

# December 2017

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

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Finally, brethren  
**WHATEVER  
THINGS** are true  
are noble  
are just  
are pure  
are lovely  
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](http://christistheway.com).

## Does God Hear and Answer Prayer Today?

S. Leonard Tyler | via **The Preceptor**, April, 1985

This is a very fundamental and potent question. It strikes at the basic thoughts of whether or not there are divine blessings granted to Christians today through prayer. If God does not hear prayer today, why pray? If He hears but will not answer, what reason is there for prayer? Prayer stems from the desire of one's heart to be heard and answered. Therefore, if there are no reasons to believe that God will hear and answer, can there be any confidence in prayer? If God hears but will not answer, to me, makes void every divine reason and kills every incentive to pray. Hearing alone kills prayer just as faith alone is dead (James 2:17, 20). It takes reason to believe that God will hear and answer prayer, to have reason to pray. And faith comes by hearing God's word (Romans 10:17). What does God's Word say?

### Some Bible Teaching Regarding Prayer

Jesus often prayed to His Father. He rose up early, went to a solitary place and prayed (Mark 1:35). He prayed with and for others (Mark 14:32-35; John 12:27-30, 17). There are some fourteen recorded prayers of Jesus in the New Testament. His prayers were not ceremonious speeches, verbal displays or empty forms. They were expressions from His very heart and soul; simple, plain and meaningful, offered to His Father. He felt the need to pray and was confident that His Father would hear and answer. But he prayed, "Not my will, but thine, be done" (Luke 22:42). We should cultivate His attitude today.

Jesus taught His disciples "always to pray and not to faint" (Luke 18:1). He gave an example as to how

and for what to pray and introduced it with "After this manner therefore pray ye" (Matthew 6:5-18; Luke 11:1-13). These texts also teach humility, dependence, and confidence in God's hearing and - and properly answering. Prayer is not a hypocritical verbal package or pseudo manifestation of humility or ostentatious display of oneself. It is a means of humbly expressing one's most inner feelings, desires, and petitions of heart to his Heavenly Father. Prayer should be offered with full confidence that "ask and it shall be given unto you," just as, "Seek and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you" (Luke 11:9-13; Matthew 7:7-12). Just as God is cognizant of the seeking and the knocking, He will give audience to the asker. To understand and properly apply these terms, one must again, go to God's word. The terms do not stand alone, but stand they do - in harmony with God's will.

### **Christians Are Taught Throughout The New Testament To Pray**

Paul prayed for other Christians (Ephesians 1:16). He taught others to pray. He wrote, "Continuing instant (to persevere, continue in. slt.) in prayer." "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit." "Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving." "Pray without ceasing" (Romans 12:12; Ephesians 6:18, 20; Colossians 4:2). He instructed the young preacher, Timothy:

*"I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions and giving of thanks, be made for all men... I will therefore that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting"* (1 Timothy 2:1,8).

"Without wrath and doubting" means with a pure heart free from anger and dissensions. Other texts could be added but these are sufficient to convince the honest seeker that prayer has a great value in and impact upon the mind of God. God's ear and heart is open to the pleadings of His people.

What other conclusion can one reach for so much instruction in attitude, appreciation, and participation in prayer? What purpose can prayer serve, if not heard and answered? Only a psychological effect upon the mind of Christians? Just an emotional boost through a false concept? No! God does not work that way. Obedient faith is based upon and flows from a true understanding of God's Word. Therefore Christians act upon real, genuine faith, not fictitious, make-believe emotionalism or sensationalism. Prayer must be real, and the reason for praying is to be heard and answered.

Peter wrote that husbands should dwell with their wives according to knowledge, "That your prayers be not hindered" (1 Peter 3:7). If one could hinder (to interfere with the progress of) his prayer by mistreating his wife, infers that unhindered prayer has an advantage, is heard, and answered. Peter tells what is meant by "hindered" in verse 12, "For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers. But the face of the Lord is against them that do evil." The hindered prayers are not heard and answered as are the prayers of the righteous. A question, "Are these passages applicable today?" I believe they are.

Paul explains, "I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also" (1 Corinthians 14:15), just as he sings. He put himself wholly into his prayer according to his understanding of God's truth. As Mr. Vine correctly states, I believe, in his New Testament Word Study, that Paul's prayers flow from, "the seat of reflective consciousness, comprising the faculties of perception and understanding." This must be done for prayer to be effective just as one's obedience in other acts. Prayer must flow voluntarily and sincerely from the heart. It is an act of faith in expectation of being heard and answered.

Paul's confidence in God should reflect into our own heart. He expressed it, "Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us" (Ephesians 3:20) How strong is your faith?

James said, "confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed .... The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (James 5:16). This is a plain statement that prayer will accomplish - be heard and answered. He uses Elijah to illustrate the value and effectiveness of prayer. Is it miraculous? No, not today.

When one prays to the Father, he is not asking God to do for him what he can do or for a miraculous manifestation of God's power. He is praying for God's providential help.

Providential help, to me, is God's enabling power and care exercised through His own established laws (physical and spiritual) in sustaining and accomplishing the ordained purpose of His creation.

Let us observe:

"all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28) .

"God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able" (1 Corinthians 10:13).

"The eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are opened unto their prayers" (1 Peter 3:12).

These texts along with others announce God's care and protection for His people, not miraculous, since miracles have ceased, but through His Divine established laws His eternal purpose will be accomplished. Call it providential or whatever, we must be as Abraham of old, "He wavered not through unbelief... and being fully assured that what he had promised, he was able also to perform" (Romans 4:20-21). How? I do not know. That is God's part, mine is to believe, obey, and trust.

### **What About The Prayer Of An Erring Child of God?**

In Acts 8, Peter instructed Simon to "Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee." Could he have done this and been forgiven? What about today? In verse 24, Simon pled, "Pray ye to the Lord for me." Would their prayer be heard through God's natural, spiritual laws? Can a Christian pray today in a like situation and be heard and answered? I believe so. God's word so teaches (1 John 1:9 - 2:6; 5:14-15). These are plain statements that God hears and answers prayers. The text or context do not necessitate miraculous intervention. God's laws provide the avenue of prayer and His hearing and answering when all is done according to His will.

Keep in mind, a prayer is offered to the Father. He is responsible to answer in His own time and way. It could be negative, positive, modified or as requested but God decides what is best for all concerned and responds according to His own choosing. **He knows what is best and will so answer.**

With Paul, God thought best not to remove the thorn in his flesh. Paul tells us God's answer, "And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee ... Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me" (2 Corinthians 12:9). We should pray, "Thy will be done," and be therein content. Paul was. He said, "Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities ... for Christ' sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong (Verse 10).

