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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.

"But those who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength; They shall mount up with wings like eagles, They shall run and not be weary, They shall walk and not faint" (Isaiah 40:31). "To wait for Jehovah is to put one's trust in Him, not despairing, but allowing God to work out the future" (Homer Hailey, **Commentary on the Minor Prophets**, 242.)

Peter Raises Dorcas

J.W. McGarvey, A Commentary on Acts of Apostles (original). 129

At Joppa there was a certain disciple named Tabitha, which is translated Dorcas. This woman was full of good works and charitable deeds which she did. But it happened in those days that she became sick and died. When they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room. And since Lydda was near Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent two men to him, imploring him not to delay in coming to them. Then Peter arose and went with them. When he had come, they brought him to the upper room. And all the widows stood by him weeping, showing the tunics and garments which Dorcas had made while she was with them. But Peter put them all out, and knelt down and prayed. And turning to the body he said, 'Tabitha, arise.' And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up. Then he gave her his hand and lifted her up; and when he had called the saints and widows, he presented her alive (Acts 9:36-41)

Nothing could be more graphic and simple than this narration, or more touching than the incident itself. Amid the array of solemn and stately events which are moving before us, it is dropped in, like a flower in the forest. It opens a vista through the larger events of history, and lets in light upon the social sorrows of the early saints, awakening a closer sympathy between our hearts and theirs. We here see enacted among them scenes with which we are familiar, when one who has been noted for good works sickens and dies: the same anxiety felt by all; the same desire for the presence of him who had been their religious counselor; the same company of weeping sisters and brethren standing by in mournful silence. As each good deed of the departed is recounted by some sobbing voice, and the garments "which she made while she was with us," to clothe the poor, are held up to view, how the eyes gush! how the heart swells. These are sacred hours. The labors of a whole life of piety are pouring their rich influence, unresisted, into softened hearts. How blessed are the dead who die in the Lord. They rest from their labors, but their works do follow them, still working while they are at rest. When Peter came into that company of weeping disciples, he seems to stand once more beside his master, as once he and all who were with him wept with Mary and Martha over the tomb of Lazarus. But he remembers that his compassionate master is now in heaven. With deep solemnity, he motions the mourners all aside. He is left alone with the dead, and the company without have hushed their sobs into silent suspense. He kneels down and prays. How the heart turns to God beside the bed of death. How fervent our prayers are then. The prayer of faith is heard. The eyes of the dead are opened, and the faith and hope which glowed in them ere they were closed are in them now. She sees the loved apostle, and rises to a sitting posture. He takes her by the hand, raises her to her feet, and calls in her friends. Who can describe the scene, when brothers and sisters in the flesh and in the Lord, wild with conflicting emotions, rushed in to greet the loved one recovered from the dead! And if that is indescribable, what shall we say or think of that scene when all the sainted dead shall rise in glory, and greet each other on the shores of life? May Christ our Savior help us to that day! We have no Peter now, to wake up our sleeping sisters, and give them back to us; but we do not regret it for we remember that Dorcas had to die again, and we would not wish to weep again, as we have wept, over the dying bed, and the fresh sods of the silent grave. We would rather let them sleep on in the arms of Jesus, till both we and they shall rise to die no more.

The Way You Learned Christ

Pat Farish | Waxahachie, Texas

The way the world is now, people who fear God are terribly outnumbered. In every walk of life, with only occasional exceptions, those in the majority include many politicians, who count on a "pass" when caught in dishonesty or immorality. Comedians whose vocabulary seems to begin and end with vulgarisms; "celebrities" who flaunt their immorality and ungodliness with no sense of shame; It is explained to us, condescendingly, that this kind of behavior is the only kind today's "sophisticates" will tolerate.

Not so. On an overnight flight to Frankfurt, it was announced that the inflight movie was going to be, "A Few Good Men", with a prominent potty-mouth in a starring role. But look! Someone with influence had exerted that influence to clean the sound-track, so that it could have been an old time Disney production. It was more dramatic, and interesting, than it would have been had the filthy language prevailed. Vulgar trash talk is the product of laziness: it is easier to make people laugh, or cringe, with language revolting to decent senses: so they take the low road.

