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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.

"The celebration of the Lord's Day in memory of the resurrection of Christ dates undoubtedly from the apostolic age. Nothing short of apostolic precedent can account for the universal religious observance in the churches of the second century. There is no dissenting voice. This custom is confirmed by the testimonies of the earliest post-apostolic writers, as Barnabas, Ignatius, and Justin Martyr"
(Philip Schaff, **History of the Christian Church**. 2:201-2).

Questions from Nigeria

Question

Can a Christian marry unbeliever?

Answer

Sometimes there is a course that is "well" but another path that is "better" (1 Corinthians 7:38). I believe this is the case with the answer to your question.

God does allow a Christian to be married to an unbeliever (1 Peter 3:1-2). In fact He forbids a Christian who is married to an unbeliever to divorce the unbeliever simply because that mate is not a Christian (1 Corinthians 7:12-13).

Some contend 2 Corinthians 6:14-18 teaches it is a sin for a Christian to marry a nonchristian. First, the passage never mentions marriage but is completely generic. It is wrong to "be unequally yoked together with unbelievers" (2 Corinthians 6:14) in any relationship. If it is sinful to marry an unbeliever, it's sinful to enter a business partnership with an unbeliever. Furthermore, the passage doesn't just forbid entering such a relationship, it commands us not to remain in one. The apostle doesn't command, "Do not become unequally yoked"; he demands "Do not be unequally yoked." If this passage means it's wrong for a believer to marry an unbeliever, then a Christian in such a marriage must divorce his mate. But the Lord forbids that

(1 Corinthians 7:12-13).

Second Corinthians 7:1, which concludes the context, makes the application of the passage clear. "Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." A Christian must not be in a relationship with an unbeliever which forces him to share in the unbeliever's sins. It would be wrong to be in business with an unbeliever who cheated customers. You would be sharing in his sins. It would be wrong to marry a Catholic if you had to agree to raise your children to be Catholics.

But it is better to marry a faithful Christian. Marriage is the closest of all fleshly relationships (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:4-6). The husband has a great affect on his wife's faithfulness, as she does on his. "Do not be deceived: 'Bad company corrupts good morals'" (1 Corinthians 15:33, **New American Standard Bible**). Christ and His kingdom must always be first in our lives (Matthew 6:33; Luke 14:26).

Women, how can you give to the church if your husband is not a Christian and doesn't want his money going to the church? Men, how can bring up your children in "the training and admonition of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4) if your wife, their mother, is teaching them to be worldly or to be unbelievers?

When I became old enough to be interested in marriage, I determined only to keep company with young women who were faithful to the Lord. Sandy and I made plans for my preaching work before we were married. This September we will have our fifty-second wedding anniversary. All four of our children were faithful to the Lord when they left our home. She has been my dependable helper in the Lord's work through the years.

When seeking a marriage partner, seek one who will help you go to heaven. It is better to go through life without a marriage partner than to be cast into hell with one.

Question

Is it good to register churches of Christ in Nigeria together?

Answer

The key to this question is the word "together." If the government requires congregations to register, they should do so (Romans 13:1-2).

Thankfully, neither the government of Nigeria nor that of the United States has any such requirement. The question really involves the corporation known as "Church of Christ - Nigeria," which seeks to control all churches of Christ and preachers associated with them throughout Nigeria. This has in effect set up a denomination in Nigeria known as "Church of Christ - Nigeria." Although it is lengthy, I reproduce below an e-mail from Brother Sunday Ayandare of Ibadan, Nigeria, which he sent to Brother Paul Williams in South Africa in 2007, which explains "Church of Christ - Nigeria."

