

September 2017

Editor, Keith Sharp

Designer, William Stewart



- unless otherwise noted, answers to questions by Keith Sharp -

In This Issue...

- **Question from Nigeria about the Wine of the Lord's Supper**
- **What Is the Hardest Command?**
| *Jefferson David Tant*
- **Understanding The Church of Christ (Part 2)**
| *Wayne Fancher*
- **"The Bible"** | *Pat Farish*
- **What Happened To The Church Jesus Built? #5**
| *Tommy G. Thornhill*
- **The Life of a Christian** | *Jim Mickells*
- **No Longer Scythian** | *Mike Thomas*
- **Joining The Disciples** | *William J. Stewart*
- **The Teaching of the New Testament**
| *Sean P. Cavender*
- **Sacraments** | *Keith Sharp*
- **The Privilege of Prayer** | *Keith Sharp*

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

PHILIPPIANS
4:8

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

"Micah here lays down a principle which determines the difference between the true and the false teacher. It is not enough to preach platitudes, even when true; for unless one declares the things a people need to know, and unless he condemns the sins of which they are guilty, he is as much a false prophet as one who declares untruths, or that which contradicts truth" (Homer Hailey, **A Commentary on the Minor Prophets**. 203, comment on Micah 3:8)

"God has nothing better to offer any man than salvation through Christ. The man, therefore, who rejects Christ and his kingdom seals of necessity his own eternal condemnation" (Robert Milligan. **The New Testament Commentary: 9 - Epistle to the Hebrews**. 366)

"When a person becomes a Christian, he becomes a citizen of the heavenly city which is composed of innumerable angels, of members of the church on earth, and of the departed saints" (Neil R. Lightfoot, **Jesus Christ Today**. 239)

Question from Nigeria about the Wine of the Lord's Supper

Question

Brother there is a dialogue and serious argument over here concerning the right wine to use as the communion wine for the Lord's supper. Brother please I need your opinion on this because it's almost becoming a problem down here. We really debated on it yesterday after church service.

Answer

The specific scriptural requirement is "fruit of the vine" (Matthew 26:29; Mark 14:25; Luke 22:19). This has spiritual significance, since it represents the blood of Christ shed for us on the cross (Matthew 26:27-28; Mark 14:23-24; Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 10:16; 11:25-27). The phrase "fruit of the vine" is a Hebraism (Jewish way of speaking) for the juice of the grape, whether fresh grape juice or alcoholic wine. The cup of the Lord's supper must be the juice of the grape, whether fresh grape juice or alcoholic wine.

What Is The Hardest Commandment?

Jefferson David Tant | Roswell, Georgia, USA

From time to time, we see articles written about love. We remember a lawyer asking Jesus a question, "trying him: Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law? And he said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second like unto it is this, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." (Matt. 22:35-39).

We may have also memorized the characteristics of love that Paul described in First Corinthians 13, concluding with verse 13: "But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love."

"Well and good," you might say. "I really try to have a loving spirit, so what do you mean by 'the hardest commandment?'"

There is another aspect of love that God has also commanded, and that is found in Matthew 5:43-48:

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

Some may not think this is the **hardest** command, but it certainly ranks near the top in anybody's list. We might think the best way to deal with our enemies is to avoid them, but Christ went way beyond that. He said we are to **love your enemies and pray for them**. And Luke quoted Christ as saying "But I say unto you that hear, Love your enemies, do good to them that hate you" (Luke 6:27).

Can we really do that? If God wants it, then it can be done. Let me give you an example. My wife and I were returning from a wedding in the Baltimore, Maryland area, and stopped in Fredericksburg, Virginia. While there we visited some historic sites, some going back to the 1600s. One site was Fredericksburg Civil War Battlefield, where there were some 18,000 killed and wounded in the battle that raged December 11-15, 1862. A touching monument was erected on the battlefield in honor of a young soldier, Richard Rowland Kirkland.

"While the civil war entailed immense destruction and tragedy, it did not always engender hate. For two days following the battle, wounded Union soldiers, caught between the lines, cried out for water. Though exposure to enemy fire for even a moment meant almost certain death, Sergeant Richard R. Kirkland of the 2nd South Carolina Volunteers tried to help. "Filling several canteens with water, the young Confederate stepped over the stone wall to care for his wounded enemies."

"When Union soldiers understood Kirkland's purpose they ceased firing at him and cheered. For nearly two hours he continued his ministrations. Kirkland has since been known as 'The angel of Marye's Heights.' He died in battle at Chickamauga, Georgia, in September 1863. He was 19 years old."