Has it ever been so? Listen to the Apostle, Ephesians 4:17-23:

Now this I say and testify in the Lord that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. But that is not the way you learned Christ! – assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the

spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

“Gentile”, in the New Testament, is used racially, as pertaining to any people not Jewish (**Webster’s New International Dictionary**); and it is used spiritually, of any people not Christians (Galatians 2: 11-14). In our text (Ephesians 4) Paul uses it in the latter fashion.

So: Christians today should not walk as Gentiles. Paul indicates that their problem was due to ignorance: understanding darkened; strangers to the life of God because of ignorance due to their hardness of heart. In connection with this they become callous. Something that is a callous is something that has become insensitive due to friction – keep on rubbing skin and, after blisters, comes hardness, callouses. Indifference to the word of God produces ignorance resulting in a callous which resists conviction of sin. This provides the access for lasciviousness, for “every kind of impurity.”

Such is not the behavior of people who have “learned Christ.” Paul has said that Gentiles must “put off your old self.” Now he calls on Christians to “put on the new self.” It is as if he had said, take off the defiled and dirty old garment; and put on the clean one. There is similar instruction in Romans 12:2, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind ...”. This new self, the transformation, takes on the image of God, in “true righteousness and holiness.” Gentiles, today, are indifferent to righteousness and holiness. Honesty, with them, is purely a matter of policy – and when honesty ceases to be the “best policy,” it will be abandoned for the “next best” policy – and if it involves deceit, hypocrisy, so be it.

No, the new self is described with such words as, “seek the things that are above, where Christ is ...” (Colossians 3:1); or, with reference to the fruit of the Spirit, “Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and lusts” (Galatians 5:24); or, “As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance; but like as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct...” (1 Peter 1:14-15). Scores of other passages could be cited in this connection, but these suffice to make the point. To please God, we must seek to imitate Him.

The new self is “created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.”

God's Will for You: Drink but Just Don't Get Drunk?

Jacob Gwin | Spring Hill, Tennessee, USA

There is an increasing trend among Christians to teach that the consumption of alcohol in moderation is acceptable to God. God's law on alcohol, they say, only prohibits the consumption of alcohol to the point of drunkenness and any consumption up to this point is permissible. Is this the correct view of the teachings of Scripture on this subject? Certainly God's Word condemns drunkenness as a sin that will damn one's soul in Hell. I Corinthians 6:9,10 explicitly states, “Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither...drunkards...shall inherit the kingdom of God.” The text is clear, and few argue, that getting drunk is a violation of God's will for the Christian. If this is the sum of God's Word on alcohol, however, it places the Christian in a precarious position. Drunkenness will cause one to be lost eternally in Hell and, as a result, is a line no one can afford to cross. But, the problem is determining when the line has been crossed and when one has become drunk?

Perhaps a good place to start would be to look at the dictionary to determine the definition of drunkenness. Webster's Dictionary defines drunkenness as “a: having the faculties impaired by alcohol. b: having a level of alcohol in the blood that exceeds a maximum prescribed by law”.

Since we're looking for the definite line for drunkenness that we don't want to cross, the second definition appears to be worth examining. It seems to be very concrete, absolute and even scientific! Maybe the answer is here! After all, one might suppose the authorities have done their homework and know when one

is drunk and when one isn't. Unfortunately, a quick look at the laws of the land show no uniformity among the states for a blood alcohol level that is used to determine drunk driving. The state drunk driving laws vary across a wide range of blood alcohol levels, so this doesn't help us in determining the where this important line is. Some might be quick to answer, "I won't get drunk because I know my limits!" But, how does one know his or her limits? The only way to know your limits is to cross the line! For example, you might know your limits when it comes how much weight you can lift. How did you come to know this limit? You learned it when you tried to lift more than you could handle and woke up with a sore back the next day! Are we to believe that God has established a law for His people with regards to alcohol that we can only know we are violating AFTER we have crossed the line and violated it?

What's worse, the "limit" for an individual varies. The effects of alcohol on a person change based upon a number of factors including the type and amount of food that has been consumed before or during imbibing, one's physical condition, and even one's emotional state at the time of consumption. So, the line that we're struggling to draw (that will send a soul to Hell) is now moving! Certainly there has to be a better answer!