"Church of Christ - Nigeria" was registered and Certificate of Incorporation was issued on 23rd July, 1955. The registration number was 387, with three Americans then residing in Nigeria as "registered trustees." The names of the three Americans were:

- 1. Elvis Henry Huffard*
- 2. Robert Eugene Peden*
- 3. Howard Patrick Horton. (See Appendix 1)*

The aims and objects of the church as listed in the document were:

- "1. To teach Christianity*
- 2. To train and develop leaders in religious and moral thought and work*
- 3. To encourage and assist the advancement of education in Nigeria*
- 4. Generally to carry out missionary and welfare work in Nigeria." (See Appendix 2)*

The existence of this document (with its Board of Trustees) was largely unknown to the generality of brethren across Nigeria until 1971 when the members of the Board started to exercise their powers over the churches. The specific event that blew this open in 1971 was the litigation at the instance of the Board seeking to "sack" brother John Obijuru (deceased), the preacher working with the church at Owerri then and take effective occupation of the church building. (At that time there was just only one congregation at Owerri).

Before this 1971 incident, the Board had in 1969 prevented brothers Leslie Diestelkamp (deceased) and Jim Sasser from entering the country by instigating the Immigration authorities to deny them entry visas. This fact was not known until much later in 1972/73. After it was known that the Board was behind the refusal of visas for brothers Diestelkamp and Sasser and the then Chairman, bro. Eno Otoyoy was confronted at a meeting in Uyo in 1972, his reply was: "this was done for the interest of peace since he (i.e. bro. Leslie Diestelkamp - SA) did not agree with us on certain doctrinal issues."

It is instructive to note that when the original members of the Board were leaving the country, they unilaterally handed over the affairs of the Board to bro. Eno Otoyoy. When Eno Otoyoy (a Nigerian of South-South extraction) left the country for America, he also in the same way handed over the mantle of leadership of the Board to bro. E. Young Owukiabo (deceased). When bro. Young Owukiabo died in 2006, bro. Peter Egure, one of the elders of the church in Kaddo, Abuja took over the Chairmanship of the Board.

Between 1972 and 1973, series of meetings were held by brethren in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State; Benin, Edo State; and Lagos seeking to nullify the composition of the Board with its "aims and objects." These meetings culminated in the drawing up a letter of objection in the form of a Memorandum in Benin on the 8th April, 1973 and addressed to the Chief Immigration Officer in Lagos. (See Appendix 3).

The matter was largely left in abeyance until around 2001. In the intervening period (i.e. between 1973 and 2001) the church at Orodu Street, Ajegunle in Lagos arranged discussions between brothers Young Owukiabo and Ezekiel Akinyemi at one time; and between bro. Owukiabo and me (Sunday Ayandare) at another time. These discussions were aimed at fashioning out an acceptable, workable and above all, scriptural solution to the impasse.

Then around May, 2001, bro. Young Owukiabo, the then Chairman of the Board made overtures to me through bro. Emonena Josiah, one of the preachers working with the church at Orodu Street, Ajegunle in Lagos about the need to review the matter of our 1973 objections against the Board with its "aims and objects." Undoubtedly, bro. Josiah was one of those who had the ears of bro. Owukiabo. This led to another round of meetings between preachers in Oyo, Ogun, Osun and Ekiti States (mainly the West). The result of these meetings was a letter written to all the members of the Board of Trustees, through its Chairman, bro. Young Owukiabo dated November 14, 2001 and signed by brothers Ezekiel Akinyemi, Isaac Ogunmoroti and Sunday Ayandare. With the benefit of hindsight, it seemed the other members of the Board did not take kindly to the idea of bro. Owukiabo reaching out to us. Besides, other members of the Board who had had other grievances with the Chairman took advantage and did vent their anger and opposition. This was the underpinning of the "National General Meeting of Churches of Christ - Nigeria" scheduled for 6th December, 2003 at the instance of the Chairman of the Board in a circular letter dated 29th October, 2003. The meeting, according to bro. Owukiabo, "has become necessary due to the on going misunderstanding and misrepresentation arising from the two past meetings held at Uyo on Sept. 5th and October 11th, 2003." (See Appendix 5).

The end product of all the efforts was the "AMENDED CONSTITUTION OF CHURCH OF CHRIST - NIGERIA" with bro. Young Owukiabo as the Chairman. (See Appendix 6). As indicated earlier, after the demise of bro. Owukiabo in 2006, bro. Peter Sunday Egure, one of the elders of the church in Kaddo, Abuja has been appointed as the Chairman of the Board.

