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Finally, brethren
**WHATEVER
THINGS** are true
are noble
are just
are pure
are lovely
are of good report
IF THERE IS ANY VIRTUE AND IF THERE
IS ANYTHING PRAISEWORTHY –
meditate on these things.

**PHILIPPIANS
4:8**

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

"Sinners love wealth and use people; saints love people and use wealth to help others" (Bruce K. Waltke, **The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 1-15**. 193)

"Birds can see a net spread before them and avoid it, but sinners are blind to the consequences of their own actions ... Birds have more sense than do some people" (Dave Band, **The College Press NIV Commentary: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes & Song of Songs**. 59)

Question from Sri Lanka about Satan

Question

Since my sister ... is teaching in such kind of school is my reason of persuading the church to help us with a lying land that may be used to be built this project of eliminating illiteracy among our poor children here.

But if it's not good to use church land, may it be good if we may seek for another land for to do it?

And how may it be done that may not go beyond what's accepted scripturally to help such children?

Answer

Christians have responsibilities in several relationships. Since we must "do all in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Colossians 3:17), we must act according to the will of the Lord in all these relationships.

We have obligations in the home, the family relationship. For example, the husband and wife are to give each other the "affection due" one another (1 Corinthians 7:3-5). Surely we will agree that, when the husband fulfills his wife's need for affection, that is not the church at work!

We also have economic responsibilities in business. We are to work to earn a living (Ephesians 4:28), and this gives each of us the right to start his own business (Acts 16:14; 18:1-3). But the church is limited to a first day of the week, free will offering of its own members as the means to raise its funds (1 Corinthians 16:1-2). If a Christian is in the farming business, that doesn't mean the church is in that business.

We also have social responsibilities in the community. We should so live before others that we draw them to Christ (Matthew 5:16). In an effort to be a good influence in the community, I am a member of the Lions Club, a civic organization. Probably few would question my right to join the Lions Club, but neither would any say that made the church a part of the Lions Club.

We also have obligations and liberties toward civil government. I believe Christians have just as much right as unbelievers to enter politics in order to hold public office (Romans 13:1-7). But I don't believe that gives the church the right to interfere with government affairs (Mark 12:17; John 18:36).

The local church is more than just Christians. It is Christians in a certain relationship, a spiritual relationship (John 18:36; Romans 14:17; Ephesians 1:3,22-23). It is when these Christians in this spiritual relationship act collectively through the use of common funds (1 Corinthians 1:2; Acts 9:26-28; 2:46; 1 Corinthians 16:1-4) that the local church is functioning. We must not confuse our individual obligations in other relationships with the work of the church.

This is exemplified in Matthew 18:15-17. If your brother sins against you, you should tell him alone about it. If he will not listen, you should take with you one or two witnesses to talk to him. If he still refuses to repent, you should tell it to the church. Neither one Christian acting alone, nor two or three Christians from among others in the church acting together constitute church action. It's when all the Christians who regularly worship together act as one in regard to God's work that the church is at work.

Another illustration is found in First Timothy 5:16. Each believer should care for needy widows related to him, and the church must not be burdened with their care. Although an individual Christian is at work, the church is not.

The church is a spiritual relationship (Ephesians 1:3,22-23), and its work is spiritual: evangelism (1 Timothy 3:14-15; 1 Thessalonians 1:6-8), edification (Ephesians 4:11-16), and relief of needy saints (Acts 4:34-35). Relief of needy saints is spiritual in that it is an expression of fellowship in Christ (2 Corinthians 8:1-4). The church is not authorized to engage in any other works (cf. Colossians 3:17; 2 Timothy 1:13; 2 John 9).

Secular education is not the work of the church. The truth the church is to uphold is the word of God (1 Timothy 3:14-15; John 17:17), not the truth of mathematics or other secular subjects.

Furthermore, the only organization that can be associated with the church is the local congregation (1 Corinthians 1:2). A congregation may help build another congregation (Acts 11:20-23), but it is not authorized to build or operate any other organization, such as a school or orphanage.

You may donate or use part of your own land for a school in which you teach secular subjects to children. You could appeal to individuals in both Kenya and America to help you or your community build a school building and hire a teacher. You may even teach in that school. But secular education is not the work of the church.

Report on Work in Samoan Islands

Mike Thomas | Beaver Dam, Kentucky, USA

It was just as productive and important as the previous three years - and Lord willing, as it will be in years to come. We traveled both to American Samoa and Samoa.

The work in Vaimoso, Samoa continues to flourish because of the faith and influence of sister Tui, who not only opened her home for our studies but also carried us to other parts of the island. We averaged 28 people a night in her home, which she recently renovated with better lighting (for the express purpose of hosting better services). Some of the lessons I spoke on were "Avoiding Worldliness," "The Complete Revelation of God's Word," and "Into What Were You Baptized" – as my brother, Alex, translated for me. The reason I state these lessons is because of the responses they generated, namely the conversion of 4 souls: Ivy Shack, Uaita Shack, Alof Ah Siu, and Samantha Ah Siu.