Fortunately, instead of instructing us not to cross some vague line that is difficult to determine or is impossible to know until you've crossed it, God gives additional instructions about the consumption of alcohol that are more absolute. Repeatedly in the New Testament we are told to be sober. For example, in I Peter 4 we read the familiar condemnation of the Gentiles' use of alcohol ("For the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry." I Peter 4:3 NASV). But, God doesn't say, "It is ok for you to go have a few with them, but know your limits; just don't get drunk with them." Instead, in verse 7 of the context, God instructs His children to be sober ("The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers." I Peter 4:7 NASV). The Greek word translated "sober-minded" here (nepho) is defined by Strong as "to abstain from wine (keep sober), i.e. (figuratively) be discreet:—be sober, watch." Vine defines the word like this: "signifies 'to be free from the influence of intoxicants;'" This instruction about the consumption of alcohol is much more absolute, isn't it?

"But, wait just a minute!" someone might object. "Why would God condemn drunkenness if he really wants Christians to be abstinent?" This is certainly a worthy question. As we look for an answer to this question, it is important to note that other condemnations of sins of actions in excess do not always justify the engaging of the action in moderation. In other words, just because God condemns excessive consumption of alcohol (drunkenness), it does not mean that moderate consumption of alcohol is permitted. For example, the condemnation of "excess of riot" in I Peter 4:4 doesn't mean riot in moderation is permissible. Furthermore, the condemnation of "living in sensuality" in I Peter 4:3 doesn't give license to be sensual some of the time as long as it is in moderation and doesn't become a lifestyle. Likewise, the prohibition of being like the world to the point of conforming to their standards in Romans 12:2 doesn't mean that occasional behavior like the world is acceptable just as long as you don't act like them all the time.

God's law isn't vague. Christians are to be sober, abstaining from alcohol, instead of consuming it and wondering if they've crossed some ambiguous, hard to define line into drunkenness. Those who abstain won't have to worry if they've "gone too far" and they won't have given any opportunities to Satan to devour them (I Peter 5:8).

Answering the Sabbath Observance (3)

Jefferson David Tant | Roswell, Georgia, USA

Reasons for Observing the First Day of the Week

(1) Christ was raised on the first day of the week. "Now after He had risen early on the first day of the week, He first appeared to Mary Magdalene, from whom He had cast out seven demons" (Mark 16:9). This was one of the most historic events in the history of the world, and God chose the first day of the week for

this marvel.

(2) Christ was declared to be the Son of God on that same day. Paul states that he "...was declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead; even Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 1:4). Since he was raised on the first day of the week, and by his resurrection was proven and declared to be the Son of God, then that was the day of God's declaration.

(3) Christ met with the disciples on the first day of the week. "So when it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and when the doors were shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, 'Peace be with you'" (John 20:19). "After eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst and said, 'Peace be with you'" (John 20:26).

(4) Pentecost came on the first day of the week. Leviticus 13 gives the conditions for observing the Feast of Pentecost. "You shall also count for yourselves from the day after the Sabbath, from the day when you brought in the sheaf of the wave offering; there shall be seven complete Sabbaths" (Leviticus 13:15).

Pen'tecost, that is, the fiftieth day (from a Greek word meaning fiftieth), or Harvest Feast, or Feast of Weeks, may be regarded as a supplement to the Passover. It lasted for but one day. From the sixteenth of Nisan seven weeks were reckoned inclusively, and the next or fiftieth day was the day of Pentecost, which fell on the sixth of Sivan (about the end of May) (Smith's Bible Dictionary).

It was on that first day of the week, Pentecost, that:

1. The church was established. "When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place" (Acts 2:1).
2. The Holy Spirit began his mission of leading men to Christ. Christ had promised to send the Spirit when the gospel was to begin at Jerusalem. "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

We see this fulfilled on Pentecost, the first day of the week, as the apostles "were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance" (Acts 2:4).

(5) The New Testament church assembled on the first day of the week.

We sailed from Philippi after the days of Unleavened Bread, and came to them at Troas within five days; and there we stayed seven days. On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul began talking to them, intending to leave the next day, and he prolonged his message until midnight" (Acts 20:6-7).