### **Things To Keep In Mind When We Pray**

(1) Miracles have ceased, therefore, one need not expect his prayer to be miraculously answered. This does not nullify the effectiveness of prayer. God functions through His established laws, both physical and spiritual. When one through faith complies with His teaching, He will fulfill His promises.

(2) God's thoughts and ways are not man's, therefore, we must allow God the privilege (it is His prerogative) to decide positive or negative, when and how He chooses to answer. Just because God's judgment differs from or alters mine does not mean that God is incapable of answering. It is His way of answering.

(3) Christians must refrain from the Naamanic attitude. He predetermined What, When, and How his leprosy would be healed. But it did not work the way he planned. The prophet sent his servant to Naaman

with his message of healing. Naaman said, "Behold I thought," and went away in a fit of anger (2 Kings 5). Later he returned, obeyed, and was cleansed.

Many honest but deluded or thoughtless Christians pray with prefixed specifics as to what, how, and when. Then, when God answers in His own time and way, they are unhappy and conclude, God does not hear and answer prayers today. Look at an illustration. A child goes to his earthly father and asks for something. The father may grant it, refuse it, alter it, or advise waiting or certain action be done, nonetheless he answers. An obedient child should accept the fathers choosing with grace and be thankful. Should not we allow our Heavenly Father at least that much consideration?

(4) Prayer must be in obedience to God's will.

*"And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's works, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear ... The eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers"* (1 Peter 1:17; 3:12).

David said, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me" (Psalm 66:18). Solomon wrote, "He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be an abomination" (Proverbs 28:9).

(5) Prayer must be in faith.

*"But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering, for he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord"* (James 1:6-7).

"But without faith it is impossible to please him" (Hebrews 11:6).

(6) Prayer must be in resignation and submission to God's will. Jesus prayed, "Father, if thou be willing, ... nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done" (Luke 22:42). This is the very essence of confidence demonstrated. John expresses his confidence as absolute, "If we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us ... we have the petitions that we desired of him" (1 John 5:14-15). The text has nothing in it to associate it with the miraculous. It is an expression of God's general law applied to specific facts of prayer, that prayer offered according to God's Will, e will hear and answer. Only good comes from God "with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." What a privilege and blessing in prayer.

Mr. Charles C. Converse wrote in the hymn, "What A Friend We Have In Jesus":

'Oh, what peace we often forfeit;  
Oh, what needless pain we bear;  
All because we do not carry,  
Everything to God in prayer."

Prayer is an opened door to God's throne, even more than that, to God's heart through Jesus His Son. Therefore we should "continue instant in prayer. ... Pray without ceasing," for God hears and answers the righteous man's prayer.

There is a beautiful thought provoking stanza in "Did You Think To Pray?"

"When sore trials came upon you,  
Did you think to pray?  
When your soul was bowed in sorrow,  
Balm of Gilead did you borrow,  
At the gates of day?

O how praying rests the weary!  
Prayer will change the night to day;  
So when life seems dark and dreary,  
**Don't forget to pray."**

Let us follow Jesus' words, "Always to pray and not to faint."

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## Answering the Sabbath Observance (2)

Jefferson David Tant | Roswell, Georgia, USA

### Reasons for Not Observing the Sabbath

(1) The Sabbath was given only to Israel. During the Patriarchal Age, there is no command or example of people observing the Sabbath as a religious requirement, and no penalty is mentioned for not observing the Sabbath. During the Mosaical Age, we have all three—commands, examples of observance, and a penalty for failing to keep the Sabbath. The penalty? “So all the congregation brought him outside the camp and stoned him to death with stones, just as the LORD had commanded Moses” (Numbers 15:36). His crime? He had gathered wood on the Sabbath. During the New Testament age—no command, example, or penalty. Note also that this penalty of “stoning” is said to be a part of the “ceremonial” law or Law of Moses. Yet this passage said it is a commandment of the Lord. Therefore, by the reasoning of the Sabbatarians, those who break the Sabbath today should be stoned to death. If not, why not?

The Sabbath was a sign between God and Israel, commemorating their deliverance from Egypt. In the midst of giving the Ten Commandments, we have these words in Deuteronomy 5:15:

*“You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out of there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to observe the Sabbath day.”* (cf. Exodus 20:2)

The same thought is expressed in Nehemiah 9:13-14:

*“Then You came down on Mount Sinai, And spoke with them from heaven; You gave them just ordinances and true laws, Good statutes and commandments. So You made known to them Your holy Sabbath, And laid down for them commandments, statutes and law, Through Your servant Moses.”*

Note that the Law was given on Sinai when they came out of Egypt, not before—not with their fathers.

In the account of the giving of the Ten Commandments in Deuteronomy 5, note what was said about the covenant: “The LORD our God made a covenant with us at Horeb. The LORD did not make this covenant with our fathers, but with us, with all those of us alive here today” (5:2-3). If the Ten Commandment covenant was not made with their fathers, then the Sabbath commandment was not given until Moses! Therefore it was not “from the beginning.”

(2) The entire covenant ended at the cross. Earlier we noted Colossians 2:14-17, but let us be reminded again: Christ

*“blotted out the bond written in ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us: and he hath taken it out that way, nailing it to the cross; having despoiled the principalities and the powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it. Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of a feast day or a new moon or a Sabbath day: which are a shadow of the things to come; but the body is Christ’s.”*

Note further that the Sabbath day and the things associated with it are said to be a shadow of things to come, but Christ is the substance. If you see the shadow of a person coming around the corner, you know that is not the real thing. Then when the real person appears, the shadow is gone. So it is, Paul says, with the things connected with the Law of Moses and the Ten Commandments.

When Solomon had completed the building of the temple, he addressed the people who had assembled for the dedication. His remarks are recorded in 1 Kings 8:12-21. That last verse (21), reads, “There I have set a place for the ark, in which is the covenant of the LORD, which He made with our fathers when He brought them from the land of Egypt.” What was made when Israel came out of Egypt? The “covenant of the Lord.” What was included in that covenant? The Ten Commandments—the law concerning the Sabbath.

