

# June 2017

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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 VIRTUE 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](http://christistheway.com).

Check out these two podcasts:

<http://believeandfollow.org>

<http://sharpsermons.org>

## Questions from Sri Lanka about the Lord's Supper

### Question

Luke 22:19 - And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me.

Why did he said that we should remembrance his death? Is there an another meaning for that verse?

### Answer

There is no other meaning to the command. Christians all over the world eat the Lord's Supper each first day of the week (Acts 20:7), when the church comes together (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 11:18-34) in memory of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Luke 22:19; 1 Corinthians 11:24-25). It is altogether fitting that we do this in memory of the sacrifice of the Lord in our behalf, for that sacrifice is the basis of our salvation and hope of eternal life (Isaiah chapter 53; Matthew 26:28; Mark 14:24; Romans 3:21-26; 5:7-10; Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:14; Hebrews 9:12; 1 Peter 1:17-19; Revelation 5:9; et al).

The Lord has given us only two rituals, symbolic acts, and both are in memory of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. We must be immersed in and raised from water in memory of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ to gain entrance into Him and receive forgiveness of our sins (Romans 6:3-5; Colossians 2:11-12). And then each first day of the week we eat the Lord's Supper in memory of Him.

These memorials demonstrate how far above human wisdom the wisdom of God is (Isaiah 55:8-9). In America, we have erected two great, granite monuments in memory of our two most illustrious Presidents, George Washington and Abraham Lincoln. But we must go to Washington, D.C. to see these monuments, and eventually these seemingly permanent edifices will crumble and fall. The Lord gave us two very perishable elements, unleavened bread and fruit of the vine, with which to remember His Son. Christians everywhere on earth will use these simple elements to remember our Lord and Savior until time is no more.

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## Apostasy in Three Generations

Gary P. Eubanks | Piscataway, New Jersey, USA

The bad news is that apostasy is inevitable! Yet, the good news is that no one has to be a part of it — especially if he is alert to, and recognizes, the signs of its encroachment. That apostasy, of both individuals and groups, is inevitable is evident from both Biblical and uninspired history. The Bible makes it clear in many statements and examples that this is the case. To name a few, there are the examples of Adam and Eve (Genesis 3), Cain (Genesis 4), the antediluvians (Genesis 6-9), the tower of Babel (Genesis 11), the general Gentile world (Romans 1:24, 26, 28), the Israelites on numerous occasions — in the wilderness (Hebrews 3:16-19), in Canaan during the times of the judges (Judges 2:11-23), the kings (2 Kings 17:1-23; 2 Chronicles 36:11-17), and Christ (Matthew 12:43-45) — Solomon, 1 Kings 11:1ff), and the apostle Judas (Matthew 26:14,15).

Jesus and Paul express the inevitability of apostasy in particularly succinct and definite statements. Jesus said, "... It is inevitable that stumbling blocks come ..." (Matthew 18:7), while Paul said, "... There must also be factions among you ..." (1 Corinthians 11:19), and "... in later times some will fall away from the faith ..." (1 Timothy 4:1).

In addition to these examples, there are numerous Biblical prophecies and warnings regarding apostasy by Jesus (Matthew 24:12), Paul (Acts 20:29-30; 1 Corinthians 10:12; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-3; 1 Timothy 4:1-3, 6), the writer of Hebrews (2:1; 3:12), and Peter (2 Peter 2:1). Indeed, the Bible is so replete with such examples, prophecies, and warnings that the prospect of becoming an apostate ought to strike fear in the heart of any pious soul. If even the humble and wise Solomon failed to escape apostasy, no one is justified in feeling safe and secure while in this life!

Furthermore, these prophecies and warnings about apostasy are repeatedly confirmed in uninspired history and experience. A generation ago, the student of American religious history, David Edwin Harrell, reported that apostasy among churches of Christ had progressed to the point of bifurcation into two separate alignments:

*"The fact that the church of Christ is divided into conservative and denominational factions is not a partisan question. It is not even debatable. This is a good, sound, inescapable, historical conclusion. Every secular scholar who has studied the current status of the church of Christ understands that the movement is in the process of a 'sect to denomination' evolution"*

**(The Emergence of the "Church of Christ" Denomination, page 26, 1972).**

A generation later it would seem that that evolution is approaching its culmination. Even some in the liberal alignment (i.e., "institutional churches") have begun to complain about the apostasy among themselves, so that what once might have seemed to be a bifurcation has actually emerged into a trifurcation of conservatives, moderates, and liberals.

*"We've raised up a generation ... where some of us kids have forgotten [the passion to teach the lost]. In fact, too many. And the result is now slapping us in the face. ... ' A National study of about 2,000 junior high, senior high and college students in the Church of Christ shows that nearly 80 percent of the teenagers do not believe one must be an active member of the Church of Christ in order to go to heaven"*

(Larry West, "World Radio News," March-April, 1995, page 2).

*"The church of Christ is dividing into two irreconcilable camps. On one side are those who have kept the same faith. On the other side are those who are experimenting with a broad range of differing faiths. And there is a vast gulf between these two sides, separating the light from the darkness. ... Christians usually fall into error gradually rather than instantly. A small compromise here, a little concession there, and before you know it the whole has changed. Lowering the boundaries between the church and other religions weakens the meaning of being a Christian. It is an apostasy of attrition"* (Gregory Alan Tidwell, "Gospel Advocate," March 2016, pages 12, 15).

