching this fact (Matthew 4:23).
2. The postponement theory also makes Jesus a liar and His preaching false.
3. It also makes the church an accident, an afterthought, a poor substitute for the kingdom.
4. It also dethrones Christ, for He is now a king, but with no kingdom, if what they teach is true. Peter made it clear that Jesus is now reigning at the right hand of His Father (Acts 2:33). The futuristic, premillennial theory is the material concept of the kingdom gone to seed.

I believe the truth has been established that the church is essential. It was in the mind of God from eternity and plays an essential role in God's scheme of salvation. It was not God's intention that the church would save mankind. That was the work reserved for His Son, Jesus Christ. The purpose of the church is to declare His plan of salvation to the world (Ephesians 3:10-11). It does not exist to make divine law, but to proclaim and defend the divine law revealed by God (1 Timothy 3:15; Philippians 2:15-16) to inspired men.

There Is One... (Ephesians 4:4-6)

Pat Farish | Lancaster, Texas, USA

There is one body and one Spirit - just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call - one Lord, one faith, one baptism one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Unity - being at one with the brethren - is a condition Jesus called for, and expects. In His prayer in John 17, He first prayed for the apostles, "that they may be one, even as we are one" and then, for all believers, "that they may all be one" to "become perfectly one" (verses 11, 20, 21). This is not "busy work"; the purpose of being "perfectly one" is stated clearly, "so that the world may believe that you have sent me ... so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them..." (verses 21, 23).

Some seek to be united on the basis of human wisdom. The concept of all believers under one banner befuddles them. Many seek something they call "unity" to justify some innovation while remaining in the fellowship. Such folks cannot be content to live according to God's provision set forth in our text at this time, Ephesians 4:4-6. Paul said we should be walking worthily of our calling; in our text at this time he calls attention to what that demands.

The unity of the Spirit demands submission to these facts:

"THERE IS ONE BODY." The "body" is the church, Ephesians 1:22, 23. Some thank God for providing many churches, so that everyone can go "to the church of his choice." The fact is, Jesus built only one church (Matthew 16:18), bought only one (Acts 20:28), saves only one (Ephesians 5:23), and is the head of only one (Ephesians 1:22). Denominations number in the hundreds (thousands?) now; but none of them is the "one body" of Ephesians 4:4.

There is "ONE SPIRIT." The Holy Spirit is God, as indicated by Acts 5:3, 4. It is the Holy Spirit who has revealed the mind of God (1 Corinthians 2:11-13); and caused the revelation to be written, 2 Timothy 3:16, 17. When Paul writes of the work of the Holy Spirit it is to say "I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says 'Jesus is accursed!' and no one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except in the Holy Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:3). The Holy Spirit speaks the truth, always. Contradictory statements do not come from Him. Jesus said the Spirit of truth "will guide you into all the truth" (John 16:13).

"ONE HOPE." Hope is desire plus expectation. Hebrews 11:1 tells us that faith is the assurance of things hoped for. That is, our desire for heaven is validated by our faith, our belief that God is and He rewards us. "Hope" is a marvelous thing. With hope we have occasion to rejoice even in sorrow (Romans 5:2; 12:12).

To stand at the graveside of one who died out of Christ, and observe the torment of grief of the survivors - who have no hope - is heart-rending, to say the least. Grief is never pleasant, but for those in whatever circumstance who have hope, there is consolation. This is why Paul writes that the helmet of salvation is hope (1 Thessalonians 5:8). Perhaps "one hope" helps understanding the other "ones" - body, spirit, Lord, faith, baptism and God - just "one," like our one hope.

"ONE LORD." There is one Lord, our Master, and we must be obedient to Him. He asked, "Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you?" (Luke 6:46). If we are not following, obeying, Him, He is not our master. Whatever, or whoever, has our attention, or receives our devotion, is our "master." If we would have the unity of the Spirit, we must be committed to the proposition that there is "one Lord," and therefore do what He has said.