The writer of Hebrews elaborates on the change in the covenants in Hebrews 8:

*“But now has he obtained a ministry the more excellent, by so much as he is also the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted upon better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, then would no place have been sought for a second. For finding fault with them, he said, Behold, the days come, says the Lord, That I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah; Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers In the day that I took them by the hand to lead them forth out of the land of Egypt; For they continued not in my covenant, And I regarded them not, says the Lord” (verses 6-9).*

Then verse 13: “In that he says, A new covenant he has made the first old. But that which is becoming old and waxes aged is nigh unto vanishing away.” Who is it that made the covenant? God. When did God make that covenant? When he brought them out of Egypt. What was included in that covenant? The Ten Commandments. And what did he say about that first covenant? He made it “old” and it was “vanishing away,” because he made a “new covenant.”

*“But now we have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter. What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, ‘**You shall not covet**’” (Romans 7:4-7).*

Paul says we have been “released from the Law,” meaning we are no longer bound under it. Which Law? The one that included “you shall not covet.” Which Law is that? The Ten Commandment Law! The same one that tells us to “remember the Sabbath.”

(3) Those who would be justified by the Law given on Mt. Sinai are severed from Christ and fallen from grace.

*“Tell me, you who want to be under law, do you not listen to the law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the bondwoman and one by the free woman. But the son by the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and the son by the free woman through the promise. This is allegorically speaking, for these women are two covenants: one proceeding from Mount Sinai bearing children who are to be slaves; she is Hagar. Now this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem above is free; she is our mother” (Galatians 4:21-26).*

Hagar represents what was given on Mt. Sinai—the Ten Commandments, and Paul says this represents slavery. Thus those who wish to be under that Law are in slavery, but Paul says there is something better—a new law coming from the Jerusalem above—heaven.

Then Galatians 5:4: “You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.” Paul is referring to the same law, the one given at Mt. Sinai, and says if we seek to be justified by it, we have fallen from grace and are cut off from Christ. Why would anyone desire that condition? Yet those who seek to bind the Sabbath are in that very situation.

(4) All commands of the Decalogue are repeated in the New Testament, as was mentioned earlier, except for the fourth command concerning the Sabbath. The first commandment is referenced some 50 times either by direct statement or by inference; the second, 12 times; the third, 4 times; the fourth, none; the fifth, 6 times; the sixth, 6 times; the seventh, 12 times; the eighth, 6 times; the ninth, 4 times; and the tenth, 9 times. Does it not seem odd that if God wanted Christians to observe the Sabbath, he would have communicated that to the early church in some manner? Yes, the Sabbath is mentioned many times, but not once are Christians commanded to observe it. Yet, in the Old Testament there are many ways in which God expressed his desire for the Jews to keep this day. (to be continued)

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## What Happened To The Church Jesus Built? (#8)

Tommy G. Thornhill | Etna, Arkansas, USA

We have learned that in about six centuries following its beginning, the church, from its human side (imperfect people) had become so corrupted that it ultimately digressed into the formation of the first

apostate church, known as the Roman Catholic Church, which came into existence about 607 A.D. in Rome Italy, headed by Boniface III, who was declared to the universal ruler of all the churches on earth. This was a far cry from the church of Christ started in Jerusalem around 33 A.D.

This apostasy did not happen overnight. It took many changes over many years to bring about the apostate church. Let's notice some of the changes that transpired to bring this about.

1. People became ignorant of the word of God as they no longer hungered for it (Matthew 5:6; 1 Peter 2:2).
2. The government of the church was slowly changed as the eldership (in which each man was equal), designed to lead and tend the local flock was corrupted by the exaltation of one man over the others.
3. The simplicity of the gospel plan of salvation and worship was replaced by the adoption of many worldly pagan customs, stressing rituals and outward forms, rather than inward spirituality.
4. Christianity became paganized as church membership was made compulsory, forcing into the membership many unconverted pagans.
5. The existing church became institutionalized, and people now looked to the church to determine matters of faith, doctrine, and worship.
6. This, in turn, led the corrupted church to have church councils to determine these matters, resulting in the formulating of church creeds, beginning with the Nicene creed in 325 AD.
7. From these councils and creeds came many practices and customs that were adopted and used to govern churches, and made equal to the word of God, even though they were contrary to the New Testament writings of inspired apostles.
8. As the church became more secular, it was divided into five areas of influence, with one man in each area being dominant over all the churches in his area.
9. This ultimately led to the ascendancy of one man out of these five areas to become the ruler over all the churches on earth, with the authority to speak for Christ on earth.
10. Finally, we have the establishment of the apostate Roman Catholic Church, 607 AD, Boniface III the first Pope.

The Roman Catholic Church was the great apostate church, and its establishment set the pattern that all later denominations would follow in the centuries since. The Roman Catholic Church, as an apostate church in no way resembled the church revealed in the New Testament. There are many reasons why this Roman Catholic Church is not the New Testament church, but, at this time, I want to deal with one area, having to do with its foundation. As the Psalmist wrote, "Unless the Lord build the house, they labor in vain who build it" (Psalm 127:1).

One of the ways to determine if the church is the one approved of God is to ask three questions. Who built the church? Where did it begin? When did it begin? The Roman Catholic Church is wrong because of its builder (founder), and the fact it started at the wrong place and at the wrong time.

Jesus is the builder of His church. He promised it (Matthew 16:18). He paid for it (Acts 20:28). He is the foundation (1 Corinthians 3:10-11), the tried, precious stone upon which it is built (Isaiah 28:16; 1 Peter 2:5). He is the head, ruling from heaven (Ephesians 1:22-23; John 16:5-8; Hebrews 1:2-3). All those in the church belong to Him (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). He is the head (Ephesians 1:22-23). He established His church in Jerusalem as prophesied (Isaiah 2:2-3; Micah 4:2-3). It was built at the time prophesied (Daniel 2:44-45; Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2:16 ff.)

Now let us look at the Roman Catholic Church. Who built it? As we have seen, it began to be built by men who usurped authority that did not belong to them. History shows that over a period of time, this corrupted leadership evolved into five areas of religious influence, each area being ruled by a Patriarch. These five Patriarchs fought with each other, each one seeking to have prominence over the others. Mostly the contest was between Constantinople and Rome, neither one having enough power to dominate the others, Finally, Boniface III was able to dominate, and he officially became the first Pope, Rector Ecclesiae (Lord

of the church), the supreme ruler of all the churches on earth (Matthew 23:6-10). To justify this, they use a false interpretation of Matthew 16:18, as Peter being the rock, instead of Christ, on which the church was to be built. Pope Boniface III was treated as God on earth, given authority to which no man had a right. No one can speak for God except Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:2-3; Matthew 28:18; Ephesians 1:22-23). Even though I do not believe 2 Thessalonians 2:2 following is a direct prophesy of the Pope, the idea of the Pope fits the image portrayed there. So, for all practical purposes, Boniface III was the founder of the Roman Catholic Church. So, to question one, the Roman Catholic Church has the wrong builder (founder).