It should be apparent that “Church of Christ - Nigeria” is a board determined to oversee all the churches of Christ and preachers of the gospel in the nation. There is no scriptural authority for anyone but the elders of the local church to oversee a congregation, and their oversight is limited to the congregation where they are members (1 Peter 5:1-2). Each local church must determine its own fellowship (1 Corinthians chapter 5). The constitution drawn up by these self-appointed leaders is a human creed in violation of the Scriptures (Revelation 22:18-19). “Church of Christ - Nigeria” is not the church Jesus built, of which He alone is the Head (Matthew 16:18; Ephesians 1:22-23) but is simply a human denomination. Have nothing to do with it but to oppose it (Matthew 15:13-14).

Question

A brother pregnant a sister, he is intending to marry, he beg the church to forgive him they forgive him, later another sister came and reported that the same brother pregnant her The pregnancy of the two sister happened the same month, he still beg the church to forgive him. Now my question is, is the church right to forgive the brother? Even some brethren said that the brother and the sister should go until the sisters put to bed, then they will come and beg for forgiveness.

Answer

“Then Peter came to Him and said, ‘Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?’ Jesus said to him, ‘I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven’” (Matthew 18:21-22).

Forgive your brother but insist he must support every child he produces (1 Timothy 5:8), but he can only sleep with his own lawful wife (Hebrews 13:4).

Coffee Bean Religion

Jefferson David Tant | Roswell, Georgia, USA

My grandfather, J. D. Tant, liked his coffee strong. In his time (1861-1941), many ground their own coffee beans. One day while eating with a family where he was preaching, he asked the housewife, “Sister, do you have any coffee beans?” “Why, yes brother Tant. I just bought some a few days ago.” “Well,” he replied, “If you’ll bring me a coffee bean, I’ll lay it here on my saucer and smell of it while I drink this lukewarm water you’ve poured in my cup.” (Grandfather could be a bit plain-spoken at times.)

Is it possible that’s how some try to get a religious “flavor”? They are lukewarm in serving God, but keep a Bible on the coffee table in the home thinking its “flavor” will be sufficient.

Through the years, I’ve known many so-called “coffee bean Christians.” They are usually good, moral people, and quite often are regular in their church attendance. But they are like the student in the school classroom when the teacher calls the roll. She calls, “Snerdly Churndasher?” “Here,” he answers. Yes, he is present, but that’s all. His lesson was not prepared, and his mind is on the weekend fishing trip with his dad. He is just occupying space. Or it might be like the man with a paralyzed arm. His arm is “present” as a part of his body, but it has no useful function.

What’s the missing ingredient among the “coffee beaners”? Would you say it is zeal, commitment? As a matter of fact, Christ used my grandfather’s “lukewarm” term in the letter to the church at Laodicea. “I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot. So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth” (Revelation 3:15-16).

The words “whole heart” are used often in Scripture. When Hezekiah asked God to spare his life, he prayed, “Remember now, O LORD, I beseech You, how I have walked before You in truth and with a whole heart and have done what is good in Your sight” (2 Kings 20:3). When God promised to restore Israel from captivity, he said: “I will give them a heart to know Me, for I am the LORD; and they will be My people, and I will be their God, for they will return to Me with their whole heart” (Jeremiah 24:7).

David advised Solomon as a wise father: “As for you, my son Solomon, know the God of your father, and serve Him with a whole heart and a willing mind; for the LORD searches all hearts, and understands every intent of the thoughts” (1 Chronicles 28:9).

The 119th Psalm uses “all my heart” (“whole heart”— **ASV**) eight times, as in verse 10: “With all my heart I have sought You; Do not let me wander from Your commandments.”