But we have examples long before this. We remember that when Stephen was being stoned after his

message in Acts 7, this is recorded:

“When they had driven him out of the city, they began stoning him; and the witnesses laid aside their robes at the feet of a young man named Saul. They went on stoning Stephen as he called on the Lord and said, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!’ Then falling on his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, ‘Lord, do not hold this sin against them!’ Having said this, he fell asleep” (Acts 7:58-60).

And even before the event with Stephen, the greatest “love your enemies” act was the crucifixion of the Son of God—Jesus Christ. We remember that he was spit upon, cursed, tortured and finally nailed to the cross. We have been told death by crucifixion was possibly the most cruel means of putting someone to death that man has invented.

“When they came to the place called The Skull, there they crucified Him and the criminals, one on the right and the other on the left. But Jesus was saying, “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:33-34).

So...how do you treat your enemies, besides avoiding them? Some might say, “Well, I’m not Christ.” Neither was Stephen. Neither was Richard Kirkland.

And finally, how do you treat your brothers and sisters in Christ with whom you may have had some differences? Do you suppose God will have some separate places in heaven where we can go to avoid having to deal with them? Perhaps it would be good to learn to get along with them now while we have the opportunity.

Do you “love your enemies,” and “do good to them that hate you?” Yes, sometimes that’s hard to do. But if Christ told us to do it, it can be done. And someone has said, “The best way to overcome your enemy is to make him your friend.”

Understanding The Church Of Christ (Part 2)

Wayne Fancher | Searcy, Arkansas, USA

As stated in my first article in this series, the purpose of these articles is to help people understand why we do what we do in the Church of Christ. Before I go any further though I must say, not everyone in the Church of Christ would agree with everything I am writing. In the Church of Christ each congregation is totally independent and autonomous. So what I am writing is what I consider to be the foundational doctrines of the majority of the congregations or at least the congregations I know of.

To understand why we do things the way we do them in the Church of Christ you must understand our perspective of the two covenants, the Old Testament and the New Testament. Paul writing through the Holy Spirit in Galatians 4:24 says, “for these are the two covenants.” The first covenant spoken of here in Galatians 4:24 is the covenant that God made with the Children of Israel at Mount Sinai. For future reference this covenant will be call the first covenant. The second covenant is the New Covenant made between God and all mankind through the mediator of the New Covenant, Jesus Christ.

Exodus 34:27: “Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Write these words, for according to the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel.’”

Hebrews 9:15-18:

“And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.”

The first covenant was between God and the Children of Israel. When we Gentiles were allowed by God to be part of the Church, certain Pharisees in the Church started teaching that Gentiles had to be circumcised and keep the law of Moses to be saved.

Acts 15:5: "But some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up, saying, 'It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses.'"

Romans 3:1-2: "What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision? Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God."

The Apostles and elders in Jerusalem answered this false teaching through the Holy Spirit saying "We gave no such command" (Acts 15:24). Gentiles never have been under the first covenant nor were we ever expected to follow it as part of our service and obedience to God as Christians. The logical question then that follows is, exactly how is the Church, Jew and Gentile alike, supposed to view and use the Old Testament, the first covenant? In my next article I will attempt to answer this question from the scriptures. The reason again that I am writing this is because I believe from my studies of the scriptures and the Church of Christ in my generation that our perspective of the two covenants and how they are meant to be used by the Church is truly a foundational doctrine of the Church of Christ that must be understood to understand the actions and beliefs of the Church of Christ.

The Bible

Pat Farish | Waxachie, Texas, USA

When we think of the "Bible," normally we have in mind "the Book divine, by inspiration given." The word "Bible" never appears within the pages of the Bible. "Scripture", that which is written, is about the closest we come to that word; it appears about ten times. In the Lord's prayer, Jesus, praying certifies it as truth, saying to the Father "your word is truth" (John 17:17). Paul wrote the Corinthians that this material was the word of God. Paul wrote Timothy that it was, "Scripture breathed out by God" (2 Timothy 3:16-17). This Book is thus a word breathed out ("inspired") by God; it is the word of God, the truth. To the Corinthians Paul wrote that this material was in fact the mind of God, revealed to man by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:10b-13).

As to arrangement, it is composed of two major parts, the "Old" testament, in thirty-nine books, and the "New" testament in twenty-seven books.

Considering the source of the Bible, we are not surprised that it is powerful. "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes .."(Romans 1:16). And James wrote that we should "receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your soul" (James 1:21). It is wonderful that we have access to such power; but our access depends on our receiving, believing, and obeying that word for salvation.