*"Churches of Christ have also felt the pressures of social liberalism. An increasing number of congregations and institutions do not teach and practice the simple truths of New Testament Christianity. When I was a young adult, if a congregation claimed to be a church of Christ, you knew what the assembly believed. College students today face a blurred ambiguity of doctrinal confusion"* (Joe Wiley, "Gospel Advocate," January 2017, page 12).

*"In his excellent new book, **Will Our Faith Have Children?**, Stan Mitchell writes, 'The church is just one generation away from disappearing. All it takes is for one generation in a long line of generations to fail to teach the next. The most important question of our age is this: Will there be a church, Christ-like and biblical, faithful and evangelistic, in the next generation? Will our faith have children?'"* (Billy R. Smith, "Gospel Advocate," January 2017, page 22).

However, no one has to be lost to apostasy. These very examples and warnings are testimony to the fact that the situation with any individual is by no means hopeless. Indeed, the very fact that one takes notice of, and trembles, at such warnings makes it that much less likely that he will be overtaken by apostasy.

Though the apostasy of individuals can occur, or seem to occur, rather suddenly, the dynamics of a social group do not typically allow for this. Instead, the influence of individuals upon one another and the change in attitudes necessary to receptiveness to unconventional ideas within the membership of a group require time. Therefore, the apostasy of an affiliation of persons usually takes place over years, decades, or even generations.

The difficulty under which this phenomenon places members of a group wishing to preserve the status quo or original identity of the group consists in the fact that the early or even intermediate steps in the process of apostasy, especially critical attitudinal changes, tend to occur so gradually or incrementally that they are nearly imperceptible to most of the members. To use a medical metaphor, apostasy is not a heart attack — it is cancer! Adding to this difficulty of discerning the forces of apostasy at work is the fact that those who do notice, and warn of, the changes taking place might often be disregarded, declaimed, and discredited by being labeled as "alarmists," "traditionalists," "legalists," "hobby-riders," or "nit-pickers."

The apostasy of the Israelites following the death of Joshua provides a good illustrative paradigm of this phenomenon (Judges 2:7-23). Three generations are distinguishable: (a) Joshua and his contemporaries (vs. 7), (b) the generation following Joshua (vs. 7), and (c) the next generation (vs. 10).

This observation that apostasy occurs in cycles of three generations is, of course, somewhat artificial. It might occur more slowly or more quickly. [Paul was amazed, for instance, that apostasy had occurred so "quickly" among the Galatians and that they were ready to "turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things" (1:6ff; 4:9).] However, this should not obscure the fact that group apostasy is typically a slow, gradual, even multi-generational process. This pattern is also confirmed by the narrative of the books of Joshua and Judges, which show that apostasy tended to develop over a period of 40-80 years (3:11,30;

5:31; 8:28,33). When Joshua called upon the Israelites to put away the false gods they had among themselves, they did so (Joshua 24:14ff). Yet, two generations later, false gods were reintroduced among them (Judges 2:10ff).

Later generations tend to lose the fervor with which their forebears fought for, and adhered to, the principles which activated their movement. They simply did not share the experiences of their forebears. Patriotism is strongest among veterans. It seems to be contrary to the nature of life to keep a fire of fervor forever fueled. It is difficult to pass on a legacy of enthusiasm to a later generation. They have come to live in a different world. They cannot relate to, or appreciate, bygone conditions which led to the movement to which they have now become only a nominal and habituated part. They have a different set of concerns, which leads them to take for granted that for which their forebears so fiercely and fearlessly fought.

The advantage of thinking of apostasy as occurring in small steps is that, not only does this concept generally conform to reality, but it also allows for better discernment of the process by which apostasy takes place. Therefore, while it might be a little simplistic to do so, it might also prove helpful to analyze the process of apostasy in three stages taking place over three generations.

### **The First Generation: Silence**

Once the victory has been won, or at least the battle lines have been clearly drawn, a kind of “peace” settles over the scene of conflict. The guns are silenced, as an uneasy armistice becalms the former war zone. A sort of “battle fatigue” has set in. The war has been fought, and the issues have been resolved as far as they can be. Foes have nestled into something akin to static and entrenched truce. Quiet descends softly over the fields where fighting has recently raged. Foes see no point in engaging each other, since sides have been chosen and combatants have made up their minds. They now focus on consolidating their positions. They become complacent and cease to teach the principles and make the applications which once animated them.

This silence is itself a problem. Satan takes advantage of this “quiet time” to get his forces ready for his next offensive. Younger generations are not being taught principles which will prepare them to identify and confront renewed assaults in slightly different forms.