It is well understood that this "breaking of bread" refers to the Lord's Supper, or Communion. It is worth nothing that Paul arrived in Troas on a Monday, but waited until the first day of the next week to meet with the disciples.

Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also. On the first day of every week each one of you is to put aside and save, as he may prosper, so that no collections be made when I come (1 Corinthians 16:1-2).

Some may claim that this contribution is to be put aside at home, but that would defeat what Paul wanted. He said he did not want to have to collect the money when he came, as he wanted it all together. Obviously, this was money contributed into the common treasury on the first day of the week, as Paul directed.

This question comes to mind. If the church met on Saturday, then why would Paul instruct them to come

the next day for the collection? These early Christians did not have the luxury of having Sunday off as most of us do. Many were slaves, and would rise before dawn to meet with fellow Christians and worship before going to their delegated tasks. It would make no sense for them to be commanded to meet the second time just to make their contribution. Since this is a clear command, I have asked members of the Seventh Day Adventist Church if they came together on Sundays for this purpose. None that I have asked have admitted they did so. If this is a command, why do they ignore it?

Didn't the Pope Change the Day?

The charge is made that the Catholic Pope is the one who changed the day of worship from Saturday to Sunday. We have already noted that this was done from the very beginning. Besides, there was no official pope until Boniface III in about 607 A. D. But of course the Catholic Church likes to take credit for this. "Of course the Catholic Church claims that the change was her act. And the act is the mark of her ecclesiastical power and authority in religious matters" (Faith of our Fathers. 14, C.F. Thomas, Chancellor of Cardinal Gibbons).

Not only does the Catholic Church make this claim, but Sabbatarian apologists accept this. Consider this quote:

When did man substitute Sabbath-keeping as a day of worship in place of God's seventh-day-Sabbath? History is clear on the fact that it was not introduced until hundreds of years after the Crucifixion of Christ

(The Ten Commandments Twice Removed. Danny Shelton—Shelley Quinn).

This just isn't so! History is clear on this, as the following quotes will show.

We have many documents from the early years showing that the early church did indeed meet on the first day of the week. Consider just a few of many quotations.

Ignatius (c. 110 A.D.):

"If therefore those who lived according to the old practices came to the new hope, no longer observing the Sabbath but living according to the Lord's Day, in which also our life arose through him and his death (which some deny), through which mystery we received faith..." (Magnesians. 9).

Justin Martyr (c. 150 A. D.):

We are always together with one another. And for all the things with which we are supplied we bless the Maker of all through his Son Jesus Christ and through his Holy Spirit. And on the day called Sunday there is a gathering together in the same place of all who live in a city or a rural district...We all make our assembly in common on the day of the Sun, since it is the first day, on which God changed the darkness and matter and made the world and Jesus Christ our Savior arose from the dead on the same day (Apology. I, 67:1-3, 7).

Tertullian (c. 200 A.D.):

"Others...suppose that the sun is the god of Christians, because it is well-known that... we regard Sunday as a day of joy" (To the Nations. 1:13). "To us Sabbaths are foreign" (On Idolatry. 13:6).

This was long before any pope arrived on the scene. The charge that the pope changed the day is a false charge.

"There Is A Way That Seems Right"

Jim Mickells | Lewisburg, Tennessee, USA

Have you ever read the various accounts of the death of George Washington? Many think he was bled to death, while others would argue the loss of blood didn't kill him but certainly hastened his death. Here is an example of what some say about his death.

George Washington was bled to death by doctors who were treating him for a cold. Bloodletting was a common medical practice at the time in order to remove 'dirty

blood,' when in reality it only weakens the patient. Half or more of his blood was removed within a few hours (Alearned -Learn Something New Daily).

This reminds me of something the wise man said. "There is a way that seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death" (Proverbs 14:12). Doctors in the days of George Washington obviously thought for one to be cured of certain diseases the patient needed to be bled. How wrong they were. In the religious world people are doing what seems right to them, when it is not what the Bible teaches. The sad reality of this is one will lose their soul because of a failure to examine and apply the Scriptures (John 5:39).

The expression "seems right" is defined as, "there is a way which is pleasing before a man" (**The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon**). Notice the Contemporary English Version on this verse, "You may think you are on the right road and still end up dead." Far too many people depend on what they think or feel instead of what the Lord says. Make sure the road you are traveling is the one which is approved by God, if not it leads to spiritual death.