While that particular phrase is not in the New Testament, the sentiment is clearly seen in such passages as First Corinthians 15:58: “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.” “Abounding” is from the Greek “*perisseuo*,” and is defined by **Strong’s Greek Dictionary**:

“to superabound (in quantity or quality), be in excess, be superfluous; also (transitively) to cause to superabound or excel:--(make, more) abound, (have, have more) abundance (be more) abundant, be the better, enough and to spare, exceed, excel, increase, be left, redound, “remain (over and above).”

That sounds pretty much like the “whole heart,” doesn’t it? You might fill a glass of water all the way to the top, and keep pouring until the water is running over. That’s “abounding.”

Now, dear reader, how would you describe your religion? If your religion consists of leading a good, moral life while faithfully attending church meetings, “what do ye more than others?” as Christ asked in Matthew 5:47. Do you practice “pure and undefiled religion” through acts of benevolence (James 1:27)? Matthew 25:31-46 is a great passage describing the Judgment Day scene, and acts of mercy have much to do with our eternal destiny

Do you practice discipleship? We are all called to be disciples. That word is defined as one who is a “learner, a pupil.” “A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a slave above his master” (Matthew 10:24). So... if we are to be a follower of Christ, then we are to be engaged in the same work he did. A carpenter’s disciple or pupil is learning to practice the same trade as his teacher. And what was Christ’s trade or occupation? “For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10).

If you are a disciple of Christ, how much effort do you put forth to talk to others, to set up studies with them, to save their souls? If you don’t, then are you really a disciple? Don’t be a coffee bean. Drink the whole cup!

What Happened To The Church Jesus Built?

Tommy G. Thornhil | Etna, Arkansas, USA

After the church Jesus promised to build Matt.16:18, was established on the Day of Pentecost Acts 2, it began its work, fulfilling the purpose God intended (Ephesians 3:10-11), that of making known (proclaiming) the saving gospel of Christ to a world lost in sin. The church, through its members, did its work well, and in ca. 35 years had carried the gospel into the whole world (Colossians 1:23).

When the church came into existence it was founded on Jesus Christ, the unshakable foundation (1 Corinthians 3:10-11), the elect, tried, precious cornerstone prophesied in Isaiah 28:16 (1 Peter 2:6). The rule of faith by which the church was to be guided was “the doctrine of Christ,” the apostles’ doctrine, revealed to inspired men by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. This doctrine also gave them the blueprint (pattern) of organization, worship, and work by which the church is to function.

In the beginning the church was in its infant state. The foundation had been laid, the rules given, and the platform for unity revealed (Ephesians 4:3-6), but the church had not yet matured, reached its intended, perfected state. Some things were lacking that were necessary to bring the church to maturity (intended

perfected state). Until these things were provided the church would never be and do all that God intended.

So, in their divine wisdom, God and Jesus Christ provided the gifts necessary to perfect the church. Paul writes on these gifts in Ephesians 4:11-13.

“And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the fullness of Christ.”

Some think the gifts Paul mentions in the passage just quoted are miraculous gifts. It is a fact that Jesus gave His apostles supernatural, miraculous gifts to confirm the word they preached (Mark 16:19-20; Hebrews 2:3-4). The apostles, in turn, by the laying on of their hands could impart miraculous, spiritual gifts to some Christians (Acts 8:14-18). These gifts were not for show, but to help establish the word of God. When revelation was complete, these miraculous gifts ceased (1 Corinthians 13:9-13).

But I do not believe the gifts of Ephesians 4:11-13 are miraculous gifts. From a study of the context I believe they are functionaries (functioning offices) given to perform specific works to assist the church to achieve maturity and perfection of the body. Their primary function was to equip the saints to communicate the word of God to lost humanity, to help them minister (serve) and edify (build up) the body of saints with the purpose of attaining the unity of the faith and form the perfect body.

Let's examine these gifts and their purpose. First, the apostles and prophets, who were responsible for laying the foundation. The apostles were representatives of Christ, chosen to lay the foundation (Ephesians 2:19-20); by delivering His divine message (Galatians 1:11-12), using and imparting spiritual gifts to confirm the word (Hebrews 2:3-4; Mark 16:19-20). The prophets, though not apostles, were inspired spokesmen for God (1 Corinthians 12:29). Once their work was done, and they died, they had no successors, but the foundation they laid remains steadfast even to this day.