After the lesson on worldliness, brother Mack (former Assembly of God preacher who was converted last year) asked us to join him the next day at a local high school to teach the lesson there. It was the first day of a program he began on "Saving the Next Generation," which he plans to conduct in all of the high schools (or colleges as they are called). We met the next day in a room filled with over 30 seniors, who were respectful and anxious to hear what we had to say; most of them able to understand English. Mack had also asked Madison, my daughter, to prepare a short talk on remaining faithful at a young age, which she did so well the students applauded her afterwards. I almost didn't want to follow her! (grin) But fortunately, they interacted well with my short talk on worldliness and applauded my efforts as well. I was amazed at how well they knew the Bible and were open to further learning. Mack followed me and had an incredible rapport with the children as he spoke to them in both Samoan and English. The only problem came when he discussed salvation, which he said could be done by asking Jesus into their heart. I couldn't believe it because of all the studies we had last year before his baptism. Nevertheless, as he worked them into a frenzy to accept Jesus right then, he asked me to lead the prayer. I immediately stood up and said, "When Jesus came back from the dead, He taught people to believe and be baptized for the remission of sins. He sent His apostles into the world to preach that message...As much as I would like to pray for your salvation today, you cannot be saved in this classroom. We must be willing to do all that Jesus teaches, which includes faith, repentance, confession and baptism." I continued on for a few minutes but then praised them for their faith and willingness to serve the Lord. I then led a prayer that included a request for the Lord to help them have the opportunity to obey the gospel. Mack followed my remarks in Samoan and English. From what my companions told me, he was affirming the need to be baptized.

Obviously, this is why further teaching is needed in Samoa, both with the unlearned and the newly converted. There is only so much to do in a short period of time or in a few weekends (when my brother and his wife travel there). But Mack is sincere and honest, and I know he will see all of the truth in time. We have a good relationship and I know he will continue to be open to what I have to say, as he was in addressing further concerns and issues this trip.

One other blessing that developed in Samoa is we were able to travel to Mulifanua—the village where my mother was raised and where some of her cousins still live. The family had heard of our preaching efforts over the years (on the other side of the island) and asked that we conduct some studies in their village next year. My brother will go there this fall and begin those efforts, and I will travel there (Lord willing) next year and work with him in a "Tent Meeting." Needless-to-say, my mother is more than excited to hear that the gospel that set her free (and changed her family's life forever) will be taken to the village she was raised, and will be taught by her sons. It will be especially rewarding if she can be with us next year at those studies.

The work in Leone, American Samoa continues but is struggling. My brother and his precious wife, Rowena, are definitely the backbone of the work there, and are carrying a heavy burden from all the

changes that developed over the last year. The eldership there is no more and a week before I arrived, the church buried one of its most dedicated members (brother Koko).

Nevertheless, the members that remain are dedicated and determined to serve the Lord in that community. Every member invited and brought neighbors to services of the meeting. Think of it. Every member brought someone. This not only led to good question and answer sessions (nightly), but it also planted the seed of the gospel in the hearts of people from all walks of life: Vivian (a Chinese lady on a work visa), Tavai (a family member who just moved back to Am Samoa), Hilo (a woman from Hawaii), and brother Koko's family who were in from Alaska. I look forward to seeing the brethren in Leone next year.

Grace Given to Each

Studies in Ephesians | Ephesians 4:6-11
Pat Farish | Waxachie, Texas, USA

The gospel is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16). Jesus did not leave the gospel to be broadcast in some mysterious way; He rather gave gifts to men to accomplish this; and He enumerated them:

First, "he gave the apostles." An apostle is "one sent with a message." In context of replacing Judas, Peter announced the qualifications of apostles of Christ with these words:

"So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John unto the day when he was taken up from us – one of these must become with us a witness to his resurrection" (Acts 1:21-22).

There were twelve original apostles. Judas fell away, and was replaced by Matthias. Saul of Tarsus (who described himself as "one untimely born") later was added to become the apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 15:9). Early Christians "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching ..."; and so do Christians today, the only difference being that they had inspiration in men and we today have inspiration in a book (thank you, Elmer). Jesus said to the apostles, "the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you" (John 14:26).

Next, "the prophets." A prophet was a fore-teller, but more than that a forth-teller. Prophets were more prominent in the Old Testament, as indicated by Hebrews 1:1; but prophets continued to work as evidenced in the New Testament, (Acts 21:9). In terms of the work they did, the apostles and prophets remain with us.

Then "evangelists." An evangelist is a gospel preacher. He may be a preacher who travels from place to place, like Philip (Acts 21:8); or, he may be in local work, as Timothy (2 Timothy 4:5; 1 Timothy 1:3). Some are troubled by a mere local preacher identifying himself as an evangelist – but such he is.

"Pastors" – the denominational world has lost the true sense of the word completely. They identify the man who preaches as "pastor" - and then whisk away the authority bestowed on pastors by Jesus.

Pastors are ordained by God. A pastor is a shepherd, and he is charged to take heed to the flock (Acts 20:28). Just as a shepherd dominates and provides for his flock, so the pastors of a local church take heed to the sheep of which the church is composed.

This is an area which needs scrupulous definition. In Acts 20, verse seventeen identifies the people to whom Paul is speaking as the elders of the church in Ephesus. He is still speaking to these elders when in verse 28 he says, "Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God which he obtained with his own blood." Look at it: in these two verses Paul addresses the elders (verse 17) and in verse 28 calls them pastors ("attention to the

flock”) and bishops (“overseers”). The same combination is found in First Peter 5:1-2.

The apostolic order called for a plurality of elders in every church, “And when they had appointed for them elders in every church ...” (Acts 14:23).

It is appropriate here to deplore the lamentable indifference toward elders and their appointment and their work, today. The attitude toward authority observed in this area mirrors the anarchic spirit in society shown today with respect to law and order in so many places. It should not be so.