The second question, where was the church established? Remember, the true church was to be established in Jerusalem (Isaiah 2:2-3; Acts 2). But the Roman Catholic Church had its beginning in Rome where Boniface 3 was Patriarch. So, the Roman Catholic Church started in the wrong place to be the true church. The Roman Catholic Church was started at the wrong place. The New Testament church was to begin in Jerusalem, not Rome.

The third question, when was the church established? Again, we noted that the church God had planned from eternity, according to prophecy, was to begin in "the last days" (Isaiah 2:2-3), during the time of the Roman empire (the 4th kingdom of the image in Daniel 2:44-45). It was to begin with the pouring out of the Holy Spirit (Joel.2:28-32). This was on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2. But the Roman Catholic Church started at the wrong time. 606-07 AD is not the right date. The "last days" had already started almost 600 years before the Roman Catholic Church began (Hebrews 1:2; Acts 3:24).

Every denomination that exists today can be proven wrong by answering these same three questions. Every denomination has been built or established (founded) by the wrong person(s), at the wrong place and at the wrong time.

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## Understanding The Church of Christ (4)

Wayne Fancher | Searcy, Arkansas, USA

In my previous articles I have tried to explain the view that many in the Church of Christ have about the Old and New Testament. We as Gentiles were never under the covenant God made with Israel at Mount Sinai (Romans 3:1-2, Romans 2:14, Acts 15:5). The Old Testament, the first covenant, had a fault, (Hebrews 8:7), it was obsolete (Hebrews 8:13), thus God annulled (Hebrews 7:18) and took away the first covenant that He may establish the Second, new covenant (Hebrews 10:7). The first covenant was taken out of the way and nailed to the cross (Colossians 2:14). The blood of Christ is the blood of the new covenant that was brought into force at the death of the Christ (Matthew 26:18, Hebrews 9:15-18).

Once it is established that Gentiles were never expected to be circumcised and keep the law of Moses as Christians, then the logical question that follows is exactly what role does the law of Moses play in Christianity? Are Christians supposed to fuse together the laws of the Old Testament with the commands of the New Testament? I believe our God gave us the books of Romans and Galatians to help us answer these questions.

Romans 7:1-4:

*Or do you not know, brethren (for I speak to those who know the law), that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives? 2 For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband. 3 So then if, while her husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man. 4 Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another — to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God.*

In the text here God is using the example from the law of Moses about the subject of marriage to help us



understand what is wrong with trying to be bound under two covenants at the same time. If a woman marries another man while her first husband lives, she is an adulteress. Her first husband must be dead before she is free to marry another man. In the same way, the Jews were not meant to try to be under the authority of two covenants at the same time. The Jews had become dead to the law by the body of Jesus so they could be married to Christ and be under His commands in the new covenant. As we learned in Colossians 2:14, the first covenant was nailed to the cross. The first covenant had served its purpose like a tutor in bringing the Jews to the Christ. Once salvation by faith in the Christ had come, the Jews were no longer under the tutor, the first covenant (Galatians 3:24-25).

Galatians 4:21-26:

*Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not hear the law? 22 For it is written that Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman. 23 But he who was of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through promise, 24 which things are symbolic. For these are the two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar — 25 for this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children — 26 but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all.*

Galatians 4:30-31:

*Nevertheless what does the Scripture say? "Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman." 31 So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman but of the free.*

In Galatians God speaks to those who desire to be under the law. He uses the examples of Ishmael and Isaac as being symbolic of the two covenants. When He says in Galatians 4:30 to "Cast out the bondwoman and her son", He is speaking of casting out the first covenant. When He says "the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the free woman" God is speaking about trying to bond together the two covenants. We are only to be under the son of the free woman, the New covenant.

Galatians 5:1-4:

*Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage. 2 Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing. 3 And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law. 4 You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.*

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## The Power of God

Jim Mickells | Lewisburg, Tennessee, USA

Usually when one mentions the power of God I think of His power in creating and maintaining the world in which we live. The vastness of the universe with its order is mind boggling. Jehovah spoke and the heavens, earth and everything therein was fashioned by His mighty power. Jesus demonstrated His great power He possessed by calming the sea, restoring sight to the blind, healing the lame, and raising the dead, etc.. Yet Paul reveals to us another aspect of the power of God; this involves the salvation of man. *"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek"* (Rom. 1:16).

Is it still God's power to save men and women today? Absolutely! This has not changed. It seems some doubt its power when they use something beside the gospel to reach the hearts and souls who are lost. I remember a man a few years ago telling me, "If you feed them they will come." So then one needs the gospel + food and then the lost can be converted, right? There are a great number of churches scattered across the United States (and probably around the world) that have built gymnasiums in an effort to reach the lost. I was told such was a part of their outreach program. So, then it takes the gospel + gymnasiums

to bring the sinner to the Lord. Is that what the apostles and the early church did to reach the lost? Not at all. They trusted in the power of God's word and so must we.

It would be of great benefit to us and to the kingdom of our Lord if we would simply follow the pattern set forth in the New Testament by the early Christians. Not only did they know the power contained in God's word, their faith in that word was shown by their willingness to share it with others. In Acts 8, when persecutions arose against the church, *"Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word"* (v 4). Paul in writing to Timothy said, *"but if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth"* (1 Tim. 3:15). The primary work of the church is to evangelize the world. This same apostle commended the church at Thessalonica for sounding forth that truth (1 Thess. 1:8). We all need to be busy sowing the seed of the kingdom in the hearts of men and women, God will give the increase, and may He receive all the honor and glory.

The gospel is still for everyone, Jew and Gentile. We must not look at the color of a man's skin, his educational attainments or lack of such, which side of the tracks he is from, the sins he may be guilty of, etc.. Every person has a soul which needs to be saved. Our job is to share the word, so it can work in their life. It has the power to change the worse of sinners into saints. If it can change me, it can change you. If it can change you, it can change others whom you know. Give it the opportunity to work on the hearts of all we come in contact with.

The word of God will save all who believe it. This implies one's obedience to its precepts. Notice in the book of Romans, it begins and ends teaching this principle (Rom. 1:5; 16:26). The Lord promised only to save those who obey Him (Heb. 5:8-9), not those who rebel against Him (Rom. 1:28-32). Thanks be to God who has given us His word, when we believe and obey it, our souls can be saved by His grace. To God be the glory.