The evangelists were preachers and messengers of God's gospel. They assisted in the spread of the gospel (Romans 10:10-15). Their work is ongoing, since the word once confirmed, was to be taught to others that the gospel might continue to spread (2 Timothy 2:2). There is always a need for people to evangelize (preach the word). Special, miraculous knowledge is not needed today, nor is it provided, for the work. The evangelists preach the word already revealed/confirmed (2 Timothy 4:2-5).

Pastors/teachers. Some divide this work into two parts, but I believe the words apply to the same office (that of elders/bishops) under two different aspects of their work. As pastors they are to shepherd, feed, and protect the flock. As teachers they are to feed, teach, nourish the flock (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:9; Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2-3).

The purpose of these gifts (offices) was/is to equip the saints, to prepare them to minister, and to edify the body to bring to maturity the church (members) (Ephesians 4:12-13). All these gifts are a permanent part of the church, continuing to endure in their intended function.

Some might say, what about “till” in verse 13? I believe the context reveals that “till” is not referring to some specified period of time on earth, but to continue until the goal is reached or the result obtained that was sought after. In other words, until the purpose of the gifts is realized, which was not only to establish and maintain “the unity of the faith,” but also to bring the saints to maturity “unto the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the fullness of Christ.” While the inspired word is complete (Jude 3; 2 Timothy 3:16-17), there is still the continued need to teach and preach the gospel to the lost, to equip the saints, and to minister to and edify the saints, to encourage them to “hold fast to the pattern of sound words” (2 Timothy 1:13), “give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest we drift away” (Hebrews 2:1).

The Rich Fool - The World & The Lord

Jim Mickells | Lewisburg, Tennessee, USA

What In Luke 12:16-21, we read a parable stated by Jesus about a rich man whom the Lord called a fool. In verse 13, one from the crowd asked Jesus to “tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.” His purpose in coming to this world was not to be a judge or an arbitrator over such matters (verse 14). He warned about covetousness, stating that “one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses” (verse 15). At this point in this conversation He relates the parable. I want us to give some consideration to this rich man, how he would be viewed from the world’s perspective and how the Lord saw him.

Looking at the rich man’s life from a worldly point of view, would one not consider him successful? He was rich. He obviously was a good farmer, having an abundance of crops, goods, and barns. Picture with me for just a moment driving down the road, seeing large fields of corn or beans, deep green in color, loaded with produce. Next there are several large barns, much equipment, and a very stately home in which the farmer and his family reside. Successful? Sure seems that way. Yet is the Lord looking at these material things? I don’t think so. The farmer He sees in the parable is not successful at all but a fool (verse 20).

The world would see this farmer as a hard worker, very industrious. He had already built barns, had crops from the previous year(s), plowed the soil, sowed the seeds, taken good care of the crops once they had been planted, etc. Hard working is a very commendable trait for one to possess. The wise man said, “Go to the ant, you sluggard! Consider her ways and be wise” (Proverbs 6:6). The Lord not only wants us to work hard to provide for ourselves, our families, and others who may be in need, but also for Him. Jesus looked at this man and saw one who had not put his hands to the plow (Luke 9:62). He had made no spiritual commitment to God.

Those of the world would look at this man and see one who was wise and thoughtful. He did not have enough room to store his crops so the solution to the problem was to tear down and build greater barns. He could easily see what he needed to do and was willing to put forth the time, energy, and the money to accomplish this task. It is not worldly wisdom that is lacking with many people but the spiritual wisdom which comes from God (1 Corinthians 1:18-29). God saw a man who had failed to demonstrate true wisdom, one who had given no thought about what his true needs were. Instead of greater barns he needed a great faith in the One who had made the crops grow.