"ONE FAITH." "Faith" describes personal conviction, "Whoever believes..." and it is also used to describe the system, the gospel. Paul, speaking of "the gospel that was preached by me," reported that some hearing him said he "is now preaching the faith..." (Galatians 1:11, 23). There is one faith. It is not unusual, however, to hear someone described as being of "another faith"; by what is meant, another gospel, contrary to Galatians 1:6-9. The so-called "tolerance" of this day is offended by preaching "one faith." Whether the subject be the plan of salvation, or the work, worship and organization of the church, or any of the moral issues gobbling up media attention and applause, taking a stand for the one faith either from the pulpit or the pew often brings a cascade of rebuke from the "the tolerant". Nonetheless, there is one faith.

"ONE BAPTISM" Baptism is for remission of sins (Acts 2:38); it is into the death of Christ (Romans 6:3, 4); it results in one's putting on Christ (Galatians 3:26, 27). Baptism saves, I Peter 3:21.

With the things just stated, we know that those who believe that God is and that John baptized with the baptism of repentance would hasten to be baptized in the name of Christ – as did the Ephesians, Acts 19:4, 5.

A question arises: what baptism? We list some of the baptisms spoken of in the Bible (Holy Spirit baptism; baptism of John; baptism of fire; baptism in the name of Christ); but we know that they cannot all be the one baptism commanded by Jesus, Mark 16:15, 16. There is one baptism!

Our search for the one baptism leads us to understand that it is the baptism commanded by Christ. So when Peter preached to Cornelius and his household, and they listened to the message by which they could be saved (Acts 11:15), he "commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ" (Acts 10:48). The "one baptism" is the *commanded* baptism.

When the gospel preached by Peter to the people on Pentecost resulted in their coming to belief, they cried out what shall we do? Peter's answer was, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins" (Acts 2:38). The one baptism is for the forgiveness of sins.

The one baptism is baptism in water. Philip preached to the Ethiopian "the good news about Jesus. And as they were going along the road they came to some water and the eunuch said, See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?" By Philip's preaching Jesus the eunuch had come to know of water in the element of baptism, Acts 8:36.

The identification of water as the element of the one baptism is underscored heavily by Peter, who declared (Acts 10:47) "can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" The one baptism is immersion in water.

Peter, again, in his first epistle, looks back to the salvation of Noah through water, and says, I Peter 3:21, "Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience". The one baptism saves.

There is one baptism. It is commanded of sinners (Acts 10:48) for forgiveness (Acts 2:38); it is in water (Acts 10:47; and it saves.

“ONE GOD AND FATHER OF ALL” Paul preached to the Athenians, people eaten up with idolatry. His solution to this situation was to preach to them of the God Who made the world and everything in it ... gives to all mankind life and breath and everything (Acts 17).

Men foolishly turn to “gods” of their own making; (confer Romans 1:18-32). Something that they have, or are, if they adore it, or rely on it, is their “god”. They construct it to their own desires, and then say “Deliver me, for thou art my God”!

But, there is one God. He is able to provide us with all we need. We trust Him, Who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think”; for there is “one God”.

“The unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.”

Instrumental Music in Church History

William J. Stewart | Kingston, Ontario, Canada

We have in previous articles looked at instrumental music in the book of Revelation, the Old Testament, and the New Testament (besides Revelation). In Revelation, we found the instances of instrumental music to deal with the heavenly realm, and not the worship of the Lord's church upon the earth. In the Old Testament, we discovered that musical instruments were commanded and used in the worship of Israel, but noted that this is no authority for us, since we are not under the Old Testament law. Coming to the New Testament, we noted that none of the occurrences of instrumental music therein address worship. Rather, every example or command with regard to our worship in song calls for vocal music, not instrumental.

Today, we turn our attention to uninspired writings, that we might view the testimony of history regarding instrumental music and worship. Of course, the religious musings and contemplation of man are no authority for us, but it is interesting to consider the record of history with regard to the use of instrumental music. Primarily, we will focus on two specific groups of religious writers. First, those who came within the next few centuries following the time of the apostles, and second, those who were present in the days of the protestant reformation, and shortly thereafter.