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## **Satan's Greatest Weapon**

Mike Thomas | Beaver Dam, Kentucky, USA

Satan has an arsenal of weapons that he uses to influence people away from God. Paul told Christians, *"Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil"* (Ephesians 6:11). We are not to be naive to his influence or *"ignorant of his devices"* (2 Corinthians 2:11).

In analyzing Satan's devices, consider the awesome power of his greatest weapon. It has the ability to convince Christians to condone sins they never would in times past. This weapon is so powerful that it causes once-dedicated Christians to support things like fornication, denominationalism, divorce (for reasons other than adultery), institutionalism, and even homosexuality. "What? That's impossible. There is no way mature Christians will ever endorse these things!" Yet, because of this weapon, sound Christians who know the truth of God's word on these things are now either silent in their opposition to them or are gradually condoning them.

What weapon has this much destructive power over Christians? It is none other than family. Many Christians lose their faith in God's word because of the influence of their earthly family.

It is not uncommon for mature Christians to weaken their stand against their family's sins. I have seen *"those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift"* eventually turn their back on the very faith they once defended because of their family's condition. They used to preach "one Lord, one faith, one baptism" yet are now in sync with denominations in saying one faith is as good as another. These are Christians who once were resolved in their mind that it is a sin for a couple to live together in fornication only to change their thinking when their family becomes guilty of such. Some who spoke out most loudly against divorce for reasons other than adultery are now making exceptions for family. The spirit of compromise has even convinced some to rethink God's condemnation of homosexuality now that

a grandchild is one. They no longer see the road to heaven as a confining, narrow way that few will follow. The path to eternal life, in their mind, is suddenly broad and wide because of a God who won't condemn anyone to hell (except Satan).

The secret to defeating Satan's greatest weapon is the same as it has always been: love God more than anyone else, including family. Our Lord and Savior said "a man's enemies will be those of his own household" as He challenged Christians to bear the cross of placing Him before earthly family (Matthew 10:36-38). Notice that He did not list second and third cousins or distant relatives as our threat. He specified those who are most immediate to us: parents, children, and in-laws. We will either meet that challenge or we will focus our family in compromising God's word. Either way, the fact remains that no Christian will make it to heaven without loving God more than this world. Our faith must be like Abraham's, who was willing to offer his son for God (James 2:21). *"And he was called the friend of God. You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only"* (vv. 23-24). *"So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham"* (Galatians 3:9).

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## Peaks & Valleys of Faith

William J. Stewart | Odessa, Ontario, Canada

Peaks and valleys in life are a common thing. Whether we are talking about our relationships, career, health, finances, emotional well being, or faith, there will be high and low moments.

A survey of what we know about the apostle Peter's life shows that he experienced these peaks and valleys in the faith, just like you and I. It is interesting to notice that most of the low or difficult times came on the heels of a spiritual high or occasions of growth. Let's notice this pattern from Scripture.

In Matthew 14, the disciples had gone out in a boat on the sea of Galilee before Jesus. They were in the midst of a storm, when Jesus came walking to them on the water. At first, they were all fearful, thinking He was a ghost. After He identified Himself, Peter said, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water" (v 28). I don't know about you, but I'm content to wait in the boat. This was a statement of great faith. And so, he was called by the Lord, and he stepped out of the boat and walked on water! I wonder how many steps he took before he focused on the waves and the sound of the wind, and began to sink. The problem is He took his eyes off Jesus. What started as a huge step of faith ended with Jesus asking, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" (v 31)

In Matthew 16, Jesus asked His disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (v 16). I imagine there was no hesitation or question in his mind. This was a statement of absolute confidence. Jesus commended Peter, acknowledging his faith in what the Father revealed (v 17). At that time He began to tell His disciples about His impending death and resurrection (v 21). Peter took Him aside and rebuked Jesus (v 22). Can you imagine rebuking the Messiah, the Son of God? Peter did! Hear the Lord's response to Peter, *"Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men"* (v 23). His confession of Christ demonstrated his love for the Lord and knowledge of who He was. In rebuking Jesus, Peter's love is still on display (he didn't want Him to die), but it revealed his failure to understand the purpose for which Jesus came.

In Matthew 17, Jesus took three of His disciples (Peter, James and John) up on a mountain and He was transfigured before them. Essentially, they were privileged to see a small measure of His glory as God. His face shone like the sun, His clothes were as white as light. It had to be a wonderful and faith building experience. They knew He was the Son of God. This was visible evidence to reinforce what they already knew. Two others appeared while they were on the mountain, Moses and Elijah. Our apostle is rarely at a loss for words or ideas - he suggested that three altars be made, one for each of these giants of the faith. I'm confident Peter meant no harm, but Moses and Elijah are not in the same class as Jesus. A moment later, he and his two companions were face to the ground in fear, as a voice boomed from above, *"This is*

*My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!"* (v 5).

In Matthew 18:21, Peter asked the Lord how many times he should forgive his brother. I wonder if there was a time in Peter's life when he'd forgive the first offense, but nothing beyond. He likely thought he was being gracious when he suggested, *"Up to seven times?"* (v 21). Jesus' response revealed the need for Peter to grow. If we are going to forgive as our Father in heaven forgives, then it is not up to 7x, but seventy times seven (v 22).

In John 13, the Lord shared Passover with His disciples. It was a Jewish custom that the host of a feast would wash the feet of his guests. They had rented this room to celebrate the event - any of them could have or should have washed feet that night. Sadly, none of them did. So, Jesus rose after supper and began to wash their feet. When the Lord came to Peter, He said to him, *"...you do not understand now, but you will know after this."* Peter emphatically stated, *"You shall never wash my feet"* (v 8). I'm sure he felt unworthy to have Jesus wash his feet. It was a statement of humility, and yet it was ignorant. Rather than hastily say "No way," he ought to have presented himself as a teachable pupil. Being told that he would have no part with the Lord if He didn't wash his feet, the apostle went from one passionate extreme to the other (v 9).

There are several other examples of this in Peter's life. In Matthew 26, even if all were made to stumble, he would not, and yet he could not even stay awake in the garden to keep watch. In John 18, he defended Jesus by cutting off a man's ear with his sword, but later would deny three times that he knew Jesus. In Acts 10, a series of miracles taught the apostle the gospel was to go to the Gentiles also, and that he should not call or treat them as common or unclean. Yet, in Galatians 2, Peter is rebuked by Paul for he withdrew from the Gentile Christians when Jewish Christians visited.

Surely Peter was not the only apostle who had these peaks and valleys in the faith. The fact that he was prominent among the apostles is likely why we have so many of his ups and downs on record. What shall we learn from such?