And, salvation is what this is all about. The Bible is not a book of history, nor of geography, nor of science – though where it has occasion to deal with any part of any of them it is accurate. Rather than a book dealing with such secular things, it is the book revealing God's will for man; man's rebellion against and separation from God; and God's loving provision for man's redemption (John 3:16).

The Bible is understandable. It was written to be understood by all --- not just by seminarians, or clergymen of whatever stripe they may be. In this connection Paul told the Ephesians, I write so you can understand; and further, "do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is", Ephesians 5:17.

The primary requirement of understanding the word of God is, attitude. Jesus said, "If anyone's will is to do God's will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority" (John 7:17). The requirement Jesus announces is **not**, "be determined to know the truth." In such a determination there is no commitment to serve the Lord. So, what Jesus said is, if you will make up your mind to **do** the word, beforehand, when perhaps you do not know what He may expect of you, you may "know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority." Resolve that

where he leads I will follow: whatever the demand, that is what I will do.

The apostle Paul echoed this, by telling the Thessalonians that people would be lost because they did not love the truth (2 Thessalonians 2:10).

The Bible is the mind of God, revealed for men to know God's will and do it. There is no better use of one's time than to spend it in reading the Bible. By so doing you can learn what God would have you do, and what He has done for you. By such reading and resolution to apply what you read, you can be sanctified, drawn away from the world to Christ and God. "I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you" (Psalm 119:11).

What Happened To The Church Jesus Built? (#5)

Tommy G. Thornhill | Etna, Arkansas, USA

From a study of God's word we learn that the government and organization was very simple for the local church (Philippians 1:1). The bishops (elders) were to rule (lead) (Hebrews 13:7), with deacons serving under the elders, and the saints willing to work with these men (Hebrews 13:17). One of the qualification for an elder/bishop/pastor in the congregation, was that each of the men must be able to "hold fast the faithful word, as he has been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict" (Titus 1:9). According to God's plan responsibility for guiding the congregation and keeping them sound in the faith rested with the leadership (2 Timothy 1:13).

But, when the leadership is no longer committed to using the word of God as final authority, as per 1 Peter 4:11; Colossians 3:17, the door is open to allow changes in doctrine and worship. While weak-minded people, because of their lack of knowledge, might suggest changes in doctrine and worship, the responsibility for allowing such changes rested with the ecclesiastical dignitaries, the leaders who had now, without scriptural authority, melded into the clergy class and allowed the unscriptural changes to come into the church.

It wasn't long after the death of the apostles that changes in faith, doctrine, and worship began to be introduced. Holy water was introduced into some congregations ca. 120 A.D. This was a superstitious practice adopted from the pagans, who felt that consecrating the water gave it the power to frighten away demons, to remit venial sins (sins committed inadvertently or without forethought), to cure distraction, to elevate the mind and dispose it to devotion. Then the observance of Lent and Easter was introduced ca. 140 A.D. in some places. This became more universally adopted almost 200 years later, ca.312 AD.

In 325 A.D. a council of 318 bishops was assembled at Nicea to determine if Jesus Christ was the first of all God's created beings, by whom all other beings were created, or if He was equal to God the Father. The council ruled in favor of Jesus being equal with God and of the same substance, and the first written human creed, "the Nicene Creed," was formulated. But, the decision about Jesus Christ was reversed, and the Nicene creed rewritten to conform to the reversal, at the next church council held at Constantinople in 381 AD. It was also at the council of Nicea that the official date for Easter was set, a direct contradiction of Galatians 4:10-11.

The Nicene council was the first of six general councils held to deal with speculative theories concerning the nature of God, of Christ, and of the Holy Spirit. After the council of Nicea, 325, came the 2nd council at Constantinople (381 A.D.), the 3rd council at Ephesus (431 A.D.), 4th council of Chalcedon (451 A.D.), 5th council Constantinople (553 A.D.), and 6th council, at Constantinople (681). Another major council was the council of Nicea in 787 A.D.

Truth never changes, while human opinions do. What happened in these councils show why God never authorized them. Instead of the councils uniting those who claim to be people of God, they created human creeds and divisive practices (1 Corinthians 1:10; Galatians 1:6-9. This is contrary to the prayer of Jesus

in John 17:20-23. Not only did these councils and creeds bring division, many of them also lacked the dignity and decorum that one would expect in a religious assembly. Many of the teachings they were assembled to solve instead perpetuated and/or aggravated the situation.

As more pagans were converted they brought in some of their previous practices and ceremonies. They just transferred their purpose from pagan idol worship to Christian symbolism. They incorporated their idolatrous ideas with religious pictures, statues of saints, worship of angels, adoration of Mary (they began referring to "Mary, the mother of God," ca. 431 A.D., just before the 3rd council at Ephesus), and burning of incense and candles. These things did not come in without objection of some who still revered the word of God.