EARLY RELIGIOUS WRITERS:

Clement of Alexandria (approx. 150-216)

“The Lord fashioned man a beautiful, breathing instrument, after His own image and assuredly He Himself is an all-harmonious instrument of God, melodious and holy, the wisdom that is above this world, the heavenly Word. ...and on this many-voiced instruments of the universe He makes music to God, and sings to the human instrument. “For thou art my harp and my pipe and my temple”

Clement of Alexandria (approx. 150-216)

“Leave the pipe to the shepherd, the flute to the men who are in fear of gods and intent on their idol worshipping. Such musical instruments must be excluded from our wineless feasts, for they are more suited for beasts and for the class of men that is least capable of reason than for men.”

Tertullian of Carthage (155-230)

“What trumpet of God is now heard – unless it is in the entertainment of the heretics?”

Novatian of Trinitate (died 258)

“Why should I speak of strings set vibrating to noise? Even if these thing were not dedicated to idols, they should not be approached and gazed upon by faithful Christians.”

Eusibius of Caesarea (275-339)

"We render our hymn with a living psalterion and a living cithara with spiritual songs. The unison of voices of Christians would be more acceptable to God than any musical instrument. Accordingly in all the churches of God, united in soul and attitude, with one mind and in agreement of faith and piety we send up a unison melody in the words of the Psalms."

Niceta of Remesian (335-414)

"Only the corporal institutions have been rejected, like circumcision, the Sabbath, sacrifices, discriminations of foods. So, too, the trumpets, harps, cymbals, and timbrels. For the sound of these we now have a better substitute in the music from the mouths of men."

John Chrysostom (347-407)

"David formerly sang songs, also today we sing hymns. He had a lyre with lifeless strings, the church has a lyre with living strings. Our tongues are the strings of the lyre with a different tone indeed but much more in accordance with piety."

Aurelius Augustine (354-430)

"...musical instruments were not used. The pipe, tabret, and harp here associate so intimately with the sensual heathen cults, as well as with the wild revelries and shameless performances of the degenerate theater and circus, it is easy to understand the prejudices against their use in the worship."

Theodoret of Cyrhus (393-457)

"It is not simple singing that belongs to the childish state, but singing with lifeless instruments, with dancing, with clappers. Hence the use of such instruments and the others that belong to the childish state is excluded from the singing in the churches, and simple singing is left."

PROMINENT REFORMERS AND DENOMINATIONAL SOURCES:

Martin Luther (1483-1546)

"The organ in the worship is an insignia of Baal."

John Calvin (1509-1564)

"Musical instruments in celebrating the praises of God would be no more suitable than the burning of incense, the lighting of lamps and the restoration of other shadows of the Law. The Papists therefore have foolishly borrowed this as well as many other things from the Jews. Men who are fond of outright pomp may delight in the noise, but the simplicity which God commands to us by the apostles is far more pleasing to Him."

Joseph Bingham (1668-1723)

"Music in churches is as ancient as the apostles, but instrumental music is not so."

John Wesley (1703-1791)

"I have no objection to the organs in our chapels, as long as they are neither seen nor heard."

Adam Clarke (1762-1832)

"Away with such portentous baubles from the worship of that infinite Spirit who requires His followers to worship Him in spirit and truth, for to no such worship are these instruments friendly."

Adam Clarke (1762-1832)

"I am an old man, and an old minister; and I here declare that I never knew them productive of any good in the worship of God; and have had reason to believe that they were productive of much evil. Music, as a science, I esteem and admire: but instruments of music in the house of God, I abominate and abhor. This is the abuse of music; and here I register my protest against all such corruptions in the worship of the Author of Christianity."