Once the barns were built and filled with the crops, the world would see a man who was set for life. He could sit back, “take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry” (verse 19). “You are not that old of a fellow, so you have a lot of years left,” some might say. The sad fact was he never got those barns built, never harvested another crop, and never saw the dawning of another day, “This night your soul will be required of you” (verse 20). Jehovah saw a man who was not ready for eternity.

Those in the community where this farmer lived no doubt saw a man who was rich materially speaking. He had land (ground), crops, goods, and barns according to this parable. Most likely he owned a house, had farm implements, farm animals, may have had servants, etc. Regardless, the Lord said he was rich (verse 16). Most of us have an abundance of material possessions. But are we rich in faith? What did God see when He looked at this man? One who was spiritually bankrupt. What a sad commentary on a person’s life, rich materially but poor spiritually. This man died lost!

What would God say about us? Would He call us fools? Not if we are rich in faith toward Him (verse 21). “Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?” (James 2:5).

If The Dead Could Talk

People leave this world every day. In a world of seven billion in population there is likely never an hour when someone is not passing from this life. But that doesn't mean a person ceases to exist spiritually when they depart, for "the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it" (Ecclesiastes 12:7). Jesus confirmed this fact in His account of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16. Unlike a parable, which never identifies people by name, this account gives insight into the ongoing condition of those in eternity. Specifically for the rich man, "And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom" (verse 23). This nullifies the idea of inactivity or unawareness after death. People truly do continue to exist beyond the grave, as further evidenced by Jesus' resurrection from the dead. And with His account of Luke 16, Jesus confirms that we will either exist in torment or in comfort. That being so, what would the dead tell us if they could talk to us?

This world is temporary. Paul made the observation that "the things which are seen are temporary" (2 Corinthians 4:18). I challenge you to find one thing that is seen that is not temporary. Everything on the earth and in the heavens will "will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up" (2 Peter 3:10). This includes every house, car, movie, document, title, deed, award, record, statistic, coin, stock, and credit score. Not only is that which is seen temporary, we lose access to it once we leave this life. Solomon said of the dead, "Also their love, their hatred, and their envy have now perished; nevermore will they have a share in anything done under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 9:6). Since this is so, why lose our eternal soul for that which is temporal? Why trust in things and in people who are but for a moment? The dead know better than that. In fact, the rich man in Luke 16 cared nothing about the riches he left behind. His primary concern was for his family and whether "they also come to this place of torment" (verse 28). The dead know there is no lasting value in earthly things, do we?

Obey the gospel. Those who have passed are fully aware of the spiritual consequences of sin and how "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). If they could speak to us, they would zealously preach on repenting of sin and being converted to the Lord (Acts 3:19). They would have no shame in telling sinners to be baptized into Christ (Acts 22:16; Romans 1:16). "If the dead would have such an important message, why doesn't God let them come back to warn us?" He's already done that in the resurrection of Jesus. The Bible states, "Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because he has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead" (Acts 17:30-31). If we won't listen to Him, neither will we listen to others (Luke 16:31; Hebrews 1:2).

You're next. If your relative or friend could come back, they would plead with you to realize that your time on earth is fragile and fleeting—and it's about to be taken from you. This world is a façade that hides true reality. They know without any misunderstanding that life is "a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away" (James 4:14). They would beg you to use your time wisely in learning and obeying God's will before your time is up (2 Thessalonians 1:8).

Wisdom is speaking to you, do you hear her? He who has an ear to hear let him hear!

The Spirit Realm, #1

William J. Stewart | Odessa, Ontario, Canada

The existence of a spirit realm and activity in that realm is mentioned throughout the Bible. In fact, there are a number of texts that seem to indicate the Lord gave angels a measure of responsibility over the nations. Deuteronomy 32:8 from the LXX reads:

When the Most High divided the nations, when he separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the nations according to the number of the angels of God.

Job 1:6 speaks of a day on which *"the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD..."* (cf. Job 2:1). This does not appear to be a worship assembly, but rather angelic beings presenting themselves to the LORD. Psalm 82 pictures the same kind of scene, as the Lord (who will inherit all nations, v 8), stands judging "the gods" for their failures among the nations (v 1-5). His proclamation against them was:

You are gods, and all of you are children of the Most High. But you shall die like men, and fall like one of the princes. (Psalm 82:6-7).