As these things began to be introduced into buildings used for church serves, one man, Agobard of Lyons, wrote against the adoration and worship of these images.

"That we have no authority for paying even to the saints that worship, which is due to God alone, and which they were ever found to decline. It was a cunning device of Satan to bring back idolatry, and under pretext of showing honor to the saints, to draw men away from that which is spiritual and degrade them to that which is sensual."

Another man, Lactantius, ridiculed the practice of those who lighted candles for God, as superstition. He mocked the idea of lighting candles for God as if He lived in the dark. We find all of these things being practiced today in various denominational bodies (Colossians 2:8, 20-23). This later evolved into prayers to the statues.

About 157 A.D. the doctrine of physical punishment for penitents who had fallen away from the church and then wanted to return was first advocated by some churches. It was more fully developed ca. 411 A.D. and fully adopted by the apostate Roman Catholic church in 1022 A.D. "Penance is a sacrament in which sin committed is forgiven. Penance remits the eternal hell and some of the temporal purgatory." This doctrine was a prelude to the mourner's bench.

The Life of a Christian

Jim Mickells | Lewisburg, Tennessee, USA

The word "Christian," as most know, is used three times in the Scriptures (Acts 11:26; 26:28; 1 Peter 4:16). The simple definition of this word is "a follower of Christ" (Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament. 672). There are many today who make the claim of being Christians, yet they have never taken the steps given in the New Testament to become such. A follower of Christ will listen to the voice of his Master. We are told to believe in Him (John 8:24), repent of our sins (Luke 13:3,5), confess our faith in the Lord (Matthew 10:32-33), to be baptized to be saved (Mark 16:16), and to be faithful in service to Him even if it means our death (Revelation 2:10). This does not nullify the grace of God, but through our obedient faith, we can have access to His wonderful grace (Romans 5:1-2).

If we have submitted ourselves to these commands, having washed our souls in the blood of the Lamb, we are now pure and just in His sight. Yet this is only the beginning of our walk with the Lord. A faithful Christian will show in his/her life that he is truly dedicated to His cause. It is not a mere confession but a lifestyle devoted to His service. We will no longer conform ourselves to the world but will be transformed by the renewing of minds (Romans 12:1). Presenting our bodies as a living sacrifice unto to Him whom we love and now serve (Romans 12:1). Notice a few characteristics with me that will identify a person who truly is a follower of Christ.

In knowledge he is a disciple. "And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (Acts 11:26). The word "disciple" is defined as "Mathçteis means more in the NT than a mere pupil or learner. It is an adherent who accepts the instruction given to him and makes it his rule of conduct, e.g., the disciples of John" (**CWSD – NT**, p. 936). A disciple of Christ wants to learn from his Master, and once he knows what

is taught, he gives strict adherence to those commands. We would do well to heed the instruction given by Paul to the young evangelist Timothy. "Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine... Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all" (1 Timothy 4:13,15; emphasis mine - JM).

In labor he is a worker. Our Master came to this earth to do the work of His Father, which work He finished (John 4:34; 9:4; 17:4). He selected the apostles to take the gospel throughout the world (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16, etc.). Later Paul says this work had been accomplished (Colossians 1:23). The early church was persecuted; therefore, they went everywhere preaching the word (Acts 8:1,4). We too must do all we can to share the gospel with those who are lost. Yet there is other work to do as well. There are those who are sick who need to be visited; the weak need to be encouraged; there are Bible classes which need to be taught; those who have fallen away need to be restored; there may be widows and orphans who need our help, etc. He depends upon us to do His work.

In preservation he is salt. When Jesus spoke to His disciple in His Sermon on the Mount, He said, "You are the salt of the earth" (Matthew 5:13). "Salt" is defined as, "Natural salt which purifies, cleanses, and preserves from corruption (Luke 14:34; Sept.: Leviticus 2:13; Judges 9:45). In Matthew 5:13 and Mark 9:50 applied spiritually to the disciples of Christ who were to circulate among and purify the corrupted mass of mankind by their heavenly doctrines and holy examples" (**CWSD – NT**, p. 119). We live in the world but are not of the world. If our nation is to avoid destruction, it will be because of the influence of the righteous upon the masses of those who know not God. Salt has that preserving influence.