We, like Peter, will face highs and lows in the faith. Why a challenge to our faith quickly follows a growth moment, I don't know. It may be euphoria (Peter had some amazing experiences with Jesus), followed by a crash, or overconfidence (1 Corinthians 10:12) leading to a fall, or maybe it is simply that spiritual growth invites new challenges and struggles. Whatever the case, the key is to grow. If we stumble or slip, we need to get back up and do better. Peter always did. He received correction, he learned from failures and errors, and he continued to grow in faith. Let's do so too.

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## Getting To Know Jesus

Sean P. Cavender | Bald Knob, Arkansas, USA

Over the past several months, we have gotten to know our Bibles a little bit better. The Bible is a wonderful book which shows how God dealt with Israel, primarily in the Old Testament, and fulfilled promises to bring about the Messiah and Christ (Romans 9:5). It would therefore be a tragic mistake to not realize who the Christ is. The Old Testament, with all of the covenants God made with Adam (Genesis 3:15), Abraham (Genesis 12:2; 15:4), and David (2 Samuel 7:16) - all pointed to the Christ. The prophecies of David, Isaiah, Micah, and other prophets looked forward to the time of the Christ. So we better know who the Christ is.

The New Testament opens with "The record of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham," (Matthew 1:1). The New Testament declares and reveals that Jesus of Nazareth is the fulfillment of the Abrahamic and David covenants! Matthew 1:23 declares that Jesus was born of a virgin in fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy (Isaiah 7:14).

So, who is Jesus?

1. **He was born of a virgin** - Mary declared that she had never been with a man (Luke 1:34). Joseph knew he had never been with Mary in order to conceive a child (Matthew 1:18-19). The apostle Paul declared that Jesus was made according to the flesh and born of a woman, acknowledging the virgin conception of Jesus of Nazareth (Galatians 4:4; Romans 1:3).
2. **He was an authoritative teacher** - as Jesus was teaching publicly during His life on earth, He was known as a great teacher, teaching with authority as a prophet and one sent by God (Matthew 7:29). Therefore, we should listen to His teachings (Matthew 17:5).
3. **He performed many miracles and signs** - all of these proved that He was sent by God (John 3:2). The demons obeyed Him (Mark 1:27). All of nature beckoned at His command (Mark 4:41).
4. **He was (and is) God revealed in the flesh** - John declares that the Word became flesh (John 1:1, 14). Jesus was recognized as the Son of God (Matthew 16:16). We must confess that Jesus is the Son of God as well in order to obtain eternal life (Romans 10:9-10). Belief that Jesus was Immanuel (God with us) is fundamental to all of Christianity.
5. **He was human** - Jesus shared in the human experience. His genealogy in Matthew 1 and Luke 3 prove that He was made according to the flesh. He was "made like His brethren" and shared in flesh and blood (Hebrews 2:14). Yet, what made Him different was that He was "yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15). Jesus never knew the stain of sin. He was sinlessly perfect, having overcome temptation.
6. **He was raised from the dead** - Jesus of Nazareth was put to death on the cross, but He was raised from the dead. His resurrection is the basis of our hope. He defeated Satan and sin (1 Corinthians 15:54-56). By the resurrection we may obtain the forgiveness of our sins (Romans 4:24-25).

Jesus is the most important figure in all of the Bible. Everything in the Old Testament anticipated Him. The New Testament is about Him. Now, everyone and everything should exalt Him and glorify Him.

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## The Autonomy of the Local Church

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

There was a time all gospel preachers at least gave lip service to the principle of congregational autonomy. For example, Brother Lewis G. Hale, Bible professor at Oklahoma Christian College, wrote over 50 years ago:

*We are all in agreement that each local church is separate and independent in organization from all other local churches. All of us are opposed to the destruction of autonomy. (77)*

Today many have quit even giving lip service to the principle of the independence of the local church. In a 1985 publication, Brother Alvin Jennings wrote:

*To sum it up, the church, the treasury and elders will be one in the urban area. Elders will allow and encourage assemblies anywhere and everywhere that men gather in the name of Jesus. Congregational autonomy will begin to fade within the city.... (71)*

(I understand both Brother Jennings and the International Church of Christ denomination, which began in the 70's as the "Crossroads Movement," metamorphosed to the "Boston" or "Discipling" ministry, then crystallized as the ICOC, have now renounced this view.)

Although the word "autonomy" is not found in the New Testament, the principle of congregational autonomy is plainly taught there. In fact, no principle is more basic to the New Testament pattern for the organization of the church than that of the independence of the local church. The purpose of this lesson is to scripturally explain congregational autonomy, or local control.

### The Word "Autonomy"

The term "autonomy" means "The quality or state of being independent, free, and self-directing; individual or group freedom" (Webster. 1:148).

## How Applied to Local Church

Does this principle apply to the local congregation? If so, how?

It certainly does not apply to legislative (i.e., law making) power. Christ is the only Head of the church (Ephesians 1:22-23) and its only Law Giver (James 4:12). No man or group of men may make laws and bind them on Christians as a test of fellowship, whether they act within or without the confines of the local church. Christians must neither draw up nor recognize human creeds or uninspired statements of faith as binding. To do so is to usurp the authority of Christ.

Rather, by “congregational autonomy” I mean that the direction of the execution of the will of Christ belongs completely within the local church and is not to be surrendered, partially or completely, to any outside control. Elders are to be appointed within each local church (Acts 14:23; Philippians 1:1; Titus 1:5). These elders (also called bishops, i.e., overseers, or pastors, i.e., shepherds - Acts 20:17,28; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Peter 5:1-2) have the oversight of the congregation of which they are members (1 Peter 5:1-2). There they rule under the authority of Christ, the Chief Shepherd (1 Timothy 5:17; 1 Peter 5:1-4). No passage of Scripture broadens their authority. The elders of the local church have no right to oversee anything other than the work of the local church where they are members. There is no authority for a congregation to allow any man, group of men, or organization outside the local church to oversee all or any part of its function.

This principle applies to every facet of the work of the congregation. Each local church selects its own leaders (Acts 6:1-6), governs itself within the limits of those things Christ has authorized (1 Peter 5:1-4; Colossians 3:17), determines its own program of work and selects the arrangements to carry it out (cf. Acts 11:22; Romans 16:1; 1 Corinthians 16:3; 2 Corinthians 8:23; Philippians 2:25), controls the use of its own resources (Philippians 4:15-16; 2 Corinthians 11:8), and disciplines its own sinful members (1 Corinthians chapter 5).