Presbyterian Board of Publications, Philadelphia, PA (1842)

“Question 6. Is there any authority for instrumental music in the worship of God under the present dispensation? Answer. Not the least, only the singing of psalms and hymns and spiritual songs was appointed by the apostles; not a syllable is said in the New Testament in favor of instrumental music nor was it ever introduced into the Church until after the eighth century, after the Catholics had corrupted the simplicity of the gospel by their carnal inventions. It was not allowed in the Synagogues, the parish churches of the Jews, but was confined to the Temple service and was abolished with the rites of that dispensation.”

Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892)

“The great congregation which is blessed with the privilege of listening to His instruction has no organ ‘to assist’ them in singing their praises to their God and Savior. They find their vocal organs sufficient. Their tongues and voices express the gratitude of their hearts... I would just as soon pray to God with machinery as to sing to God with machinery.”

Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892)

“Israel was at school, and used childish things to help her to learn; but in these days when Jesus gives us spiritual food, one can make melody without strings and pipes... We do not need them. That would hinder rather than help our praise. Sing unto him. This is the sweetest and best music. No instrument is like the human voice.”

None of these quotes are authoritative, but the consistent testimony of history is that instrumental music was not used by the early church, and their introduction (which was in fact the innovation, not the absence of them) produced a huge stir and outcry. Many today believe that instrumental music has always been used in the churches, and look with curiosity and contempt at those who oppose their use. The testimony of Scripture, as we have seen in a previous article says otherwise. And, the testimony of history, as we have seen herein, also reveals that the introduction and use of instrumental music in the churches is relatively new, and not a practice which has its origin in the apostolic age. Let us not be innovators, adding to the doctrines and practices given in Scripture, but rather, let us simply be faithful servants, seeking to “...do all in the name of the Lord.”

Sources:

[Instrumental Music in Worship to God](#), Wayne Wells.

www.bible.ca/H-music.htm

Did We Exist Before Life?

Mike Thomas | Beaver Dam, Kentucky, USA

Among the radical ideas promoted by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (i.e. the Mormons) is the belief that everyone existed in another world before coming to earth. This idea permeates much of their literature. "Man, as a spirit, was begotten and born of heavenly parents, and reared to maturity in the eternal mansions of the Father, prior to coming upon the earth in a temporal (physical) body" (*Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* [1998], 335). Thus, all men and women are literally the physical offspring of God the Father and pre-existed in another realm before coming to earth.

In studying with the Mormons, I was told we each chose to come to earth to do God's work and that our knowledge of pre-existence gradually departs after birth. The passage they turn to for biblical evidence of this notion was Jeremiah 1:5, which states, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you..." They say this is proof God literally knew Jeremiah in person before sending him to the womb. But that is a faulty interpretation. When God told Jeremiah that He knew him before birth, He was referring to Jeremiah's calling as a prophet. That verse further states as much: "before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations." He had already devised the plan to send Jeremiah before he was born, in the

same way He foretold of John the Baptist's ministry centuries before it occurred (Malachi 3:1; Matthew 11:10). These prophecies did not demand prior existence of either man, and are no different than a couple naming their children before they are born. God is unique. He can see the future before it unfolds and is able to call "those things which do not exist as though they did" (Romans 4:17).

The only human to exist in a life before this one was Jesus, who occupied heaven before coming to earth to become a man (Philippians 2:6-7). But no one else made this transition. Every other human received his beginning in this life by the One who "forms the spirit of man within him" (Zechariah 12:1). Hence, Jesus told His opponents, "You are from beneath; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world" (John 8:23). That statement would have no meaning if everyone has a prior existence.

Friends, we are on this planet because our Creator placed us here. The only hope we have of experiencing eternal life is through His Son, Jesus Christ (1 John 5:11). We did not have it before Jesus, nor will we have it apart from Him. And we certainly have no hope of reincarnation and returning to this world until we advance to enlightenment. If we want to find heaven, we must follow Jesus now (Hebrews 5:9) by obeying His gospel (Acts 2:37-41) and living in holiness (1 John 3:1-3). Only then will we reach God's dwelling place, which will be an original, first-time experience for us (Matthew 25:34).