In illumination he is light. Jesus said to His disciples, "You are the light of the world" (Matthew 5:14). The definition of the word "light" is, "Metonymically, a light, the author or dispenser of moral and spiritual light, a moral teacher" (**CWSD – NT**, 1462). Not only should we teach the gospel of Christ to the lost, but we also must live in such a way they can see Christ living in us (Galatians 2:20). Peter says that wives can live in such a way, chaste conduct accompanied by the fear of Jehovah, to win their husbands to the Lord. A righteous and good life is a powerful way to illuminate the world around us.

Are you truly a Christian? You could just be one in claim and in name. Be a follower of Christ in every aspect of your life. Show the world that the Lord means something to you. By doing so you can have a positive influence upon all those who know you. Love the Lord in deed and truth and not just in word and tongue (1 John 3:18).

No Longer Scythian

Mike Thomas | Beaver Dam, Kentucky, USA

One of the defining features of Christianity is social equality. The apostle Paul emphasized this when he told the Colossians that in Christ "there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all" (Colossians 3:11). They were to no longer see each other as barbarian or Scythian (SITH-ee-uhn). What did he mean by that?

The Scythians were a race of people who lived in what is modern Russia and were notorious for brutality and inhumane behavior. Nelson's Bible Dictionary says, "Eventually they became allies of the Assyrians and oppressed western Persia for almost three decades.... After the Medes became a world power, they finally drove the Scythians back to southern Russia" (page 959). Their legacy, however, became a permanent concept in Jewish ideology of cruelty and ignorance. "They were nomads who neither plowed nor sowed...they had the most filthy habits and never washed in water...they drank the blood of the first enemy killed in battle, and made napkins of the scalps and drinking bowls of the skulls of the slain" (Herodotus). Thus, to be Scythian was to be a violent, barbaric, and untrustworthy.

So what was Paul's point in telling the Colossians to no longer view each other as Scythian? Are Christians to remove all sense of judgment, ignore personal safety and associate with everyone, including

those given to violence and brutality? Certainly not. The word of God warns, “Make no friendship with an angry man, and with a furious man do not go, lest you learn his ways and set a snare for your soul” (Proverbs 22:24-25). Paul was not dismissing this rule in telling the Colossians to receive Scythians. It is a dangerous matter to partner with those given to cruelty, social upheaval and violence.

Paul was writing to Christians; a group of people who had “put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge” (Colossians 3:10-11). He was not writing to people who lived apart from the authority of God. This was a group of people who had repented of their sins and was no longer given to “anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language” (verse 8). They had been called to “put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another” (verse 13). If there were those present with a Scythian-type past, they were no longer living in it. They had repented of all wickedness and humbly obeyed the gospel. If the Scythians present were that in race only (and not actually of a violent past), the Colossians were to look past those social reputations and receive them anyway. Either way, the Scythians at Colossae were not people who celebrated or nurtured violence.

Because of this commitment to righteousness, the Colossians were to no longer view each other in derogatory terms, whether Greek, Jew, barbarian, or Scythian. They were part of a special group of people, as the “holy and beloved” of God, and were to treat each other with the same tender, forgiving spirit that Christ had shown them. The mercy of God and the cleansing power of Christ’s blood had caused Him to no longer remember their sins (Hebrews 10:17).

Consequently, anyone who is in Christ should view fellow Christians with the same level of respect and esteem – by not remembering forgiven sins against one another or by not judging each other with unfair biases. A forgiven Scythian is no less a child of God than a forgiven Jew or Gentile; and all are equal in Christ as pardoned sinners.

“For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus”
(Galatians 3:25-27).

Joining The Disciples

William J. Stewart | Odessa, Ontario, Canada

Saul left Jerusalem, headed for Damascus, intending to arrest any Christians he found there (Acts 9:1-2). On the way, he met the Lord, and in Damascus, he was taught the gospel and baptized by Ananias (Acts 9:17-18). Immediately he began to associate and work with the Christians in Damascus (Acts 9:19-22). However, a plot against his life (Acts 9:23-25) made it necessary for Saul to leave Damascus.

He returned to Jerusalem and tried to join the disciples there (Acts 9:26). They did not receive him. He claimed to be faithful to Christ, but they did not believe him.

Barnabas seems to have had knowledge of Saul's conversion and work among the disciples in Damascus, since he was willing to take him to the apostles (Acts 9:27). To do so without evidence of Saul's faithfulness would potentially be devastating for the church, since Saul was a known enemy (Acts 8:3; 9:1).

After hearing about Saul's conversion and preaching, the Jerusalem church received him into fellowship (Acts 9:28).

Luke didn't write this as a neat tidbit about the apostle Paul's life. This text is one of a handful on congregational membership. Let's notice what the Bible reveals about becoming a member of a local church.