I believe Brother Lewis Hale well summarized the scriptural principle of congregational autonomy:

*Church autonomy includes and requires that the local church, under Christ*  
*(1) control its own resources, (2) exercise the oversight of its own work,*  
*(3) manage its own affairs, (4) discipline its own disorderly members,*  
*(5) provide for its own worthy indigent to the limit of its ability, and*  
*(6) governs itself in all matters of judgment and expediency. (Ibid)*

### Acts 15 and Congregational Autonomy

I received this e-mail message from a friend in response an article on the autonomy of the local church. “I appreciate the emphasis on individual congregations. Though I was wondering how you would view Acts 15 in light of this?” This is an excellent, pertinent question. Let’s examine Acts chapter 15 and it’s bearing on the autonomy (independence, self-government) of each local church. (Why not read Acts 15 now?)

Paul and Barnabas had been sent out by the church at Antioch on the first preaching journey to the Gentiles (Acts 13:1-3), and they returned there at the end of this very successful trip (Acts 14:26-28). Some men came from Judea, teaching the brethren, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved” (Acts 15:1).

These men were trying to bind the law of Moses, the Old Testament, on Gentiles (Acts 15:5). If they had been successful, they would have caused these brethren to be severed from Christ (Galatians 5:1-4) and turned them into Jewish proselytes rather than Christians. Those introducing this doctrine were “false brethren secretly brought in (who came in by stealth to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage)” (Galatians 2:4).

Paul and Barnabas did not yield to them for even an hour (Ibid) but opposed them vigorously (Acts 15:2). This should have settled the matter with the church in Antioch due to Paul's apostolic authority (cf. 1 Corinthians 9:1).

But, for whatever reason, the brethren at Antioch wanted to hear from the apostles and elders in Jerusalem about this question (Acts 15:2). Thus Paul, Barnabas, Titus, and at least one other went to Jerusalem about this issue (Acts 15:2-3; Galatians 2:1).

They met first with the apostles and elders over the question (Galatians 2:2). These men added nothing to Paul's understanding of the matter (Galatians 2:6). Rather, Paul "went up by revelation, and communicated to them that gospel which" he preached "among the Gentiles" (Galatians 2:2). Thus, the apostles at Jerusalem gave to Paul "and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship" (Galatians 2:7-9).

Then the matter was discussed before the entire congregation at Jerusalem, and even the false teachers were given the opportunity to present their case (Acts 15:4-17). James stated the conclusion he drew, that the apostles and elders, including Paul, had already concurred in, that Gentiles need not be circumcised or keep the law of Moses (Acts 15:18-22).

Therefore, "the apostles and elders, with the whole church" decided to send Paul and Barnabas, along with Judas and Silas, from Jerusalem to Antioch stating this conclusion (Acts 15:22). They put this in the form of a letter which became a part of the inspired canon of Scripture (Acts 15:23-29). They claimed the guidance of the Holy Spirit in reaching this conclusion (Acts 15:28).

Johnson, in a commentary published by the Church of England, comments, "This, the first council of the Church, is generally considered an example for all times" (2:15). Thus, such denominations as the Catholic Church, Orthodox Church, Lutheran Church, and Episcopal Church view this as the First Ecumenical Council, in which questions of church doctrine are settled for all time. This is a strange "ecumenical council," that consisted of a few messengers sent by the congregation at Antioch, all the members of the congregation in Jerusalem, and no one from any other congregation.

This High Church view assumes "The Church" decides doctrinal soundness in councils composed of uninspired men. The church decides nothing about truth or error. The Holy Spirit sent by Christ to His apostles revealed to them all truth (John 16:13-15), the entirety of the mind of God for our salvation (1 Corinthians 2:6-13). They wrote it down for us in the New Testament (Ephesians 3:1-7). Anyone who adds to this is anathema (Galatians 1:6-9; 2 John verse 9). The responsibility of the church is to uphold and defend this divine truth (1 Timothy 3:14-15; Jude verse 3).

The High Church position also assumes that the apostolic authority has been passed down to bishops today. The apostles of Christ were led into all truth and guarded from any error by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (John 14:26; 16:13-15). They demonstrated their authority by working the miraculous signs of apostles (2 Corinthians 12:12). To occupy their office, one would have to be an eye witness of the resurrected Lord (Acts 1:15-26), and Paul was the last such witness (1 Corinthians 15:5-8). Modern denominational bishops don't even claim these abilities. They are pretenders.

Acts fifteen does not authorize church councils or courts, nor does it sanction less formal assemblies of representatives of congregations to discuss and decide anything. All matters of salvation were decided by the Lord two millennia ago and written by His apostles in the New Testament. Matters of individual conscience must be decided by each Christian for himself alone (Romans 14:1-5).

Those in Acts 15 who stated the conclusion that all accepted were inspired of God. They were led by the Holy Spirit. Their conclusion is a part of the canon of Scripture. This was not a council of representatives from all or even various churches. One congregation sought to know if those who had come from another congregation to trouble them actually represented the views of that congregation.

Thus, there is nothing in Acts 15 that contradicts or amends the fact that the direction of the execution of the will of Christ belongs completely within the local church and is not to be surrendered, partially or completely, to any outside control. The local church is indeed to be autonomous.

### **The Difference Between Evangelism and Benevolence**

Several years ago a preacher asked me if I was “anti-cooperation.” I told him I am in favor of scriptural congregational cooperation. I further add that I have many times been and even presently am involved in authorized cooperation between local churches. We are examining the scriptural pattern for cooperation between congregations. This section examines the difference between cooperation for benevolence and for evangelism.

### **Three Great Issues**

The study involves three great issues.

- (1) Must we follow the divine pattern?
- (2) May we sacrifice local church autonomy?
- (3) Is a collectivity of local churches scriptural?

### **Benevolence & Evangelism**

Defenders of the sponsoring church arrangement characteristically employ passages authorizing churches to send funds to another church for the work of benevolence to defend churches sending money to another church to do the work of evangelism. What difference does this make?

### **Pattern**

It makes a big difference. First, the New Testament clearly authorizes many churches to send to one for benevolent needs within the receiving church (Galatians 2:10; Romans 15:25-28; 1 Corinthians 16:1-4; 2 Corinthians chapters 8-9; Acts 24:17) and for one church to send to several for benevolence inside the receiving congregations (Acts 11:27-30). But there is no authority for a church or churches to send to another church or other churches to do the work of evangelism. Shall we follow the New Testament pattern or not?