It is both wrong and dangerous to keep silent about the truth. Isaiah affirmed his obligation to declare the truth when he said, “For Zion’s sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem’s sake I will not keep quiet, until her righteousness goes forth like brightness, and her salvation like a torch that is burning” (62:1). The four lepers at the gate of famine-stricken Samaria understood this. They initially kept quiet about the bounty they found in the abandoned camp of the Arameans but then repented and said, “We are not doing right. This day is a day of good news, but we are keeping silent; if we wait until morning light, punishment will overtake us. Now therefore come, let us go and tell ...” (2 Kings 7:9). When Esther hesitated to intervene on behalf of her people, her guardian, Mordecai, told her, “Do not imagine that you in the king’s palace can escape any more than all the Jews. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place and you and your father’s house will perish. And who knows whether you have not attained royalty for such a time as this?” (Esther 4:13-14). Peter and John refused to comply with the Sanhedrin’s command to cease preaching the gospel, replying, “For we cannot stop speaking what we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:20).

### **Second Generation: Apathy**

Because the first generation ceases teaching certain Biblical principles, the next generation becomes indifferent to them. They might be aware of them and even abide by them, but they do not have a strong emotional or principled attachment to them. They accept them because they are a part of the heritage which gives them their identity. They know that they are expected to oppose the teachings and practices their forebears did, but the basis of their commitment to these principles goes no farther than that. In any event, they have even less to say about these principles to the next generation than the preceding one had to say to them.

This indifference might evolve into embarrassment about these principles or even hostility toward them. Such reactions might be driven by a psychological impetus not uncommon in younger generations to forge an independent identity and define their spirituality by its distinction from that of their forebears, especially if their spirituality seems stilted and legalistic. Such hostility might not express itself openly and explicitly, for fear of backlash from those who care about such matters. Yet, they might become increasingly intolerant of sermons critical of other religious viewpoints. They want “truth” which is palatable and imbalanced in favor of subjects which are inoffensive. One is reminded of Isaiah’s contemporaries, who said, “to the seers, ‘You must not see visions’; and to the prophets, ‘You must not prophesy to us what is right, speak to us pleasant words, prophesy illusions’” (30:10), or Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, who was aggravated by Amos’ prophesying and told him, “Go, you seer, flee away to the land of Judah, and there eat bread and there do your prophesying!” (7:12), or Paul’s warning to Timothy, “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires; and will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths” (2 Timothy 4:3-4).

They might conceal their antipathy toward “distinctive preaching” by calling, instead, for emphasis on preaching which is more devotional or “positive” or which focuses on supposedly neglected subjects. While there might be some validity to their complaints, they might also be taken to the opposite extreme and used to justify it.

### **Third Generation: Reintroduction**

The third generation experiences the reintroduction of those elements which their forebears found so offensive. Not only have they not experienced the battles which their forebears fought, but they have not heard much about them or been taught the principles involved. They have not been encouraged to care about them. They see matters much differently. They are looking for a different kind of religion and life. Hence, they feel no compunctions about reintroducing to their lives and worship what was once so offensive to their forebears.

By the end of the first century, the church had been in existence for about seventy years — enough time that the second and third generations of Christians had come, or were beginning to come, to the forefront. The author of Hebrews, writing perhaps several years before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., appears to be concerned about the threat of extensive apostasy among Jewish Christians, as he warns, “For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it” (2:1).

John, whose writings are probably the latest in the New Testament and might coincide with the last decade of the first century, describes conditions among Christians in that period. He seems to acknowledge the existence of three generations in the church when he refers to “fathers,” “young men,” and “(little) children” (1 John 2:12-13). By this time, apostasy was already well under way, for he says, “... Even now many antichrists have arisen; from this we know that it is the last hour” (1 John 2:18).

By the end of the first century, only two of the seven churches of Asia addressed by Christ in Revelation (chapters 2-3) escaped serious rebuke for their unfaithfulness. Second Peter’s second chapter and Jude’s only chapter are largely parallel, but while Peter uses the future tense in referring to the arrival of apostates, saying that “there will also be false teachers” among his readers (verse 1), Jude uses the past tense, saying that “certain persons have crept in” (verse 4), thus confirming that the very ones about whom Peter had warned had arrived on the scene by the time Jude picked up his pen.

### **Conclusion**

If both Scripture and historical experience teach that apostasy is virtually inevitable, why should any generation of Christians, even today’s, feel comfortable, thinking that they, their children, or their grandchildren are immune to it? Biblical truths and their proper application are a “tradition” (2 Thessalonians 3:6) in the truest sense: they must be handed down by teaching to succeeding generations, for time and

lack of direct experience lead those who come later to forget their importance. There will eventually arise those who “did not know Joseph” (Exodus 1:8) or “had not experienced any of the wars of Canaan” (Judges 3:1), and their behaviors and reactions will be different from those who did — unless they are taught by an older generation to “stand by the ways and see and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is, and walk in it” (Jeremiah 6:16).

The Lord’s church is now entering, or approaching, the third generation since institutionalism was a source of serious and divisive conflict. “Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall” (1 Corinthians 10:12).

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## **Tumbleweed Christians**

Jefferson David Tant | Roswell, Georgia, USA

Tumbleweeds are a familiar sight in the Western United States. A tumbleweed is a structural part of the above-ground anatomy of a number of species of plants. Once it is mature and dry, it detaches from its root, and then is blown across the landscape by the wind. “Tumbling Tumbleweeds” is a song made popular by Gene Autry, Roy Rogers and the Sons of the Pioneers and others many years ago.