1. Being a member of a local church is important. If it were not, Paul wouldn't have sought to join the disciples. Go-it-alone Christians are foreign to the Bible. The benefit of fellowship is in the local church. God-designed spiritual leadership is in the local congregation. Being a member of a local church is important.
2. Membership with the local congregation is assumed for the one who has just been baptized. There is nothing about Paul or any other who had just been baptized making a request for membership or being examined by church leaders prior to being received into fellowship. By obedience to the gospel and confession of faith (1 Timothy 6:12), they are accepted into fellowship. Acts 2:41 simply says they were added to them. The only time this may not be so is if an individual was baptized while traveling, and has no intention of remaining there. In such a case, new converts ought to join a group of disciples after returning home. Perhaps a good example if this is Onesimus, who was baptized by Paul in Rome. He felt it was necessary for this runaway slave to return to his master (Philemon 1:10-17), who was from Colosse. In his letter to the Colossians, Paul referred to Onesimus as "one of your number" (Colossians 4:9, NASB). He was accepted as a member in the church at Colosse.
3. It was right for those in leadership to seek proof of the faithfulness of any who desire membership in the local church. It was after they heard details of Paul's conversion and work in Damascus that he was received into fellowship. We want to be sure, first of all, that those who seek membership in the local church have actually obeyed the gospel, that they are Christians. Further, we want to know they are faithful to God. In the New Testament, we read of a practice where people who went from one place to another might have a letter of commendation (2 Corinthians 3:1; Acts 18:27; cf. 1 Corinthians 16:3; Romans 16:1-2).
4. If one comes our way seeking to be a member of the local church, it is right to find out if there is sin present for which they have been withdrawn from by another congregation (1 Corinthians 5:1-5; Romans 16:17; 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14). If there is, such must be remedied before they could be received as a member.
5. Likewise, before receiving someone as a member, we want to know what they believe or teach. Paul said we want to be of the same mind and the same judgment (1 Corinthians 1:10). To that end, John said we must test the spirits to see whether they are of God or not (1 John 4:1). Again, John warned the church of those who go beyond the doctrine of Christ, and said not to receive them (2 John 1:9-10). If there are differences on matters of opinion, it is neither here nor there. However, there should be agreement on matters of faith if we are going to have fellowship and work with one another.
6. There is a distinction to be made between attending a church and being a member of a church. Unless we have closed assemblies, anyone may attend a meeting of the church. That does not make them a member. Non-Christians may assemble with us - they are not members. It is possible for a Christian to assemble with a local church for a time and still not have been received into membership.

Paul went to Jerusalem, seeking to join the disciples. After his faith and works were known, he was received as a member. He was described as being "with them at Jerusalem, coming in and going out" (Acts 9:28).

It is important for a Christian to be a member of a local church. It is equally important for a local church to be careful in receiving members.

GETTING TO KNOW YOUR BIBLE

The Teachings of the New Testament

Sean P. Cavender | Bald Knob, Arkansas, USA

Throughout our study of getting to know our Bibles, we have seen the two major divisions in our Bible: the Old Testament and New Testament. The Old Testament has 39 books, whereas the New Testament has

27 books, for a total of 66 books in our Bibles.

The Old Testament was God's revelation and will made known specifically to the nation of Israel. It contained promises of a Messiah Who would come and save all people who might believe, not just Israelites. So when Christ came, He gave us a new law and a better covenant. That law is revealed in the New Testament. So what are some of the major points of emphasis in the New Testament?

We learn the plan of salvation. God sent His only begotten Son to this world so that those who believe in Him may have eternal life (John 3:16). Those who believe the gospel of Jesus Christ will be saved (Romans 1:16). Those who obey the truth will be granted life everlasting. However, those who do not obey the gospel will not be saved, but will suffer eternal death (2 Thessalonians 1:8-9).

So what does it mean to obey the gospel? And how do we do it? We must have faith which comes through hearing the words of God (Romans 10:17). We then must repent of our sins, or we will remain in sin and perish (Luke 13:3, 5). Then we must confess our faith in Christ as the Son of God who died for our sins (Matthew 16:16; Romans 10:9-10). We must be buried with Christ in baptism, united with Him in his death and His resurrection, being given new life (Romans 6:3-6). Finally, we must live to serve God in holiness and faithfulness (Romans 6:12-14). As we serve God faithfully in obedience to the gospel, we can look forward to the reward of receiving the crown of life (James 1:12).