God's way may not be the way of my family or friends. Are my religious beliefs and practices simply based upon what I have been taught by my mother and father? Am I a member of a church only because that is where my friends attend? How much of what I believe is based on what I can read about in the Bible? Do you think it would be a good thing to do as Paul instructed, "Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?--unless indeed you are disqualified" (2 Corinthians 13:5)? Who could successfully argue against such a wise course of action. Remember Jesus warned, "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me" (Matthew 10:37). If the word of God proves you wrong, through such an examination, do you have enough faith and courage to change?

I have heard some say, "Surely that many people could not be wrong," when trying to justify something they believe. In the Lord's Sermon on the Mount, He said:

Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it
(Matthew 7:13-14).

The majority, according to these two verses, will be destroyed. Throughout the history of mankind, it seems it has always been only a remnant of the people who have truly followed the Lord. It is no different today. We must make sure we enter the narrow gate and walk in the difficult way. It is the one which pleases the Lord, not the way of the majority.

Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). It is the way of faith, repentance, confession, baptism, and faithful living (John 8:24; Luke 13:3; Matthew 10:32-33; Mark 16:16; Revelation 2:10, etc.). God's grace is extended, Christ's blood has been shed, and the Spirit has worked to reveal all these things to us through the inspired word; so why not instead of following a way which seems right, walk in the way which is right. God's way!

Rightly Dividing The Word of God (1)

Tommy J. Thornhill | Etna, Arkansas, USA

Second Timothy 2:15 reads, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (**New King James Version**). The last phrase, "rightly dividing the word of truth" literally means, "cut the word of truth straight, handle it properly." This necessity is borne out by examining various translations: "handling aright the word of truth" (**American Standard Version**), "handling accurately the word of truth" (**New American Standard Version**), "correctly handling the word of truth" (**New International Version**). All these translations clearly agree that for one to be approved of God as a worker who is not ashamed, one must understand how to properly treat the word of

truth from God.

At the same time, the phrase teaches that it is possible for people to mishandle the word of truth. While many people are sincere when they mistakenly fail to rightly divide the word of truth, there are some who mishandle the word of God on purpose (2 Corinthians 4:2, "handling the word of God deceitfully"); 11:3-4 (corrupting people by preaching another Jesus, another spirit, another gospel); 2 Peter 3:16 (twisting scriptures to their own destruction).

Following various religious discussions carried on, and posted on Facebook the last few weeks, I have observed that many of the arguments advanced by those opposed to the truth are based on a failure to rightly divide the word of truth. They draw false scriptural conclusions, based on situations that do not properly apply to the argument they are making. One of the basic things in Bible study is to study the context and understand to whom the things are written and when they are to be applied.

In the next two or three articles, I plan to notice five areas where religious differences have occurred because people are not "rightly dividing the word of truth."

1. The difference between Faith and Opinion.
2. The difference between the Old and New Testaments.
3. The difference between a citizen and an alien.
4. The difference between the local church and universal church.
5. The difference between collective and individual action.

Notice the first one. The difference between Faith and Opinion. It is a fact that some decide the rightness of wrongness of some religious matter simply because they have formed an opinion without a scriptural foundation. They do it because, "in their opinion," it is right. But, basing an action on human opinion does not please God. As His children we are to "walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Corinthians 5:7). Since "faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17), and we are to walk by faith, then, logically, if we find no message from God in His word we have no right to assume that it is alright to follow our opinion. But many people do just that.

As we have seen, faith is established by what God says in His word (Romans 10:17); which is His revealed truth (John 17:17; 16:13; 1 Thessalonians 2:13). His word is plain enough that it can be understood if people want to understand it (2 Corinthians 4:13; Ephesians 5:17; 3:3-5). Faith lies in the realm of divine revelation, and we are told to hold fast to sound doctrine (2 Timothy 1:13). When we speak as God speaks in His word, we walk by faith (2 Corinthians 5:7), rightly dividing the word of God (1 Peter 4:11; 1 Corinthians 4:6; 2 John 9). This is the safe course to follow (John 8:31).