How well this describes some who call themselves Christians. It seems they have become detached from their roots, and are thus susceptible to be blown here and there by whatever wind of doctrine that comes along.

Our Lord has made provision for His people to be firmly rooted and grounded in the faith. Paul wrote about this in his letter to the church at Ephesus.

*“And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ.”*  
(Ephesians 4:11-15)

We don’t know if Paul was familiar with tumbleweeds, but his description of those who are “carried about by every wind of doctrine” surely fits. And what was a danger then is truly a danger in the present. Paul’s picture is of a ship at sea that has no fixed course, but is tossed here and there by the winds and waves.

The culture in which we live today is obsessed with the idea of inclusivism. We all ought to sing “com by yah” (however you spell that) and agree to disagree, because truth is relative and there are no absolutes. The commonly seen bumper sticker expresses the idea very well. We should “coexist” all the way from the religions of Islam to Christianity to Hinduism to Scientology to Atheism, etc.

I once asked a high school student if she really understood the message she was sending out by having the sticker on her car. She really had no idea of the teachings of the religions she was promoting. Basically, she just wanted to be Politically Correct. It was obvious that wherever she went to church, there was no fundamental teaching.

We remember the Parable of the Sower in the gospels. Some of the seed “fell on the rocky places, where they did not have much soil; and immediately they sprang up, because they had no depth of soil. But when the sun had risen, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away.” (Matthew 13:5-6). That’s the same problem tumbleweeds have—no roots.

The point is that we need to teach basic principles of the gospel, evidences, how to establish authority and

what Biblical doctrine really is. We need to make sure our young people are deeply rooted in truth, for they will face many challenges to their faith in their school classrooms. One survey shows that 66% of denominational young people lose their faith by the time they graduate from college. Some professors have plainly stated their intent is to destroy the faith of any of their students who are so ignorant as to believe in God. Consider the following statement:

*"We try to arrange things so that students who enter as bigoted, homophobic, religious fundamentalists will leave college with views more like our own... We are going to go right on trying to discredit you (fundamentalist parents) in the eyes of your children, trying to strip your fundamentalist religious community of dignity, trying to make your views seem silly rather than discussable. We are not so inclusivist as to tolerate intolerance such as yours"*

(Professor Richard Rorty, in essay "Universality and Truth").

This philosophy is spreading in our nation, and is prevalent in our institutions of higher learning. This makes it imperative for both parents and churches to teach God's word to our children, so that they may be planted firmly with deep roots. And parents cannot just leave it up to "Sunday School" to teach their children. Would we expect our children to get a good education by going to school just two or three hours a week? Obviously not! God knew the necessity for parental involvement long, long ago.

*"These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead.*

*You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates"* (Deuteronomy 6:6-9).

"Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4).

Paul wrote to the church at Colossae:

*"Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude. See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ"* (Colossians 2:6-8).

Paul expressed his desire for the Ephesian Christians "that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love..." (Ephesians 3:17).

Without deep roots, we are destined to become "tumbleweed Christians."

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## What Happened To The Church Jesus Built? #2

Tommy G. Thornhil | Etna, Arkansas, USA

As the close of the last issue it was pointed out that the gifts of Ephesians 4:11-13 were functioning offices, designed to establish and maintain the unity of the faith, and bring the Lord's church (people) to maturity. Some contend the gifts were supernatural gifts, but I disagree. Let me elaborate a little more.

Note the context. In Ephesians 4:7 we read, "But to each one of us grace was given, according to the measure of Christ's gift." What was the purpose? That "...He might fill all things" (verse 10). Then in verse 13 he writes, "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 stature of the fullness of Christ." The gifts were given by Christ to supply everything necessary to bring all saints to unity and maturity, so their function is to build up the body (Ephesians 4:12, 16).

As seen in a previous lesson, the church (through its members) was designed to make known God's

manifold wisdom “to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places” (the spiritual realm), the means by which He would send the gospel of Christ throughout the sinful world (Ephesians 3:10-11; 1 Timothy 3:15). If you read carefully the passage, Ephesians 4:7-16, you will note that the emphasis in these verses is not miraculous gifts, but gifts for the spiritual development (equipping) of the saints of God to enable them to perform the spiritual work assigned to the church of which they are a part (Ephesians 4:12, 16).

While it is true that some of the evangelists, pastors/teachers in the early church had “miraculous gifts,” this is not what Paul has in mind in the passage we are considering. You should notice in the context that the gifts in Ephesians 4:11 were meant to teach, equip, and edify the brethren. In fact, you will notice that the one thing these gifts have in common is the idea of teaching and edifying, not the use of miraculous gifts.

Some say, what about the word “till” (until) in verse 13? As pointed in the last article I don’t believe the word as used in the context refers to some specified duration that will end at a certain time. Rather these gifts were to continue until the goal or results sought after were reached. This goal, unity of the faith and maturity, is one that each generation must seek after and develop itself. I sincerely believe this is what the context teaches.

The task of the apostles and prophets, guided by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, was to record the doctrine of Christ (apostles’ doctrine). When the New Testament was completed, God’s people had available all matters of faith, worship and work, including the pattern for the local church’s organization and function. When the apostles and prophets died, they had no successors, so their function was no longer active. Yet, their work remained behind, for all future generations to follow. We find this work in the New Testament.