Daniel 10 records a vision of Daniel. An individual (the Lord?, Daniel 10:5-6; cf. Revelation 1:14-15) appears to the prophet and speaks of fighting with the "prince of Persia" (10:13, 20), mentions the coming of the "prince of Greece" (10:20), and of one of the chief princes, "Michael, your prince" (10:13, 21) who was a help to the One who spoke to Daniel. The prophet didn't receive a vision about physical battles that were going on, but about spiritual activities, things that were going on behind the scenes in the spirit realm. These princes were not temporal royals, but angelic beings associated with these respective nations. Michael, the archangel (Jude 1:9; Revelation 12:7), was responsible for Israel in the spirit realm (Daniel 12:1).

Psalm 2:8 promises the Messiah,

I will give You the nations for Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for Your possession.

A time would come when these spiritual princes would be removed from their role over the nations, for all the nations would be given to the Messiah. So, when would that happen? In Luke 4:5-7, the devil, knowing the promise of Psalm 2, claimed authority over the nations and offered their glory to the Lord if He would worship him. Jesus refused and rebuked the devil (v 8). Incidentally, Satan does not have, nor has he ever had authority over the nations. He is a liar (John 8:44). He has certainly exercised influence on people (Ephesians 2:2), but influence is not possession.

Psalm 22, a Messianic psalm, says,

...the kingdom is the LORD's, and He rules over the nations. (v 28)

Again, Psalm 67:4,

...You shall judge the people righteously, and govern the nations on earth.

And once more,

Say among the nations, the LORD reigns; the world also is firmly established, it shall not be moved; He shall judge the people righteously. (Psalm 96:10)

In Matthew 28:18-19, Jesus said,

All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations...

After His resurrection, all the nations were given to the Lord. That is why the gospel went out to all, and not just the Jews. Paul speaks of this gathering of Jew and Gentile together in one body in this way:

...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... (Ephesians 3:10-11)

Who are the principalities and powers in the heavenly places? Might they be the spiritual beings who were charged with oversight of the nations before they were given to the Christ? In Romans 8:38, the same words are used in the immediate context of *"angels."* 1 Peter 3:22 says these angels, authorities and powers have been made subject to the Christ.

So, what is the point? In this article, we simply want to acknowledge the existence of a spirit realm out there, a realm where angelic beings are active, and where their activities have in the past, and perhaps still

today intertwine with this physical world.

In our next article, we will look at some examples in the Bible of the spiritual realm interacting with the physical realm, and consider whether such still occurs today or not.

NAMES OF THE MESSIAH

Prince Of Peace

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In Isaiah 9, the kingdom of God is the clear subject of the passage, predicting the rule of the Messiah over the kingdom. There are several names ascribed to the Messiah in Isaiah 9, describing the nature of His rule and the roles He would fulfill in the kingdom. He is the Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, and Prince of Peace. Due to the taking on of each of these roles “there will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace” (Isaiah 9:7).

One of the most recognizable names attributed to Christ as ruler of the kingdom is the royal Prince of Peace. When Jesus was born and the angelic host appeared before the shepherds, they declared, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased” (Luke 2:14). They praised Jehovah for the introduction of true peace on the earth through the Lord Jesus Christ. Their declaration was not a statement of world peace among all the nations of the earth, but of the peace that would be established through the kingdom of God, between God and man.

“He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end” (Luke 1:32-33).

Peace Is Necessary Where Strife Exists

While we were dead in our trespasses and sins, we were dead to God (Ephesians 2:1-3). God, through Jesus Christ, abolished the enmity that existed between us and God (Ephesians 2:15) and established peace with God.

“by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity” (Ephesians 2:15-16).