Apostles and prophets and evangelists and pastors are all supposed to teach, but additionally all Christians, then and now, are obliged to teach as they have opportunity.

When these gifts were first bestowed, most of the recipients were endowed supernaturally --- the New Testament was not written, and the messages offered by men to whom the Spirit gave utterance needed certification (confer Acts 8:6, et al). The teachers under view in Ephesians four taught the word of God. The teachers under view today must also teach the word of God. Jesus made that possible.

I Can't Compete

Jefferson David Tant | Roswell, Georgia, USA

The religious world is a world of fierce competition, just as car dealerships are in competition with one another. Obviously the dealer that sells the most cars makes the most profit and has bragging rights - “We’re the #1 Chevy dealer in the Southeast.” How does a car dealer become #1? It offers the most - friendly salespeople, up-to-date service center, free loaners, comfortable waiting rooms, etc.. That’s all the name of the game. But a car is a car, and whether Ford or Chevy, will get you from point A to point B. The choice comes down to personal preference.

Much is the same with churches, but there are also sharp distinctions. I get calls asking what the Roswell church offers. Do we have a sports program? Do we have a “youth minister?” Do we have a day-care program? Do we have a “Mother’s Morning Out?” Do we have a “divorce recovery” program? Do we have praise bands? In other words, are we a “full-service church?” Then I see the preachers on TV, with \$1,000 suits and \$100,000 cars (or a \$350,000 car, which is driven by a local mega-church pastor). I don’t even have my own jet plane to fly me to my preaching appointments. (I don’t even fly first class on scheduled airlines.) I don’t stand before an audience of 10,000 or 20,000 on Sunday—not even one of 1,000. I don’t have a staff of people to write my sermons or do my research, or make hospital visits. I don’t have a drawer full of amusing stories to liven up my sermons. I don’t even have any sermons in my notebooks dealing with the “health and wealth” gospel. And I certainly don’t make \$1,000,000 a year as some do. And some of these churches have bragging rights about being the largest in their particular denomination in the state, Southeast, or even in the nation.

Then who am I, and what do I have to offer? I am just a preacher of the gospel of Christ, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God unto salvation...” (Romans 1:16). All I know is I have “determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified” (1 Corinthians 1:13). I preach for a congregation of people who love the Lord and who love one another. I preach for people who come to worship assemblies and classes to learn, to worship, to encourage one another, to express thanksgiving to our God. The congregation may not be large, but the members do have large hearts.

Do I want people to “feel good” after they leave? Certainly, but I also recognize that Muslims and Hindus and pagans may also “feel good” after their worship. Feeling good is great, but the gospel doesn’t always make people feel good. Thousands were “cut to the heart” when Peter convicted them of sin in Acts 2. People rushed upon Paul and stoned him more than once for preaching the gospel. If emotion is what it is all about, then I guess the mega-churches with their entertainment would win the debate. But as I search the New Testament, I find no such mandate for God’s church. In fact, there are times when preaching the

truth may make people feel bad (guilty). Paul instructed Timothy to

“preach the word; be urgent in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure the sound doctrine; but, having itching ears, will heap to themselves teachers after their own lusts; and will turn away their ears from the truth, and turn aside unto fables” (2 Timothy 4:2-4).

We see this in churches that go into communities to find out what people want a church to offer, and then design a church around what pleases people, rather than what pleases God. And then if the preacher says something that “offends,” people get upset. Paul understood this when he asked a poignant question: “So then am I become your enemy, by telling you the truth?” (Galatians 4:16). Then there are those like Joel Osteen who state, “I don’t preach on sin. God hasn’t called me to do that. I want my people to feel good.” One day he will meet his Maker, who often dealt with sin, urging mankind to turn from sin to righteousness.

The true competition is between God and Satan for the souls of the lost. And Satan is a good strategist. He knows how to please people. He knows how to get preachers to tell people what they want to hear. He knows how to mix the Bible with pop psychology. He knows how to wow the crowds with great entertainment and pleasing sermons. He even has his own preachers.

“For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds” (2 Corinthians 11:13-15).

If it’s OK with you, I’ll stick with being a simple preacher, preaching the simple gospel. I don’t think of myself as being either eloquent or powerful, just someone who loves the Lord and loves the souls of men. Thanks to those who put up with and encourage me.

What Happened To The Church Jesus Built? #4

Tommy G. Thornhil | Etna, Arkansas, USA

The last article closed with the church beginning its drift into apostasy when a distinction was made in the leadership, where one elder in the local congregation was elevated above the others, and became the bishop presiding over the other elders. He was given superior status. This simple change was just the beginning of many changes that would take place in the years to come.

After this seemingly small change in the organization of the church it was inevitable that much more was to come. The prophet Jeremiah had pointed out centuries before that his people were headed into apostasy because they had forsaken the fountain of living waters (the word of God) for the broken cisterns (ideas, opinions) of men that hold no water (Jeremiah 2:12-13). This was what was now happening to the Lord’s church.

Once men abandon the word of God in one area, they have opened the door for other innovations, as church history shows. Even though a change had taken place in the eldership, the basics of Christianity were still being taught, and the influence of the gospel being felt in surrounding communities. Churches were being established all over the countryside. So, a denominational concept began to develop, a metropolitan form of organization. Believing the church, with an enlarged organization, could function more smoothly and accomplish more, several congregations would unite together, under the umbrella of the larger, more dominant church in the area. This union then prompted the elders in the larger city congregations to send some of their elders to the smaller rural churches, to help them care for their spiritual affairs. The elders of the larger church, with its presiding bishop, then exercised authority over the other, smaller congregations. Even though men may have thought this was a good idea, it was in direct conflict with First Peter 5:2, “shepherd the flock of God, which is among you....”