The New Testament also teaches us how to worship God. We must worship Him in spirit and in truth (John 4:24). While we must engage the heart in worship, we must also engage the mind to properly worship (1 Corinthians 14:14-15). We worship God through prayers and thanksgiving, petitioning the throne of God for grace and mercy. We also sing praises to God (Colossians 3:16; Ephesians 5:19). The New Testament gives no commandment of using instruments in worship, but only commands that we sing, engaging the heart and mind. We preach and teach God's word for the use of edifying the church (Acts 20:7). We also remember the Lord's death by partaking of the Lord's Supper each first day of the week (Acts 20:7). Members of the local congregation also give of their means to support the work of the church (1 Corinthians 16:1-2).

The New Testament is our guide and authority and we learn the plan of salvation and how we should properly worship God.

History of the Church #5

Sacraments

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

Catholics believe "Our Savior instituted seven Sacraments, namely, Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Penance, Extreme Unction, Orders and Matrimony...." (Gibbons. 219).

The word "sacrament" is never found in the Bible, nor is the idea there. "Sacrament" is from the Latin "sacramentum," meaning mystery. The term "mystery" is found twenty-seven times in the New Testament and simply means "a hidden thing, secret" (Thayer. 420). God's plan for human redemption was a mystery (secret) which is now revealed (made known) by the writings of the apostles (Ephesians 3:1-7).

The Catholics have seven sacraments, and Protestants recognize two: baptism and the Lord's Supper. But the word "mystery" is never applied in the New Testament to an outward act, whether baptism, the Lord's Supper, or any other.

By "sacrament" Catholics mean "a visible sign instituted by Christ by which grace is conveyed to our souls" (Gibbons, 218). Protestants conceive of sacraments as "ordinances" or "institutions" which "are used as illustrations of salvation." Both are wrong. God demands we obey the faith (Romans 1:5; 16:25-27) in order to be saved (Hebrews 5:8-9).

The Lord's supper is not a sacrament by which grace is mystically conveyed to our souls. It is a simple memorial of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ Jesus (1 Corinthians 11:23-25). The priest does not sacrifice Christ again when he says the mass. "Christ was offered once" (Hebrews 9:27-28).

Baptism is not a sacrament. It is an act of obedient faith (Romans 1:5; 16:25; Galatians 3:26-27) in which sinners receive the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16), are saved (Mark 16:16), and gain entrance into Christ (Romans 6:3-4; Galatians 3:26-27).

The idea of sacraments was an invention of church theologians in the second and third century by which the salvation of the laity depended on the dispensing of sacraments by the clergy. This brought the common people under the control of the clergy and eventually led to the political power of the papacy. This power reached its zenith when Henry IV, the King in Germany, waited miserably in the snow for three days in January, 1077 outside the papal residence in Canossa to have his excommunication lifted by Pope Gregory VII.

Works Cited

Gibbons, James Cardinal, **The Faith of Our Fathers.**

Thayer, J.H., **A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament.**

The Privilege of Prayer

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

The memory of Daddy Sprott, my maternal grandfather, in the rocking chair in his little farm house on forty acres of rocky Ozarks hill top is precious to me. Around 8:00 in the evening he would call to my grandmother, "Emma, get the Book." Mama Sprott would read a chapter from the Bible, and then Daddy Sprott would get down on a knee and pray. He wouldn't say a nice, eloquent, memorized prayer. When he prayed, he poured out his heart to a loving Father.

I have heard it said, "Christians don't pray as they used to." I know of no objective proof either to confirm or disprove this assertion, but I do know that prayer is absolutely essential and central to the life of a Christian.

What, then, does the New Testament teach about Christians and prayer? I will answer this question by posing five specific questions about prayer and by allowing the will of Christ to answer these inquiries.

What is prayer? Paul describes prayer by using four words which describe its components. He admonishes, "Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men" (1 Timothy 2:1). "Supplications" are "the expressions of personal need" (Thayer. 126), i.e., asking God for things we personally need. It is like a helpless beggar asking for sustenance. "Prayers" are "any offering of our desires and wishes to God" (Bengel. 2:512). This is the general word covering all of our subject and is simply "talking to God." "Intercessions" are "seeking the presence and hearing of God on behalf of others" (Vine. 2:267), i.e., asking blessings, not for ourselves, but for other people. "Giving thanks" is simply telling God "thank you" for the blessings we receive daily.

Should Christians pray? Yes, of course we should, because, rather than prayer being an empty exercise to make us feel better, we can be assured that, when we pray in harmony with God's will, He actually does hear and grant our requests (1 John 5:14-15). We ought to speak to the Father regularly as an important part of our daily lives, because we are so commanded (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18). We have the example of prayer in the life of our Master, Who began His public ministry with prayer immediately following His baptism by John, closed His work on earth with prayer in the garden and on the cross, and regularly and sincerely communed with His Father in prayer throughout His walk here (cf. Luke 6:12). The early church also left an approved example of regular prayer (cf. Acts 12:5). We ought to pray because believing prayer,

not the psychiatrist's couch, is the refuge and comfort for the Christian from the heartache and worry of life (Philippians 4:6-7). What soothing balm for an injured heart to carry all our troubles to One Who always cares and can and will always help!