Unlike the apostles and prophets, the active function of evangelists, pastors and teachers has not ceased. Their work, that of imparting the words the apostles left behind, continues (2 Timothy 2:2; 4:1-5). Even though some had miraculous gifts in the first century, spiritual gifts are not needed to function as evangelists, pastors and teachers. They have the completed word of God at their disposal (1 Corinthians 13:9-10; Jude 3). All they need is a knowledge of God’s word and a desire to teach it boldly and plainly, for God has decreed that man would be saved through the foolishness of preaching (1 Corinthians 1:18, 21; Rom.1:16). As long as there are people who need saving and being kept saved, there is a need for men to function as evangelists and pastors/teachers. The responsibility of preaching the gospel and equipping and edifying the saints to bring them to maturity and a unity of the faith is ongoing.

As long as these gifts are utilized as God designed them to work, they will bring any group of Christians to the unity of the faith and maturity in any given locale. They will be a church of Christ functioning the way God intended. They will

*“no longer be children tossed to and fro and carried about with every word of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting... from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love” (Ephesians 4:14, 16).*

When these gifts are not utilized, or people allow them to be abused, a local church will never fulfill the purpose for which it claims to exist.

With the simplicity of God’s plan, the church Christ promised to build, and did build, in the first century grew and prospered and spread throughout the world. It grew in spite of the open conflict it faced from the beginning, first from the hostile, worldly, materialistic Jews, followed by the hatred of the world and its pagan carnality. To be a follower of Christ required a complete separation from the human philosophies and sinful worldly practices of paganism and the rejection of material Judaism. The saints recognized only the authority of Christ and allegiance to His cause. They were not attracted to the allurements of the world. Their commitment and courage kept them from compromising their faith for the sake of the world. The



world's bitter hatred and enmity toward God's people brought severe persecution against the church.

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## **"As I Teach Everywhere"**

Jim Mickells | Lewisburg, Tennessee, USA

"For this reason I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church" (1 Corinthians 4:17).

Do you think Paul would be permitted to preach the things he taught in the New Testament in the various churches throughout the world today? I don't think so! I know there are things taught in denominational churches which would contradict what the apostle taught on a great variety of topics. Let me suggest just a few for your consideration.

What about baptism? Paul very clearly taught that baptism would wash away one's sin. When speaking of his conversion in Acts 22, he told his audience what Ananias had instructed him to do. "And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (verse 16). Could he teach such a doctrine today in the vast majority of the churches? They would not let such be taught. Most all teach that you should be baptized, it is a good thing for one to do, Jesus was baptized. Yet they would say it has nothing to do with the forgiveness of sins. It is only an outward sign of an inward salvation that has already taken place at the point of one's faith. This same apostle said the old man who was buried in baptism was dead in sin. The one which comes forth from this grave is a new creature in Christ (Romans 6:1-18). Denominational baptism buries the man who is alive (he had already been saved or made alive before baptism), not the one who is dead. The Bible teaches us to baptize those who are dead in sin so their iniquities can be forgiven (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38, etc.) We'd better listen to Paul.

What about singing? Paul taught one is to sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16). There was no instruction given about the use of instrumental music in the worship service. The great majority of churches in the world use some kind of instrument as they attempt to worship God. Many have bands, not only for the purpose of worshiping Jehovah, they are used also to entertain the worshiper. Would the apostle be allowed to preach the truth on this subject, tell them they are only authorized to sing? If he taught this, would they welcome him back to preach at the next assembly? Probably not! I suppose some of the leaders would call him aside and say, "Now Paul, you know they had instruments in the Old Testament. If they could use them, surely it is alright for us to have the same. Besides, we like the way they sound and they really help our singing. Furthermore, we are going to lose our young people to other churches if we don't use these instruments. We just can't have you preaching such a doctrine here. You will need to find some other place to teach your opinion."

What about the church? This great apostle said there is only "one body" (Ephesians 4:4), which is the church (Ephesians 1:22-23). Could he preach and teach such a doctrine today everywhere he went? This topic would not be very popular among the masses. It is general believed and taught there are many different bodies or churches today, teaching a host of doctrines, yet all heading to the same eternal home for the soul. Doctrine matters (1 Timothy 4:1; 2 Timothy 4:3; Revelation 2:12-17). The name matters (Acts 4:12; Acts 11:26; Romans 16:16; 1 Corinthians 1:2). Worship matters (Matthew 15:9; John 4:23-24). Organization matters (Acts 14:23; Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:1-13). The work of the church matters (1 Timothy 3:15; Ephesians 4:11-16; 1 Corinthians 16:1-2). Someone would probably tell Paul, "You and your kind think you are the only ones going to heaven. What a narrow-minded view you have. You can't preach that here!" Truth is narrow (Matthew 7:13-14).

What about purity of life? Do you think the apostle's message against homosexuality would be well received in the religious world today? It has not been! Notice what he said as he writes his first epistle to the Corinthians, "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Corinthians

6:9-10). He not only condemned homosexuality but also, fornicators, adulterers, thieves, drunkards, etc. There are some churches who not only condone such immoral behavior but encourage such. They place men and women in leadership roles who practice such. "Paul, you can't preach that here, we're open-minded and willing to accept all regardless of their sexual preference and their choice of life-styles."