On the other hand, opinion is established by what man thinks or feels which is based on human reasoning, ideas, speculation and thoughts. "I think" is not divine revelation. The following scriptures make it clear there is a difference between what men think and what God says: Acts 26:9; Colossians 2:6-9; Matthew 15:7-9; 21:23-27.

Opinion is dangerous because it adds to what God says. People don't like unexplained mysteries, so if God has not chosen to reveal something, they decide to add their two cents worth to explain it. Sometimes the assumption (opinion) is harmless, unless people seek to bind the opinion on others. Note some examples where men speak their opinion about what God has not revealed. What kind of fruit came from the tree of knowledge of good and evil? (Genesis 3). We aren't told, but people assume it was an apple. Is that faith or opinion? What kind of bush did Moses see burning in Exodus 3:1-6? Why did Nicodemus come to Jesus by night? (John 3:1-2) We are not told these things, but people have opinions. What did Jesus write on the ground when the woman taken in adultery was brought to Him? (John 8:6-8) Whatever people might say is opinion, not faith, since we are not told. This is opinion, not faith.

In Second Corinthians 12:2-4 Paul tells us he was caught up into the third heaven. I believe this by faith

because it is revealed. But what he heard and saw is not told, because he was not permitted to tell these things. Yet, a false religion exists today, based on the claims of a woman, Ellen White, who said she was caught up into the same heaven as Paul, and saw the fourth commandment, "Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy," with a halo around it. She took this to mean people were to keep the Sabbath today, and she founded the Seventh Day Adventist church. Did she act by faith, or by opinion? I believe you know the answer.

Religious differences rise over what is not said (opinion, the silence of God). Opinion confuses and divides. If you talk with people you will hear a variety of answers for the kind of fruit eaten, type of burning bush, why Nicodemus came to Jesus at night, what Jesus wrote on the ground. But they speak opinion, not the revealed word of God. One has to know the difference between faith and opinion in discussing different religions practices.

Understanding The Church of Christ (5)

Wayne Fancher | Searcy, Arkansas, USA

In my last article I tried to explain from scripture why many of us in the Church of Christ do not believe that we are under the authority of the first covenant, the Old Testament, but the body of Christ today is meant to be under the authority of the new covenant, the New Testament. Once that fact is understood about us, then the logical question is "what purpose then does the law serve?" This question is actually asked in Galatians 3:19.

Galatians 3:19: "What purpose then does the law serve? It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator."

The New covenant does actually explain how the Old Testament is meant to be understood and used by Christians today.

Galatians 3:24-25: "Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor."

The primary function of the Old Testament is to bring us to Christ.

Acts 28:23: "So when they had appointed him a day, many came to him at his lodging, to whom he explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning till evening."

Acts 17:2-3: "Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, 'This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ.'"

The New Testament makes absolutely no sense whatsoever without the Old Testament. The Old Testament functions as a giant arrow pointing us to the Christ. When I bring people to God through Christ today, I show them the big picture of the Bible as a whole and use the prophecies and shadows of the Christ in the Old Testament to prove that Jesus is actually the Christ.

Romans 15:4: "For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope."

1 Corinthians 10:1-11:

Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, all ate the same spiritual food,

and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ. But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness. Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted. And do not become idolaters as were some of them. As it is written, 'The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.' Nor let us commit sexual immorality, as some of them did, and in one day twenty-three thousand fell; nor let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed by serpents; nor complain, as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer. Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.

Hebrews 4:11: "Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience."

James 5:10-11: "My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience."

Hebrews 11:7-8:

By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith. By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going.

The Old Testament is for our learning and examples of people and their relationship with God. This information and these examples are for us to better understand our God and what He expects of us in our relationship with Him today. You will find quotes from the Old Testament in the New Testament and many commands found in the Old Testament are also found in the New Testament. It is God's prerogative as God to put in each covenant what His desires and commands are for those of us who live under each of the covenants. There are many things commanded and practiced under the Old Testament that are not commanded nor practiced under the New Covenant. The New and Old Testaments are not one big covenant meant to be blended together where we are supposed to obey all the commands in both covenants as Christians. Christians today are only under the authority of the new covenant of which Jesus is the mediator and His blood is the blood that brought this new covenant into force at His death on the cross.