While the early Christians could read nothing in God’s word (the apostles’ doctrine,” the New Testament)

about presiding bishops, or elders ruling over other congregations, the members' ignorance of God's word, and/or their failure to heed it (Hebrews 2:2-3) allowed prideful men to introduce these things into the church. Flaunting their exalted status, these men soon elevated themselves above the rest of the congregation and brought about what is known as a clergy-laity distinction. The clergy, as they were then called, became the ones who set the rules for what a congregation was to believe and practice.

The church was now viewed as a religious institution, established to offer salvation and validate faith and worship, and to provide for the members all their spiritual and physical needs. The church was now operating the same way a secular government operates to maintain law and order and dispense physical needs for its citizens. Later, they would form conferences and associations to determine matters of faith and worship for all the churches. In later years, they would add theological schools and/or human institutions to supplement the church. None of these concepts came from God's word. They were all formed from human reasoning, and would later replace the word of God as the authority to determine matters of faith, worship, and work for the members.

What was fast developing **was not** (and still isn't) **the way** God intended His church to function. The metropolitan, institutional church concept, hatched by uninspired men, conveys the idea of an organization separate from the people who comprise it, rather than the church being composed of the saved in a given location. Salvation from sin came through "the obedience of faith" (Romans 1:5) in the gospel of Christ (Mark 16:16; Romans 6:3-5; Colossians 2:12-13). Salvation is not dispensed through the church, for the church is made up of those who are already saved (Acts 2:47). As pointed out earlier, the church's responsibility is to make known the gospel (Ephesians 3:10-11), not to formulate it. To make the church of Christ into something it is not intended to be, is to dishonor the Father's purpose for planning it, the Son's fulfillment of His purpose in building it, the Holy Spirit's revelation of the plan for its existence, and man's submission to the plan. By respecting what the church is intended to be God will be glorified, not man (Ephesians 3:21).

Christianity by this time was corrupted by men, but still flourished, and its influence continued to expand into the various provinces. Many of those converted wanted to bring with them some of the pagan practices and rituals of their previous religions into the church, things unknown to the word of God. Wanting to include these things made it impossible for the church to maintain the simplicity of the original gospel, the purity of the worship and form of government God intended. People were forgetting that they (the church) had been called out of the world to be God's "special people" (2 Corinthians 6:17-18). They lived in the world, but were not like the world and its practices (John 5:19; 17:14-16)

But, when men were no longer committed to the word of God as their final authority (1 Peter 4:11; Colossians 3:17), the door was wide open to allow changes in doctrine and worship. Weak-minded people might make changes through ignorance, but the responsibility for these changes rested with the leadership (now the clergy class). So, a leadership who had lost respect for God's word, along with a compliant, ignorant membership and a spirit of compromise, led the way into further apostasy in doctrine and worship. They wanted to make the church more acceptable to the world.

Understanding The Church Of Christ

Wayne Fancher | Searcy, Arkansas, USA

If you were to ask people who are not members of the Church of Christ what they generally know about us you would probably hear statements like these.

"You people really stress baptism a lot." Well, yes that is true about us. Those who have ever worshipped with us immediately notice that we do not use musical instruments in our singing worship to God. Those who know a little more about us know that we take the Lord's Supper every first day of the week in our worship services. Some probably would say, "you people argue a lot about the scriptures." Well, yes, I imagine from their perspective that is true. OK these are the basic things people know about us and say

about us. However, all these things are simply what we do. What I would like to do in my next few articles is try to help you understand why we do these things the way we do them. If you are not a member of the Church of Christ, I would like to help you understand us better. There are certain foundational beliefs we have that result in all of these actions. What I hope to do is help you understand the why behind the what, as I explain the foundational doctrines of the Church of Christ.

2 Peter 1:21: for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.

2 Timothy 3:16: All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,

1 Thessalonians 2:13: For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.

The first and most important thing you must understand about us in order to understand our actions and beliefs, is to understand that we truly believe with all of our heart that the Bible is the inspired revelation and will of God almighty the creator of the universe. We do not see the Bible as being merely the religious feelings of some Hebrew men from thousands of years ago that have no meaning in our life today. To the contrary, we see the Bible as the absolute truth revealed by God through the Holy Spirit to the prophets, who had it recorded for future generations to be able to read it and know the truth about God and mankind. It is this complete confidence in the inspiration of the Bible that is the first and most important foundational belief that is behind our actions in religion.

"Why Do You Pretend To Be Another Person?"

Jim Mickells | Lewisburg, Tennessee, USA

Jeroboam, the first king of the ten northern tribes of Israel, has a son named Abijah who is sick. He tells his wife to disguise herself, go to Shiloh, there she would find the prophet Ahijah, and he will tell her what will become of his sick son. The prophet is blind, yet the Lord speaks to him and reveals the woman who will appear before him is Jeroboam's wife. Notice what is said when she draws near to the prophet (1 Kings 14:1-5). "And so it was, when Ahijah heard the sound of her footsteps as she came through the door, he said, 'Come in, wife of Jeroboam. Why do you pretend to be another person? For I have been sent to you with bad news'" (1 Kings 14:6). The bad news is, because of Jeroboam's wickedness, his house will be cut off from Israel and the son will die (1 Kings 14:7-17).