I am convinced the apostle Paul would not be welcomed in the pulpits of many churches today simply because of what he preached everywhere he went. Would he be welcomed where you attend? Would you be willing to listen to him despite the social pressures not to? Do you have the conviction of heart and mind to stand for the truth even when it is not accepted by the majority? I certainly hope so. We all had better listen to what the Lord said through the writings of men like Paul. He revealed the mind of God under the direction of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 1:11-12).

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## Small Churches

Mike Thomas | Beaver Dam, Kentucky, USA

It is not uncommon for people to measure a church's success solely by the numbers it has in attendance. One of the first things I am asked when people learn I am a preacher is how big the church is where I attend. They will then use this as a benchmark for whether or not I am a successful preacher or if the church is a vibrant congregation. I guess we all have done the same. For one reason or another, we are convinced that all we need to know about a church is found in its numbers. This perception leads some Christians to ask, "Have we failed because we cannot get more people to join our effort? Are we doing something wrong when the numbers are low?" This reflects the erroneous belief that a church's faithfulness is determined by its attendance. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The church at Sardis had a reputation as a growing and active church, but from God's perspective they were dead spiritually (Revelation 3:1). Perhaps their pews were filled to capacity and everybody who was anybody went there; with other churches in the area wanting to emulate their every move. But Sardis was not the ideal church from God's point of view. They still had a lot to learn from Smyrna (2:8-11) and Philadelphia (3:7-13) in demonstrating faith and zeal. This does not mean that every large church has compromised with sin to get to that size (Acts 11:21). Nor does it mean that fewer numbers guarantees faithful, dedicated members. Some churches are few in number because they have a toxic environment of bitterness, slander, and hate; while others are small because they lack good leadership and are in constant turmoil. These environments force those who walk circumspectly to look elsewhere to work and worship. Yet at the same time, some churches are overflowing with people despite their poor teaching and leadership. Truly, numbers are not the final measurement of a church's dedication to the Lord. As long as a church as a whole is striving to keep the Lord's will, they should not feel like a failure when the numbers are not booming as in other churches. As Noah proved, sometimes the most dedicated disciples can only find a few others to join them in keeping God's word (1 Peter 3:20).

A church with few numbers can still have a very positive, uplifting, and encouraging atmosphere if it is willing. One of the finest churches I know of has attendance in the 20s to 30s every week. The world looks at numbers like that and says it is time to close the doors and go elsewhere to worship, but don't tell these brethren that. They are genuinely committed to worshiping God in spirit and truth—with no thought whatsoever of self-pity and disappointment. Their time in worship is deliberate and unhurried. Their singing is plentiful and with purpose. Their preaching (the kind they demand from visiting speakers) is straight out of the Bible. Any time they have together is time to let each other know how much they genuinely appreciate one another. They even keep the building up-to-date and clean. It's hard to believe a church like that will stay small for long, but then again that's measuring success with a different standard than God's.

In any setting and in all things may our attitude be "not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord" (Romans 12:11). There is always reason to rejoice when gathered with fellow Christians to worship, especially when Jesus promises that "where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20).

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## The Spirit Realm, #2

William J. Stewart | Odessa, Ontario, Canada

There are several occasions recorded in the Bible of interaction between the spiritual and physical realms. This should not surprise us: our Creator is a Spirit and He has made us in His image (despite being in the flesh, we are spirits). As we have previously noted, spirit beings were given duty over the nations before the coming of the Messiah. Oh, and let's not forget, we have a spiritual enemy, the devil. Having said all this, one might think we would see occurrence after occurrence of interaction - that it would be commonplace. It is not. The connection between the two realms is continual, but the incidents of interaction which are visible, audible and experienced by humanity are relatively few. Let's notice some of them now.

Years ago, I penned a series on the appearances and activity of the Christ in the Old Testament. The LORD appeared to Abraham (Genesis 12, 17, 18, 22), Hagar (Genesis 16), Isaac (Genesis 26), Jacob (Genesis 31, 32, 35), Moses (Exodus 3, 19, 20, 33), all of Israel (Exodus 13, 14), and others.

Numbers 22 tells us of the prophet Balaam being commissioned by Balak, king of Moab, to curse Israel. Balaam inquired of the LORD, whether he should go with Balak's men. The answer was NO (Numbers 22:12). However, Balak sweetened the pot, and Balaam ended up going. On his way, his donkey kept acting up: turning off the path, crushing his foot against a wall, and laying down under him. The text reveals that the donkey saw the Angel of the LORD standing in the way (v 23-27). The LORD opened the donkey's mouth to speak with Balaam (v 28-30), and then eventually opened Balaam's eyes, and he too saw the Angel of the LORD (v 31).

Following the death of Moses, Joshua became the leader of Israel. In Joshua 5, shortly before he would lead the people on their mission to take the land of Canaan, "a Man" appeared to him, who identified Himself as "Commander of the army of the LORD." Joshua was then told to take off his sandals, for he stood on holy ground (v 15). This "Man" was more than a man, it was the LORD!