Peace Requires An Enemy To Be Destroyed

Christ came to the earth to destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3:8). Peace is established through might and strength, putting an end to the enemy of God’s kingdom, “The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet...” (Romans 16:20). While our God is a God of peace, He does what is necessary to secure peace, namely, defeating the devil’s stronghold on this world through sin. By the work of Jesus Christ, we have peace with God, in obtaining the forgiveness of sins.

“Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1)

By Jesus Christ we have obtained peace, but peace and liberty were not free—it came at the cost and sacrifice of His life. Through the shedding of Jesus’ blood, peace was made. Glory to God in the highest, indeed!

Peace Must Rule In The Kingdom of Christ

Our King and Prince is the one who has established peace in His government. Anger, malice, gossip, and backbiting must be put away from ourselves and we should not seek to destroy one another (Galatians 5:15). Therefore, it is essential that peace rule in His kingdom, the church.

“Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful,” (Colossians 3:15)

Conclusion

Jesus Christ is the Prince of Peace and He has brought peace to the earth through His defeat and binding of the devil. We may have peace with God and be brought into the Messianic kingdom. We must be careful to maintain peace in the church of Christ and be the peacemakers that Jesus has called us to be (Matthew 5:9).

CHURCH HISTORY - PART 1

The Beginning

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“To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; 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, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him” (Ephesians 3:8-12).

The church is the revelation of the secret hidden in the mind of God but made known by the Holy Spirit to the inspired apostles and prophets of Christ. The Lord purposed the church “from the beginning of the ages”; indeed, it is the fulfillment of His “eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.” When “the principalities and powers in the heavenly places” beheld the church, God’s people brought to salvation in Christ Jesus, they see “the manifold (many sided) wisdom of God” (Ephesians 3:8-12).

The history of the ancient world, properly viewed, is the development of the divine plan for the church as the fulfillment of God’s will to save all who come to obedient faith in Jesus Christ. In God’s infinite wisdom, He used whole peoples and nations to prepare the world for “the fulness of the time” (Galatians 4:4). The rise and fall of ancient Middle Eastern kingdoms - Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Macedonia/Greece, Rome - was but the preparation for the eternal kingdom (cf. Daniel chapters two and seven).

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.

Israel was specifically the nation/people through whom the Lord brought about the fulfillment of His plan. The Jews (Israel) 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 is “the manifold wisdom of God” (Ephesians 3:10).

The kingdom of Christ and the church of Christ are the same entity (Matthew 16:18-19). The kingdom (rule) of God is within the hearts of His people (Luke 17:20-21), who are His church, the spiritual assembly of people called out of the world into fellowship with Christ (Hebrews 12:22-24; 2 Thessalonians 2:14; 2 Corinthians 6:17-18; 1 John 1:3).

The Lord promised that His indestructible kingdom, His church, would be established during the time of the rule of the Romans, the fourth empire of Daniel chapter two (Daniel 2:44-45).

John the Baptist promised that the kingdom was at hand (near) (Matthew 3:1-2), and, “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). Jesus promised to build His church (Matthew 16:18) and declared the kingdom would come with power while some of His hearers were still alive (Mark 9:1).

Just before his ascension back on high, when the apostles asked the Master when the kingdom of God would come, He refused to tell them the time, but answered, “you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you” (Acts 1:6-8). It takes power to set up a kingdom. It takes spiritual power to establish a spiritual kingdom.

On the Day of Pentecost, fifty days after the Sabbath of the Passover, when Christ had been in the tomb, the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles (Acts 2:1-4), and they received the power to preach the gospel in the various languages of men from throughout the world (Acts 2:4-11). On that day the kingdom came with power.

Thereafter the church is a present reality (cf. Acts 5:11; Ephesians 1:22-23; Colossians 1:18) as is the kingdom of Christ (Colossians 1:13; Revelation 1:9). The first Pentecost after the resurrection of Christ is thereafter known as “the beginning” (Acts 11:15).

The kingdom of the Lord, the church of Christ, began on the first Pentecost after the resurrection of Christ, traditional reckoning of time, A.D. 33. If you will repent and be baptized for the remission of sins, the Lord will save you and add you to His church, the body of the saved (Acts 2:38, 47).



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