Speaking Ashdod

Mike Thomas | Beaver Dam, Kentucky, USA

One of the issues many Jews had in coming out of Babylonian Captivity was "half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod, and could not speak the language of Judah" (Nehemiah 13:24). The problem with their children speaking Ashdod was not that God forbade His people from learning other languages. He authored the world's languages in Genesis 11. His problem with Jews knowing only Ashdod was it proved His people had violated His law regarding Jews marrying foreigners. Nehemiah said:

"So I contended with them and cursed them, struck some of them and pulled out their hair, and made them swear by God, saying, 'You shall not give your daughters as wives to their sons, nor take their daughters for your sons or yourselves'" (verse 25).

For Jewish children to not know the language of Judah (Hebrew), yet have a fluent tongue in Ashdod (a language of the Philistines) was evidence His people had not been living by His will. They had violated God's marriage law for them (Deuteronomy 7:3), and their words proved it. Our language continues to reveal our relationship to God. Whenever we say things that are inconsistent with righteousness ("let not corrupt word proceed out of your mouth," Ephesians 4:29) or whenever we express beliefs that are founded in religious error, we reveal a lack of Bible training on our part.

For instance, a person who refers to the preacher as “pastor” shows they have been misled by denominational error. In the New Testament, the term “pastor” is used only once and it is in reference to the same group of men who are also known as shepherds, overseers, bishops, and elders of local churches (see Ephesians 4:11; Titus 1:5, 7; 1 Peter 5:1-2). It is never used for the man who is solely a preacher or evangelist, as indicated in Ephesians 4:11 (“some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers”). This verse proves these are separate roles. Furthermore, the Bible does not teach Christians to have one pastor over the local church, or for bishops to oversee many churches, but to have a plurality of pastors (elders or bishops) serve at one location. The only pattern we have in the New Testament is for there to be “elders in every church” (Acts 14:23). Men have corrupted that pattern with a one-man pastor or a multi-church bishop arrangement, but from the beginning it was not so. Those who view the preacher with this concept reveal their lack of training in God’s word.

The language of Ashdod is also seen other modern examples.

Born Again Christian. The only source for this phrase is with men because God never used such language. There is no concept like this in the Bible since it is redundant in nature. According to God, a person is not born again without becoming a Christian, nor can one be a Christian without having been born again. Jesus said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (John 3:5). He was referring to the plan of salvation that the Spirit would reveal in the Christian era, which includes water (baptism). The first gospel sermon ever preached was by Peter in Acts 2. He told the Jews who believed in Jesus as God’s Son, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). Those who obeyed this message were “added to the church” by the Lord (verse 47). This is what Jesus had in mind in telling people to be born again. Hence, to say a person is a “born again Christian” is redundant and unnecessary; and suggests a person can be born again without being a Christian. Would you say you are going to the “tooth dentist” for a cleaning? Of course not, but why? Because the term dentist is defined as one who cares for, extracts, or repairs teeth. There is no way to be a dentist without caring for teeth. Likewise, a Christian is one who has been born again in Christ. There has never been a Christian who was not born again, nor one born again apart from being a Christian. To use language that suggests otherwise is to reveal the influence of Ashdod.

Jesus Is My Personal Savior. I suppose this is in contrast to an impersonal savior! Where does the Bible use this phrase? “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son...” Jesus is the same Savior for everyone and does not customize redemption for each person, as “personal” implies. When Paul told people to “work out your own salvation” (Philippians 2:12), he was not issuing a license to find your own plan of salvation. Redemption is never tailor-made to each individual’s preference. Jesus warned, “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven” (Matthew 7:21). Does that sound like we may construct salvation from any method we choose? Of course not, so why use language that implies salvation is personal? Why give the impression that Jesus has done something for us that He has not or will not do for others? Certainly, that is how it is applied because each man does what is right in his own eyes when it comes to salvation. Alas, “This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic” (James 3:15). The fact of the matter is, people who use the phrase “Personal Savior” (synonymous with “private, respective”) are doing so because of a denominational concept. It is rooted in the belief that salvation is a better felt than told experience and leads one to trust in his emotions instead of the Word. While salvation is not dull or meaningless, it is not a unique experience to its recipients. Everyone who obeys the gospel may go on their way rejoicing because Jesus saves us all in the same way and by the same gospel. See Acts 8:12, 26-39.