There are a number of times when angels appeared to men. In Genesis 19, two angels came to Lot in the city of Sodom. In Luke 1, an angel appeared to Zacharias, to announce the birth of his son, John the Baptist. In the same chapter, Mary also saw an angel who announced the birth of our Lord. Joseph was sleeping, but in a dream, an angel affirmed that he should marry Mary, for she had not been unfaithful to him, as he had feared (Matthew 1). After Jesus rose from the dead, an angel appeared to the women who came to the tomb (Matthew 28). After Jesus ascended into heaven, two angels appeared to His disciples, speaking to them of His return (Acts 1). That's just a sampling of the angel appearances.

In 2 Kings 6, the king of Syria was making war against Israel, but his movements and plans were being revealed to the king of Israel by Elisha. The Syrian king sought to kill the prophet, and thus sent a great army to surround the city of Dothan, where Elisha was. The servant of the prophet arose early in the morning and saw the city surrounded. He helplessly exclaimed, "Alas, my master! What shall we do?" Elisha's response must have confused the young man, "Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them" (6:15-16). Who? Where? The text continues,

*...Elisha prayed, and said, 'LORD, I pray, open his eyes that he may see.' Then the LORD opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw. And behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. (v 17)*

The curtains were pulled back, and the servant saw what Elisha already knew. Notice a couple of Psalms:  
*The angel of the LORD encamps all around those who fear Him, and delivers them. (Psalm 34:7)*

*The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of thousands; the Lord*

*is among them as in Sinai, in the Holy Place. (Psalm 68:17)*

So, what does this have to do with you and I? We're far removed from the days of Abraham and Lot, or the time of Balaam or Elisha, etc.. I want you to notice a text in Hebrews 1. Of the angels of God, we are told:

*Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation? (Hebrews 1:14)*

All those who are serving God in this life with the hope of eternal life, raise your hands. Ok. You, with your hand in the air - the angels of God are sent forth to minister to you. How do they do so? I don't know, but I do know the text says they are and they do. The spiritual and physical realms are intersecting in your life, and you may not even know about it. Have you ever met an angel? How would you know? Later, the same writer penned this:

*Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by doing so some have unwittingly entertained angels (Hebrews 13:2).*

It is entirely possible that our lives have crossed paths with angelic beings and we were oblivious. Abraham had no clue who these "men" were when he invited them to dine with him. He was simply doing a good deed to some travelers. The spiritual and physical realms are not so far apart as we sometimes believe.

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## **NAMES OF THE MESSIAH**

### **Man of Sorrows**

Sean P. Cavender | Bald Knob, Arkansas, USA

One of the most recognizable names associated with Christ is the designation "Man of Sorrows." Over the past several months, we have looked at several names of Jesus and how He has been designated with several different titles which show us the nature of Christ's kingdom. This particular name associated with Christ does not emphasize His rule and kingship as much as it reveals how He would accomplish the will of God and redemption for mankind. A hymn by Philip Bliss beautifully articulates the richness of this name:

*"Man of sorrows what a name  
for the Son of God, who came  
ruined sinners to reclaim:  
Hallelujah, what a Savior!"*

### **Rejection**

While many of the names in Isaiah 9 indicate the Messiah would rule over His kingdom with great power and authority, Isaiah 53 shows the Anointed as a humble servant. There would be nothing outwardly that would cause people to turn to Him.

*"For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of parched ground;  
He has not stately form or majesty that we should look upon Him, nor appearance that  
we should be attracted to Him," (Isaiah 53:2, NASB).*

While there was nothing outwardly attractive about Christ that would cause people to want to follow Him and make Him their king, the rejection of Christ was far more than just personal dislike or displeasure. The Jews rejected His teaching, His kingship, and His authority. The Jewish leaders brought Jesus to Pilate because He claimed to be a king (Luke 23:2). Therefore, He was despised and forsaken by men. He was not esteemed as He should have been. Jesus was a "man of sorrows and acquainted with grief."

Jesus was a man of sorrows because He bore our griefs and carried our sorrows (Isaiah 53:4). When He was doing the will of God, He was perceived to be smitten and afflicted by God — a vile sinner, worthy of death (cf. John 19:6-7). He died beside criminals; the perfect Son of God died instead of the murderer and insurrectionist, Barabbas. Jesus the Christ was crucified and the Jews appeared vindicated in their

rejection of Him — however, their “victory” would be short-lived.

*“He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth; like a lamb that is led to slaughter, and like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, so He did not open His mouth. By oppression and judgment He was taken away; and as for His generation, who considered that He was cut off out of the land of the living for the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke was due?” (Isaiah 53:7-8)*

Christ willingly died for people who rejected Him and had turned against the will of God. When all had been guilty of sin and deserved God’s punishment and affliction, Jesus died for them. He died for all of us who have sinned and transgressed God’s will.

### **Propitiation**

The Messiah was pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities, and bore the sins of many (Isaiah 53:4-5, 12). While those who put Jesus to death had their own motives, He went to the cross to die for our sins. Jesus became the propitiation for our sins. He died, offering His blood as God’s requirement for atonement. God has always required the shedding of blood for atonement and remission of sins.