The word "pretend" is defined as "the word means to present oneself in such a way as to fool others" (**The Complete Word Study Dictionary – Old Testament**). The Scriptures do not tell us why he wanted his wife to disguise herself. There are two thoughts which comes to my mind: (1) If others saw his wife going to the prophet in Shiloh, where was the king's faith in the gods he had set up in Bethel and Dan? Why not ask them? (2) If Ahijah knew this was the wife of Jeroboam, who had done more evil than all before him, would the prophet reveal anything to her? These are two possibilities, yet we do not know for sure.

There are some valuable lessons to be gleaned from the words of the prophet to Jeroboam's wife. Notice just a few with me.

One cannot disguise himself before God. The Father knows who we really are. We may fool others but not the Lord. Jehovah is omniscient; He knows all. The Psalmist declared, "Great is our Lord, and mighty in power; His understanding is infinite" (Psalm 147:5). Of Jesus it was said, "and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man" (John 2:25). His word can even discern between the thoughts and the intents of the heart (Hebrews 4:12). Solomon concludes the book of Ecclesiastes by stating our duty toward God, fearing Him and keeping His commandments (12:13), followed by a very

solemn warning. "For God will bring every work into judgment, Including every secret thing, Whether good or evil" (Ecclesiastes 12:14). He knows all about us.

Some try to pretend to be someone else. Jesus speaks about the hypocrites, in His Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:1-18), who try to appear before men as being righteous, holy, and godly. Yet true disciples do not sound the trumpet when doing charitable deeds. They do not pray while standing in the synagogue or on the street corners to be seen and heard by men. Neither will they fast with a sad countenance, disfiguring their faces simply that others may see how pious they are. Christ said, "...your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly" (Matthew 6:18). No need to pretend, He knows exactly whether we are hypocrites or humble servants.

We can be sure our sins will find us out. The wise man said, "He who covers his sins will not prosper, But whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy" (Proverbs 28:13). The word "covers" in this verse means to conceal. It is speaking of one who would try to conceal their sins from God. One would certainly never be successful in such an effort. Jehovah knew all the sins of which Jeroboam was guilty. He has had a great opportunity to serve the Lord yet he is rebellious and is destroyed because of his sins. Paul warned:

*"Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.
For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit
will of the Spirit reap everlasting life" (Galatians 6:7-8).*

If we are guilty of sin, we need to repent. Then we must sow to the Spirit; live a life in harmony with the word of God which has been revealed to man by God's Holy Spirit.

Please examine your life in light of what is taught in the Scriptures (2 Corinthians 13:5) and answer these questions. Are you a true disciple of the Lord, or are you just pretending? Are you disguising yourself before others thinking you are fooling men and God? You might fool others but not Jehovah. Serve the Lord faithfully.

Food and Church

Mike Thomas | Beaver Dam, Kentucky, USA

If we could travel back in time to the days of the New Testament, we would see a stark difference in Christianity. One significant disparity we would find is church-sponsored meals and entertainment. The first Christians knew nothing of the sort from the apostles' teachings. The Lord and His apostles were careful to make a distinction between spiritual activities and social activities. Jesus set this precedent when He fed five thousand followers (John 6:9-10). Afterward, He noted how this changed their motivation for following Him:

*"Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because
you ate of the loaves and were filled. Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the
food which endures to everlasting life" (verses 26-27).*

Perhaps this was one of the reasons He performed this miracle, or at least informed us of it. It demonstrated the corruption that takes place in people's heart when they associate non-spiritual activities with religion. If they believe a religion is promising them food, entertainment, or money, they will have more interest in those things than in spiritual matters, and will only remain as long as those donations remain. Jesus proved this very point with the five thousand, who later left Him when they saw He would not feed them with anything except sound preaching (John 6:66).

The apostles taught Christians to make a distinction between social activities and the spiritual work of the church. "So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart" (Acts 2:46). They gathered at the temple for spiritual activities (because it met their congregational needs), then went "house to house" for social activities. This principle remained true even when the places of assembling were upper rooms (20:8), individual's houses

(Romans 16:5), or places besides a person's house (1 Corinthians 11:22). The place of assembly was irrelevant because the rule was always the same: "If anyone is hungry, let him eat at home" (1 Corinthians 11:34) — separate and apart from the work of the church.

Some will argue that since some New Testament saints met in people's houses, and most houses have kitchens, then local churches may have kitchens in their buildings as well. This line of reasoning not only ignores the lesson taught by Jesus with physical food and religion, it fails to acknowledge the work of the church as defined by God. He says "the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking" (Romans 14:17). The place of assembly does not alter that truth whether a church meets in a barn, school building, or store front. The church only uses those places to fulfill God's will in assembling for worship and in teaching. However else people use those buildings does not define the church's reasons for using them. If saints in the New Testament could meet at the temple courtyard without promoting Judaism, they could also meet in individual's houses without making eating and drinking a work of the kingdom.

Fellowship in the church, as God defines it, involves only spiritual matters only (Acts 2:42), that are not found in "the food which perishes, but the food which endures to everlasting life."