But, whose prayer will God hear? Peter declares:

For the eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, And His ears are open to their prayers; But the face of the LORD is against those who do evil (1 Peter 3:12).

God will not hear just anyone's prayer. He will only accept the petitions of those who are in heart and life righteous, i.e., right in reference to God's law, as the Lord would have us to be. For our hearts to be righteous when we approach the Father, we must truly believe He will hear us (James 1:6-7), pray sincerely, not just to be heard or seen of men (Matthew 6:5-6), approach Him in humility (1 Peter 5:6-7), speak to Him in reverence, not with the brash familiarity with which we address our own peers (Psalm 111:9), not ask selfishly (James 4:3), truly repent of our sins (Acts 8:22), and be willing to forgive who wrong us (Matthew 6:14-15). Furthermore, our lives must be righteous (1 John 3:22), i.e., we must be leading lives in harmony with His precepts.

How are we to pray? Regardless of currently popular doctrine, the Father refuses to hear some kinds of petitions. We, as the Lord's disciples, should have the attitude, "Lord, teach us to pray" (Luke 11:1). The object of our requests, i.e., the One addressed, should be God (Matthew 6:9). not the virgin Mary, dead saints, angels, or any other created being. The avenue of our prayer, i.e., the One through Whom we pray, must be Jesus Christ (Romans 1:8; Colossians 3:17), not saints or Mary. The nature of the petition should be "according to his will," i.e., in harmony with the Law of the Lord. The time we should pray is "always" (Ephesians 6:18), and the place is "everywhere" (1 Timothy 2:8).

For what should we pray? Scriptural prayer is actually the pleading of God's promises. The Father has not promised to give us anything we desire in answer to prayer, but He has pledged to give us specific blessings for which we may implore.

The heavenly Father has promised to grant certain supplications. As Christians we may and should pray for the forgiveness of our sins (Acts 8:22), for deliverance from temptation (Matthew 6:13), for wisdom (James 1:5), for comfort in afflictions (James 5:13), for health (James 5:14-15), and for our material necessities (Matthew 6:11). In none of our supplications should we either request or expect a miracle, for God has promised no such intervention today.

The Father will also hear our scriptural intercessions. We should pray that God's Will might be done (Matthew 6:10), determining to be faithful instruments in carrying out His revealed Will. We should intercede in behalf of Gospel preachers, that they might be presented with opportunities to reach the lost and that they might plainly proclaim the truth (Colossians 4:2-4). Christians ought to pray for "all men," particularly those "in authority" (1 Timothy 2:1-2) and for the health of others (James 5:16). We must never forget to sincerely and lovingly intercede in behalf of the welfare of the church, that Christians might "be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding" (Colossians 1:9).

Christians of all people should be thankful for the Father's blessings. We should "in everything give thanks" (1 Thessalonians 5:18).

The life of a Christian may be summarized in one word, "faith," i.e. trust (2 Corinthians 5:7). The deepest expression of that dependent trust in God is prayer. The Lord once spoke a parable to teach "that men always ought to pray and not lose heart" (Luke 18:1). Having spoken of a Widow who persistently troubled an unjust judge until he finally granted her request, in order to emphasize the surety that a just and merciful Father will speedily hear His children, the Master concluded, "Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8).

Faith is synonymous with prayer in this verse. When we pray we have no miraculous proof that God hears

us. We have only faith in the promises of His Word. Prayer is the ultimate expression of our faith.

Devout Christians with deep, trusting, unshakable faith are the ones who “pray without ceasing.” Dear Christian, prayer does avail; our loving Father does hear His children’s requests (1 John 5:14-15). Therefore:

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).

Work Cited

Bengel, J.A., **New Testament Word Studies.**

Thayer, J.H., **A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament.**

Vine, W.E., **An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words.**



If you no longer wish to receive these emails, please reply to this message with "Unsubscribe" in the subject line or simply click on the following link: [Unsubscribe](#)

[Click here](#) to forward this email to a friend

Meditate On These Things (MOTT)
2950 Hwy 5 S
Mountain Home, Arkansas 72653
US

[Read](#) the VerticalResponse marketing policy.

Vertical DELIVERED BY
response
Try It Free Today!