“For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement,” (Leviticus 17:11)

“whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith...” (Romans 3:25)

“How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” (Hebrews 9:14)

“...and without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness” (Hebrews 9:22)

These passages show the relationship between the shedding of blood and God’s forgiveness. Isaiah states the suffering Servant in Isaiah 53 will bear our griefs, sins, and iniquities (Isaiah 53:4, 12). William Mounce and others define the word “bore” to mean “to bear, carry, lift up; forgive” (Mounce). Isaiah provides not only a word picture of the brutal death Jesus would suffer, but he also affirms the purpose of Jesus’ death.

Christ died on the cross and by His death, we have forgiveness of our sins. He bore our sins and carried them away. As Peter would summarize Isaiah 53, he said, “...so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed,” (1 Peter 2:24). We have been healed and forgiven by Christ’s death at Calvary. Through His blood, we have atonement and are righteous in the sight of God.

### **Exaltation**

The atoning death of Christ was made as a sacrifice for sin unto God (Isaiah 53:10). This recognizes the high priestly service of Jesus Christ. He brought His own blood as the atonement before God (Hebrews 8:1-6; 9:13-14). In the midst of Isaiah 53, which predicts Jesus’ death, there is the promise that God would “prolong His days” (Isaiah 53:10). The Lord was put to death, but He was raised from the dead and exalted to the right hand of God (Acts 2:31-36). Since He lives forever, He holds His priesthood permanently (Hebrews 7:23-25). His days have been prolonged and He is high priest forever.

*“but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God” (Hebrews 10:12)*

Jesus Christ is ruling on the throne of God, at His right hand, because He willingly laid down His life as a sacrifice for sin. The Father promised to prolong His days, raising Him from the dead and giving Him great power and authority to sit on the throne.

### **Conclusion**

Jesus is identified as the Man of Sorrows because He is our Redeemer and Savior. He was put to death,

but God vindicated Him and declared Him as the Son of God by raising Him from the dead (Romans 1:4). We must accept Christ as the Son of God, exalted as our King and Lord. If you reject Christ, then you are no better than the ones who shouted “crucify Him!”

#### **Sources:**

William D. Mounce, **Mounce’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old & New Testament Words** (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 998.

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## **CHURCH HISTORY - PART 2**

### **Growth of the Church**

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#### **Introduction**

Shortly before the Lord ascended to the Father, He gave the Great Commission, commanding, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). As He was about to ascend, in reply to the apostles’ question when the kingdom of God would come, the Lord promised them, “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

#### **The Church Begins**

The kingdom, the church (Matthew 16:18-19; Hebrews 12:22-24,28), came with power (Mark 9:1), when the Holy Spirit came (Acts 1:8).

The Holy Spirit came upon the apostles on the first Pentecost after the resurrection of Jesus from the dead (Acts 2:1-4). On that day, by the power of the Holy Spirit, the apostles preached the gospel of the risen Lord for the first time to “Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven.” (Acts 2:5). Thus, three thousand souls from throughout the world (Acts 2:5-11) believed, repented, and were baptized (Acts 2:36-41), and the church of Christ had its beginning (Acts 2:47).

#### **The Gospel to Jerusalem**

As recorded in Acts chapters 2 - 7, the church, through the preaching of the apostles, and later others, enjoyed phenomenal growth in Jerusalem. Believers were “added to the church daily” (Acts 2:47). “Many of those who heard the word believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand” (Acts 4:4). “Believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women” (Acts 5:14). “Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith” (Acts 6:7).

Why was there such tremendous growth of the church? Because of their mutual love and godliness, the church “had favor with all the people (Acts 2:44-47). Furthermore, “Daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ” (Acts 5:42).

#### **The Gospel to Judea and Samaria**

Following the stoning of Stephen, there was a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and the disciples “were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles” (Acts 8:1). “Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word” (Acts 8:4). In fact, “those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to no one but the Jews only” (Acts 11:19). During this period (Acts chapters 8 - 12), the gospel was carried to Africa (Acts 8:26-39), and the first Gentiles were converted to Christ (Acts 10:1 - 11:18).

#### **The Gospel to the End of the Earth**

Beginning in Acts chapter thirteen, apostles, prophets, evangelists, and ordinary Christians carried the gospel throughout the world. Paul and Barnabas traveled to Cyprus and Asia Minor in Paul’s First

Evangelistic Journey (Acts 13:1 - 14:28). Later Paul and Silas traveled as far as Macedonia and Greece in Southeastern Europe preaching the gospel (Acts 15:39 - 18:22) and returned in another preaching trip (Acts 18:23 - 21:17). After his arrest and imprisonment, Paul was taken as a prisoner to Rome, where he even converted some in Caesar's household (Acts chapters 27 - 28; Philippians 4:22).

### Conclusion

In 33 A.D. the Lord commanded, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). Around A.D. 60-62 the apostle Paul declared that the gospel had been preached "in all the world" (Colossians 1:5-6) "to every creature under heaven" (Colossians 1:23).

The great church historian Philip Schaff wrote:

*"There were no missionary societies, no missionary institutions, no organized efforts...; and yet in less than 300 years from the death of St. John the whole population of the Roman empire ... was nominally christianized"* (History of the Christian Church. 2:20).

The first century church, each and every disciple, was absolutely committed to taking the gospel to the lost. If we are to be like them, so must we.



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