The Spirit Realm, #4

William J. Stewart | Odessa, Ontario, Canada

Google "demon list" and you will discover site after site telling you about the myriad of demons. In these lists you'll find everything from odd names (Bifrons, Jinn, Lamia) to human actions (gossip, lying, rape) or emotions (pride, grief, jealousy). The extensive and weird list of names given by some are not found in the Bible, but are from the writings of men. If you are familiar with the mythology of the Norse, Greeks, Romans, etc., then you may recognize some of the names. Of all these, I would say along with Paul,

...we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one. For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as there are many gods and many lords), yet for us there is one God... (1 Corinthians 8:4-6)

The thought that human action or emotion should be attributed to demons is disturbing. It removes personal responsibility for sin. Have an ego problem? It's not you - it's a demon of pride. Do you have a hard time controlling your temper? You've been possessed by a spirit of rage! Cheating on your spouse? That's a spirit of fornication. These folks have listed evil spirits for everything you could think of and more. Apparently there's a baldness demon! Are you a vegetarian? There's a demon for that! If it weren't so serious, it'd be funny.

We listed every occurrence of demon possession from the New Testament last month. Something that stood out was the fact that no demon spoken of in the New Testament caused an individual to sin. We do not read about a demon of drunkenness, an evil spirit of idleness, an indifference demon, or a sodomite spirit. All these are manmade demons, if not to justify sin, at the very least to deflect culpability.

The Bible tells us of the distressing spirit which was upon king Saul (1 Samuel 16:14). Well, it must have been a demon of depression, right? No. The text says, "...a distressing spirit from the LORD troubled him." It was not a demon, nor was Saul possessed by a spirit. The word spirit is often used to describe an attitude or disposition. The Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and anxiety or dejection set in. To rid himself of the distressing spirit, Saul had David play his harp (1 Samuel 16:23). David wasn't casting out an evil spirit with his harp; it served to distract Saul from his unfaithfulness to God. 1 Samuel 18:10-11 speaks of a time when even David's music didn't work to change Saul's disposition.

Out of curiosity, I searched for the phrase "spirit of" in the Bible. These are not all the references, but a good selection of them:

- Spirit of wisdom (Exodus 28:3)

- Spirit of jealousy (Numbers 5:14)
- Spirit of ill will (Judges 9:23)
- Spirit of deep sleep (Isaiah 29:10)
- Spirit of harlotry (Hosea 4:12)
- Spirit of bondage (Romans 8:15)
- Spirit of stupor (Romans 11:8)
- Spirit of gentleness (Galatians 6:1)
- Spirit of fear (2 Timothy 1:7)

Just as Saul's distressing spirit was a disposition, not a possession, so the spirits listed above do not indicate a possession, but a disposition, attitude or frame of mind.

Zechariah 12:10 is a reference to the Lord's death at Calvary. Chapter 13 follows this up by referring to a time when the washing away of sins and uncleanness would happen. That is the very reason why Jesus suffered and died, so that the forgiveness of sins would be available (Luke 24:46-48; Acts 2:38; 3:19; etc.). Forgiveness of sins by the shed blood of Christ was made available with the coming of the gospel message. In Zechariah 13:2, we are told:

*...I will cut off the name of the idols from the land, and they shall no longer be remembered.
I will also cause the prophets and the unclean spirits to depart from the land.*

Just in case someone wants to make a distinction between a demon and an unclean spirit, the Bible makes no such distinction (see Matthew 10:1, 8; Mark 1:23-27; Luke 4:33-36; Mark 5:12-13; etc.). An unclean spirit is a demon.

Zechariah said when the forgiveness of sins was made available because of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the unclean spirits would depart from the land. Which is it? Has demon possession cease or was Zechariah a false prophet? The gospels show demon possession on a massive scale. Then, in the book of Acts there are but a few instances. The unclean spirits were to depart. If demon possession still happens today, Zechariah was wrong.

Might there be demon activity going on in some way or another? Sure. The apostle Paul warned about people "giving heed to deceiving spirits and the doctrines of demons" (1 Timothy 4:1). False teachings are linked to demons. In like manner, false worship is linked to demons in 1 Corinthians 10:20-21. When people use Ouija boards, seances and such things, the aim is to contact evil spirits. I've read of cases where people using drugs have had out of this world experiences, perhaps contact with demons. Demons did not vacate the spirit realm - they were to depart from the land. Do demons still exist? Absolutely. Can people be in contact with or influenced by demons? Perhaps. Does demon possession happen today? Not according to the Holy Spirit, the source of Zechariah's prophecy.

GETTING TO KNOW YOUR BIBLE

Contrasting The Old & New Testaments

Sean P. Cavender | Bald Knob, Arkansas, USA

Bible students recognize the two major divisions of the Bible as the Old Testament and New Testament. Christians believe all 66 books are inspired and are God's words which were written and recorded for us. However, there are stark differences between these two testaments. Which one is binding upon us today? Are there aspects of the Old Testament that we should continue to keep and practice today?

The Purpose of the Old Testament

Moses is recognized as the great lawgiver under the old covenant, thus, the Old Testament is often referred to as the Law of Moses. We need to consider the purpose, design, and weaknesses of the Old Testament in greater detail. While there are many benefits from reading and studying the Old Testament, we must realize the need for the new covenant which would be enacted by Jesus Christ.

There are a several reasons we are no longer under the old covenant. Moses' law, divinely given by God, has been fulfilled and completed. Its purposes and design were limited. Notice several points for consideration.