Immanuel

Names of the Messiah

Sean P. Cavender | Bald Knob, Arkansas, USA

Some of the most important and poignant prophecies about Jesus the Messiah are found in the book of Isaiah. Throughout these prophecies, we learn more about Christ and His reason for coming to earth and the reason for His death. We gain insight into the promise of His kingdom, as well. There are many names that are applied to Jesus, but some of the most important come from Isaiah. The first name we want to study and consider is the name "Immanuel."

"Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel." (Isaiah 7:14)

A number of things could be pointed out from the greater context in which Isaiah makes this prophecy, but we want to simply note two important items. The first, Immanuel would be born of a virgin. In Matthew's account of the birth of Christ, he quotes Isaiah 7:14 and he uses the Greek word virgin, or chaste person, defending the integrity of Mary, the trustworthiness of Scripture and fulfillment of prophecy, and the miraculous circumstances surrounding the birth of Jesus of Nazareth. Joseph was a man of integrity, a righteous man, and was surprised to learn that Mary had conceived a child (Matthew 1:19). He was ready to end the marriage, but an angel of the Lord halted all fear, telling him that Mary's child had been conceived by the Holy Spirit. Mary herself defended her virtue and asked how it would be possible for her to carry a child since she was a virgin (Luke 1:34).

The birth of the Lord and Savior was a grand and wonderful miracle which proved that God had sent His only begotten Son to this world.

Isaiah prophesied that the virgin would bear a son and His name would be called Immanuel. Again, Matthew's account is helpful in defining for us exactly what the name meant - "...which translated means 'GOD WITH US'" (Matthew 1:23). Perhaps the gospel of John is most known for its defense of the deity of the Lord. The apostle tells us, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...And the Word became flesh," (John 1:1, 14). John's defense of Christ's deity is on the basis of Jesus' eternal nature since He had been since the beginning. He had fellowship "with God" (John 1:1). He also created the world and provided life for all things (John 1:3). Simply, He "was God" (John 1:1).

That same Word, Jesus of Nazareth, became flesh (John 1:14). The Word that is God became flesh and became a man. He was God dwelling among men. However, He was rejected by His own people - *"He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him,"* (John 1:11). They eventually crucified and murdered the sinless Immanuel (Acts 2:23).

Isaiah prophesied and promised of Immanuel's coming to earth. Matthew confirmed that Immanuel came. John defended that God became flesh in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ and Messiah. The question that we may be asking is "why?" Why was it even necessary that God become flesh?

The reason it was necessary that God become flesh and have God with us was to redeem mankind. Redemption required incarnation, God becoming man. Salvation required Immanuel. The apostle Paul says, *"It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all,"* (1 Timothy 1:15). The essence of the gospel is captured in that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—Immanuel came to the world for our redemption. The great mystery of godliness and the gospel was summarized by the apostle Paul *"By common confession, great is the mystery of godliness: He who was revealed in the flesh..."* (1 Timothy 3:16).

For salvation, redemption, and the forgiveness of sins to be extended by the grace of God, it was necessary that Immanuel come to the world. Jesus Christ came to save sinners and we must praise God for sending His Son to be born of the virgin, humbling Himself to live *"in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin"* (Romans 8:3).

Present Truth

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

What About the Thief on the Cross?

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

When faced with a Bible passage that plainly teaches the necessity of water baptism for salvation, many of our friends protest, "But what about the thief on the cross? He was saved forty feet above the high water mark! He never got his big toe wet! I want to be saved just like the thief on the cross!" Surely this unnamed malefactor must be the most popular criminal who ever lived!

The story of the thief on the cross is found in Luke 23:32-33,39-43.

"There were also two others, criminals, led with Him to be put to death. And when they had come to the place called Calvary, there they crucified Him, and the criminals, one on the right hand and the other on the left.... Then one of the criminals who were hanged blasphemed Him, saying, If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us., But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying, Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong., Then he said to Jesus, Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom., And Jesus said to him, Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise."