### **Autonomy**

This also involves the principle of autonomy. Each local church has the responsibility to assist its own needy members (Acts 2:44-45; 4:32-35; 6:1-3). Local churches may assist a church unable to relieve its own needy members until the church is able to do so (2 Corinthians 8:13-15). The work of the sending church is to help the needy church, and the work of the receiving church is to assist its own indigent members. Thus, equality of congregations relative to oversight and the autonomy of local churches are maintained, in that oversight of the work of each local church is within that local church, and each local congregation is able to do its own work.

But each local church has equal responsibility in the work of evangelism, commensurate with its own ability (Matthew 28:19-20). Thus, when churches send funds to another church to do the work of evangelism, the oversight of the work of all the churches involved is within the receiving church. Sending churches sacrifice oversight of part of their work and give up autonomy.

In essence, there is one pattern (the autonomy of the local church) with two applications (cooperation for benevolence and for evangelism). This is not hard to understand. We often preach on “God’s Two Laws of Pardon.” God has one plan of salvation: by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8-10). But there is one set of



conditions for forgiveness of the alien sinner and another for pardon of the erring child of God. One pattern - two applications.

### **Pattern for Cooperation for Benevolence**

Six passages comprise the New Testament pattern for cooperation between local churches to do the work of benevolence: Acts 11:27-30, 24:17, Romans 15:25-28, 1 Corinthians 16:1-4; 2 Corinthians chapters 8-9; and Galatians 2:10. Parallel to this, seven passages authorize music in New Testament worship (Acts 16:25; Romans 15:9; 1 Corinthians 14:15; Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16; Hebrews 2:12; James 5:13). They constitute a pattern which specifies the kind of music, singing, and we must follow it (sing in worship) and not violate it (use instrumental music in worship). Even so, the pattern for congregational cooperation for benevolence specifies the kind of cooperation, concurrent, and we must follow this (each contributing church send directly to the church in need) and not violate it (create a collectivity of churches or a church supported benevolent society).

### **Two Contributions**

The New Testament passages authorizing congregational cooperation for benevolence relate to two historical occurrences separated by over a decade. The church in Antioch sent benevolent aid to the churches in Judea ca. A.D. 44-45 (Acts 11:27-30), and the apostle Paul took a collection from Gentile churches for the benevolent assistance of Christians in Jerusalem ca. A.D. 57-58 (Galatians 2:10; Romans 15:25-28; 1 Corinthians 16:1-4; 2 Corinthians chapters 8-9; Acts 24:17). Don't confuse the two collections.

### **Antioch to Judean Churches**

The brethren in Antioch assisted their brethren in Judea (Acts 11:27-30). Since the elders of each church had the oversight of the work of that church (1 Peter 5:1-4), this money was not sent to one church in Judea, such as Jerusalem, for distribution to the other churches. Rather, congregational autonomy was maintained, and no collectivity of churches was created.

### **Gentile Churches to Jerusalem Brethren**

James, Cephas, and John asked Paul to remember the poor, and he eagerly followed their request (Galatians 2:10). He took a voluntary contribution from Gentile churches for the needy Christians in Jerusalem (Romans 15:25-28; 1 Corinthians 16:1-4; 2 Corinthians chapter 8 - 9) and delivered this assistance at the end of his third journey (Acts 24:17). The purpose of the collection was to maintain the equality of the churches (2 Corinthians 8:13-15), i.e., to insure that each church would have sufficient funds to do its own work. Each church raised its own funds and chose its own messengers (1 Corinthians 16:1-4). No church or human organization acted as a collecting and dispersing agency or assumed the oversight of the benevolent work of all the contributing churches. Each congregation maintained its autonomy, and no collectivity of churches was created.

### **Modern Example**

Several years ago I received word from Brother H.F. Short that a severe, prolonged drought in Southwestern Zimbabwe threatened to cause starvation among Christians there. I brought this to the attention of the members of the congregation where I preached. We, along with many other congregations, sent relief funds to Brother Short, who in turn forwarded these funds to Brother Newman Gumbo in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe. Brother Gumbo traveled to the churches in the bush of Southwest Zimbabwe and dispersed the funds to each local church as they were needed. Brother Gumbo received a receipt from each receiving congregation, acknowledging receipt of the funds. Each church being helped reported the number of members whom it aided. Brother Short reported all funds received and dispersed to each assisting congregation. Brethren Short and Gumbo were messengers of the churches (Acts 11:29-30; 1

Corinthians 16:3-4; 2 Corinthians 8:16-23; Acts 24:17). They insured there was no fraud or even reasonable suspicion of it (2 Corinthians 8:18-21). No Christians in Zimbabwe starved. Each local church maintained its autonomy. Congregations cooperated scripturally to do the work of benevolence.

The pattern of congregational cooperation for benevolence further establishes the principle of local church autonomy. Each church is to raise its own funds and send directly to the church in need. The equality of all the churches relative to oversight of its own work must be kept. No church may act as an agent for another or assume oversight of a benevolent work of several churches. We must maintain local church autonomy.

### **Congregational Cooperation for Evangelism**

How may congregations scripturally cooperate in evangelism while at the same time maintaining autonomy?

It is perfectly scriptural for churches to send teaching to each other. The church in Jerusalem sent Barnabas to the young church in Antioch to encourage them "that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord" (Acts 11:22-23; cf. 13:1-3; 14:21-23, 26-28; 15:22-31,40; 18:22; Colossians 4:16). A local church may send scriptural teaching to any person or group of people anywhere (1 Thessalonians 1:8). When a local church sends a teaching paper to other churches, or when a congregation pays the way of an evangelist to preach a gospel meeting for a small congregation or to preach overseas, this is scriptural congregational cooperation.

A congregation may act alone in supporting a preacher in another place (Philippians 1:3-5; 2:25,30; 4:14-18). Or, several churches may independently and directly support a preacher working in another place (2 Corinthians 11:8-9). Thus, when several churches send directly to a preacher to work with a small church or to send that preacher to another nation, they are scripturally cooperating in evangelism

### **The Pattern Applied**

This reveals three facts. No church is to act as an agent for another church or churches since, when several churches pool their resources to do a work common to all of them, all the other churches become subordinate to the congregation which decides how the funds will be used. No church may assume the oversight of any part of the evangelistic work (or any other work) of any other congregation(s). Also, the equality of each local church relative to oversight must be maintained.

### **The Pattern Summarized**

The principle is congregational autonomy. The oversight of all the work of each local church is completely within that congregation (1 Peter 5:1-4). The expression of that autonomy in congregational cooperation for evangelism is concurrent cooperation. Local congregations may and should work concurrently to achieve a common objective, but they must not pool their resources under the oversight of one church.

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