1. **The old covenant was a shadow of the true spiritual blessings that were to come later.** "... since there are those who offer the gifts according to the Law; who serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things, just as Moses was warned by God when he was about to erect the tabernacle..." (Hebrews 8:4-5, **NASB**)
2. **The old covenant promised a new covenant.** "... Behold, days are coming, says the Lord, when I will effect a new covenant..." (Hebrews 8:8; Jeremiah 31:31, **NASB**)
3. **The old covenant was not intended to be a permanent law.** "When He said, 'A new covenant,' He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear," (Hebrews 8:13, **NASB**).
4. **The old covenant was a tutor to lead us to Christ.** "Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor." (Galatians 3:24-25, **NASB**)
5. **The old covenant could not take away sins.** "Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, because the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sins? But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins year by year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins," (Hebrews 10:2-4, **NASB**)
6. **The old covenant has been done away with.** "having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross," (Colossians 2:14, **NKJV**)

The Authority of the New Testament

While Moses was the lawgiver and mediator of the old covenant, Christians believe that Christ is the Son of God and fulfillment of the Old Testament. The old covenant served as a tutor and schoolmaster to bring us to Christ. Jesus came to fulfill the law of Moses—"Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill" (Matthew 5:17). Jesus' purpose was not to tear down, destroy, or invalidate the law; Christ came to fulfill, or complete the law.

The apostle Paul affirms this same truth as well, "For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes," (Romans 10:4). Paul uses the phrase "end of the law" to describe Jesus as the goal, or end objective of the law. Jesus came and completed the law of Moses and fulfilled the prophets, therefore we are no longer under that law —"Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor," (Galatians 3:24-25). We are not under the law of Moses, but we are under the law of Christ (Galatians 6:2).

So what does all of this mean?

We are under a new covenant. Even the old covenant prophets, like Jeremiah, stated plainly of God's promise to bring a new covenant into effect. "For finding fault with them, He says, 'Behold, days are coming, says the Lord, when I will effect a new covenant...When He said, 'A new covenant,' He has made the first obsolete..." (Hebrews 8:8, 13).

The new covenant was made effective because of Christ's blood. The new covenant was first proclaimed on the day of Pentecost, in Jerusalem (Luke 24:47; Acts 2:1-47). When Jesus died, He nailed the old law to the cross, putting it to an end, "having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross," (Colossians 2:14).

We are no longer under the authority of the Old Testament. Dietary restrictions, circumcision, keeping the Sabbath day (7th day of the week) as a non-work day and day of worship, temple worship, and animal sacrifices are no longer required since we are now under the law of Christ. The Ten Commandments are no longer binding upon us. We must obey Christ under the New Testament.

Heresy

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In January 1972, Robert F. Turner and W. Carl Ketcherside had an exchange during the Florida College

Lectures on the subject of fellowship. Ketcherside asserted, "If you love one another as you should, you will not divide or fuss or fight." But the Lord sternly warns us about "false teachers..., who will secretly bring in destructive heresies" (2 Peter 2:1-3) and commands us to "avoid them" (Romans 16:17-18). What do the Scriptures teach about heresy and heretics?

What Is Heresy?

The term translated "heresies" in Second Peter 2:1 occurs nine times in the New Testament. In the New King James Version of the Bible it is translated "sect" (Acts 5:17; 15:5; 24:5, 14; 26:5; 28:22), "factions" (1 Corinthians 11:19), and "heresies" (Galatians 5:20; 2 Peter 2:1). The word "heretick" in the **King James Version** of Titus 3:9 is rendered "divisive man" in the **New King James Version**.

Opinions

The primary meaning of the Greek word "hairesis," which made its way into the English language as "heresy," is

"a choosing, choice' ...; then, 'that which is chosen,' and hence, 'an opinion,' especially a self-willed opinion, which is substituted for submission to the power of truth, and leads to division and the formation of sects" (Vine. 303).

Everyone has opinions, "a belief or judgment that rests on grounds insufficient to produce complete certainty" (Dictionary.com). My opinion is that "the Day" of Hebrews 10:25 is the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. I can offer what I consider good reasons for this view, but I cannot prove it as scripturally certain, so I don't ask anyone to believe it. The obligation of preachers and teachers is to "speak as the oracles of God" (1 Peter 4:11), to "preach the word" (2 Timothy 4:2), which "is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17). I must leave my opinions out of my preaching and teaching and present "book, chapter, and verse" for what I ask people to believe and practice. Those who preach and teach what they cannot prove by Scripture are guilty of teaching "heresies" (2 Peter 2:1).

Sects

The most common usage of the word "hairesis" in the New Testament is "sect" (Arndt & Gingrich. 23). The various parties of the Jews were called "sects" (Acts 5:17; 15:5; 24:5, 14; 26:5; 28:22). These Jewish sects were formed around human opinions rather than Scripture (Matthew 15:1-9), they were identified by sectarian names (Acts 5:17; 15:5), and they were jealous of other sects and of those who adhered to the doctrine of Christ (Acts 23:6-10). They were parallel to modern denominations in Christendom.