Since Jesus promised him, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise," the malefactor was indeed saved. Does his salvation nullify the necessity of water baptism for the remission of sins?

In order to answer affirmatively, one must answer "yes" to three questions. Please consider each one.

(1) Does this one case nullify the plain teaching of Jesus Christ and His inspired apostles?

The Lord certainly taught that baptism is a condition of salvation: "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned." (Mark 16:16)

His apostles plainly proclaimed the same truth: "Then Peter said to them, Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38).

Since the word of God is truth (John 17:17), it does not contradict itself. Does this case contradict the precepts of the Lord and the apostles?

(2) Can you prove the thief on the cross was not baptized?

He was crucified in Jerusalem in Judea. "But when John preached in the wilderness and baptized in Jordan: all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to him and were all baptized by him in the Jordan" (Mark 1:4-5). Might John have baptized the thief when he baptized "all the land of Judea"?

Furthermore, Jesus "made and baptized more disciples than John" in the same region (John 4:1-3). The thief knew Jesus was Lord (Luke 23:42). How did He know that if He had not heard John, Jesus, or His disciples preach? Why did he call Jesus "Lord" if he was not a disciple? Are you sure the thief was not baptized? The burden of proof is on the one claiming him as an example of salvation without baptism. Are you willing to risk your soul on it?

(3) Is the salvation of the thief on the cross a pattern for our salvation?

We live in the New Testament age (Hebrews 9:13-15). The New Testament did not acquire force until after Jesus died on the cross (Hebrews 9:16-17). The Lord blessed the malefactor with the promise of paradise as they both hung on crosses, before the death of Christ. The conditions of salvation were different at that time. For example, we must believe in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ to be saved (1 Corinthians 15:1-4), but no one could believe these facts before Jesus' resurrection.

The answer to all three questions is "No." No, the salvation of the thief on the cross does not nullify the necessity of water baptism for the remission of sins.

But what if the Lord had made an exception for the thief on the cross? As the Master told Peter, when Peter asked about John, "If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you? You follow Me" (John 21:18-22).

Friend, stop quibbling about the Lord's commands and obey Him. "But why do you call Me Lord, Lord, and do not do the things which I say?" (Luke 6:46) "And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord." (Acts 22:16)

Zechariah

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Zechariah ("Whom the Lord Remembers"), as the former prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel, was a priest. He was among those who returned with Zerubbabel from Babylon to Jerusalem in 536 B.C. (1:1; cf. Neh. 12:1,4,16).

Date

Zechariah began to prophesy in 520 BC (1:1), two months after Haggai's prophetic service began. He helped Haggai exhort the people to build the temple (Ezra 5:1; 6:14). He received more revelation two years later (7:1). He was a young man at this time (2:3-4), and there is evidence he wrote chapters 9-14 years later under different conditions.

Theme

The theme of Zechariah is **Return to the Lord** (1:3). The people were to return to the Lord by finishing the Temple (4:6-10) and by obeying the Lord (7:4-7). The result would be glory for Israel (6:12-13; 14:8-9).

Characteristics

Zechariah is the longest of the minor prophets and one of the most difficult to comprehend of all the Old Testament books. Zechariah ranks with Isaiah as a prophet who looked beyond the Old Testament to the time of Christ (cf. 6:12-13; 9:9-10; 11:10-14; 12:10; 13:1-2,7-9; 14:8-9). The book is the most like the book of Revelation of all the minor prophets in that its revelations were given through angels by means of visions and communicated in symbols. Christ is presented as “the Branch” of David, the Servant of the Lord (6:12-13).

Outline

- I. Return to the Lord - chapters 1-6
 - A. Call to Return - 1:1-6
 - B. 8 Night Visions - 1:7 - 6:8
 - C. High Priest Crowned - 6:9-15
- II. Question of Fasting & Lord’s Answer - chapters 7-8
- III. World Powers & Kingdom of God - chapters 9-14

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