In two New Testament passages "hairesis" denotes a party or sect formed from within the Lord's church (1 Corinthians 11:18-19; Galatians 5:19-21). These sects are formed upon human opinions, whether it be damnable error (2 Peter 2:1-3), such as the premillennial denial that Christ now reigns on the throne of David (cf. Acts 2:29-32), or an innocent opinion raised to the level of the word of God and made a test of fellowship (Titus 3:9-11), such as the opinion that all in the worship assembly should drink the fruit of the vine in the Lord's Supper from the same drinking vessel. (The one "cup" is the contents, not the container. - 1 Corinthians 10:16)

Sects choose sectarian names to set them apart (1 Corinthians 1:11-13). I don't want to be identified as either "conservative" or "liberal," names unknown to the New Testament used to identify members of factions. Feel free to call me a "disciple" (Acts 9:1), "saint" (Acts 9:13), "Christian" (Acts 11:26), or "member" (1 Corinthians 12:27).

Jealousy abounds between such factions and toward those who simply follow the doctrine of Christ (3 John verses 9-10).

Church of Christ Not a Sect

The Jews of the first century viewed the Lord's church as a sect of Judaism (Acts 24:5,14; 28:22). They

contemptuously called members of the church “Nazarenes” (Acts 24:5), since the Lord was from the despised village of Nazareth (John 1:45-46). But the church found in the New Testament follows only the Scriptures (1 Timothy 3:14-15; 2 Timothy 3:16 - 4:5; 1 Peter 4:11) and is known by divinely given descriptions rather than a sectarian name (Acts 9:2; Romans 16:16; 1 Corinthians 1:2; Hebrews 12:22-24). It has no reason to be jealous of sects, for it has no rivals (Ephesians 1:22-23; 4:4; 5:23).

Causes

What causes heresy (sectarianism)? Hatred and wrangling among brethren can lead to the formation of sects (Galatians 5:20). When Christians behave as politicians, seeking their own way, their own advantage, positions of power or influence (2 Corinthians 12:20), they sin and form sects. Promoting opinions and speculating about unrevealed things can also lead to the formation of factions (Titus 3:9-11). Teaching false doctrine can also (2 Peter 2:1-3). A very common cause of sectarianism is unscriptural loyalty to men (1 Corinthians 1:11-13). I don't care what “Brother so-and-so,” who is the finest preacher you ever heard, says. What do the Scriptures teach?

Attitude Toward

What should be our attitude toward heretics, those who cause factions to arise by promoting their opinions or false doctrine? They destroy both themselves and those who follow them (2 Peter 2:1-3), they shall not inherit the kingdom of God (Galatians 5:19-21), and, after repeated admonitions, we must reject them (Titus 3:9-11).

Conclusion

“Heresy,” sectarianism, is damnable. We must scrupulously avoid it. Do not preach, teach, or promote opinions. Do not place loyalty to any man or group above Scripture. Make sure what we teach and accept is scriptural. Avoid the party spirit, loyalty to a group above loyalty to Christ. Refuse party labels. Mark and avoid those who persist in this sin. We must carefully watch our hearts, tongues, and lives to remain free of heresy.

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History of the Church #4

Clergy

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

Philip Schaff, perhaps the greatest church historian of all time, wrote concerning the historical period A.D. 100-311:

"The idea and institution of a special priesthood, distinct from the body of the people, with the accompanying notion of a sacrifice and altar, passed imperceptibly from the Jewish and heathen ... into the Christian church" (History: 2:123)

Cyprian, who died in 258, may “be called the father of the sacerdotal (priestly - KS) conception of the Christian ministry as a mediating agency between God and the people” (**History**. 2:126). Thus, the idea of a clergy separate from the lay people, a priesthood separate from ordinary Christians, whose duty is to offer sacrifices for the lay people and to interpret the will of God to them, was borrowed from Judaism and paganism and developed over the first two centuries after the apostolic age.

The Old Testament did indeed distinguish between priests and lay people. The sons of Aaron were the priests who, in distinction to the “lay people” (2 Chronicles 35:5,7,12-13), had the exclusive right and duty to offer sacrifices at the altar (Exodus 29:9; 40:5; Numbers 3:1).

But this priestly system is a part of the Law which was removed when Christ died on the cross (Hebrews 7:11-28). Christ alone is our High Priest (Hebrews 2:17; 3:1-2; 4:14-16; 5:5-11; 6:19-20; 9:11). All Christians are priests (1 Peter 2:4-5, 9; Revelation 1:4-6; 5:9-10; 20:6) and offer to God the living sacrifices of our bodies in transformed lives (Romans 12:1-2) and the sacrifices of the praise and thanksgiving of our lips, good deeds, and sharing with others (Hebrews 13:15-16). The incense we offer is our prayers (Revelation 5:8). Our only altar is the cross of Christ (Hebrews 13:10-12).

Christ alone is the Mediator between God and man (1 Timothy 2:5), and He makes intercession for us to God (Romans 8:34; Hebrews 7:25; 1 John 2:1). We should pray to the Father through Christ (Colossians 3:17).

No mere human stands between Christians and the Father as an intercessor. All Christians should pray for one another (James 5:16), and all may boldly come before the throne of grace through Christ our High Priest (Hebrews 4:14-16).

We need no clergy to authoritatively interpret the will of God. The faith was delivered to all the saints (Jude 3), that is, Christians (cf. Acts 9:1, 13; 11:25-26), and we capable of reading it and understanding it (Ephesians 3:1-4). In fact, it is our duty to understand the will of God (Ephesians 5:11).

The Master specifically forbade the special garments, titles, and honors that the clergy jealously claim (Matthew 23:5-12). Their ostentation stands in direct conflict with the humble service that is the mark of greatness in the kingdom of the lowly Nazarene (Matthew 11:29; 20:25-28; 23:5).

There is no place in the church of Christ for clergy.

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