I realize we all have things to overcome in putting on Christ and that we must be patient with one another as well as seek maturity in Christ. However, let us not be “lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord” (Romans 12:11). That is, let us test all things we are taught in religion to see if they descend from heaven or from men. It could be we are using concepts and language that have been handed down to us

through men, and are not found in God's will. Let us have enough love for God to do as the Bereans with everything they were taught: "These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so" (Acts 17:11). People with that kind of commitment are less likely to use concepts that originate in the language of Ashdod.

Are Examples Binding?

Sean P. Cavender | Bald Knob, Arkansas, USA

When discussing matters of work, organization, and worship of the church, or the plan of salvation, our objective should be to establish biblical authority. Direct commands, approved apostolic examples, and unavoidable conclusions become the avenues by which we read and understand what the church should, or should not, be involved in.

It is incredibly hard to deny direct statements. When some teaching is directly stated or commanded, then it becomes undeniable. However, examples and implications/inferences of Scripture are subtler. We must exercise caution and examine carefully for what is an approved example, or a required and necessary implication.

Are examples binding? Yes, some examples are binding; not all examples are binding. Some approved examples are binding, but some examples may be permissive (for more on this, please be sure to look forward to next month's article).

In the book of Acts we have many examples which show us how a person receives the forgiveness of sins and becomes a Christian. The 3,000 in Acts 2 were baptized "for the forgiveness of sins" (Acts 2:38, 41). The Samaritans were baptized and converted to the Lord (Acts 8:12), the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:36-38), Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9:18), and Cornelius (Acts 10:47-48) — all of these were baptized to have their sins washed away (cf. Acts 22:16). Later in Acts Lydia and her household were baptized (Acts 16:15), a jailer from Philippi was also converted and baptized (Acts 16:33). The Corinthians and the Ephesians were baptized, as well (Acts 18:8; 19:5). We learn from so many examples there is an approved action that must take place in order to become a child of God—a person must submit to the Lord in baptism. Baptism was (and is still) a universal requirement.

What makes these examples binding? It was applied universally to various people in diverse locations and in several different circumstances. Specific details might be different, but the principle and example of baptism is evident in each case. In regard to the organization of the local church, in the New Testament, we read of only a plurality of elders. We never read of a congregation having a single elder, or pastor. Paul and Barnabas brought a collection to the elders of the church (Acts 11:30). Paul and Barnabas ordained elders in all the churches (Acts 14:23). Paul met with the elders of the church in Ephesus (Acts 20:17). He addressed the elders of the church at Philippi (Philippians 1:1). Paul told Titus to ordain elders in the churches (Titus 1:5). Churches are to be organized by the New Testament pattern and example—having a plurality of elders in the churches. There is no other example and no exception, so the example becomes binding.

Clearly, some apostolic examples are not binding on us today. Paul took a vow that involved cutting his hair (Acts 18:18). He traveled by boat (Acts 20:6), whereas, other preachers' mode of travel is not specifically given (Acts 8:26-27). Paul went into the temple in Jerusalem and purified himself according to Jewish tradition (Acts 21:26). Peter sinned and acted hypocritically by not accepting Gentiles, even though he knew better (Galatians 2:11-14). Simply because an apostle did something, does not mean it was a binding, or an approved action. We are not expected to keep those examples.

How do we know when an example is approved and binding? We will look at this question next month, Lord willing.

a response to
"THE BIBLE VERSUS THE CHURCH OF CHRIST" (1)

William J. Stewart | Odessa, Ontario, Canada

.....
Someone recently pointed me to an article claiming to expose the falsehood
of the Church of Christ. We will be responding to the content of the article
over a period of several months. The original article, by James L. Melton,
can be found at www.av1611.org/jmelton/chchurch.html
.....

Mr. Melton begins by quoting a single sentence from a Delton Haun tract, and concludes from it, *"The Church of Christ people fail to realize that the 'true church' is a spiritual organism, NOT a physical organization."* The citation says no such thing. Haun acknowledged the Lord's promise to build only one church (which He did, Matthew 16:18), and that it is identified in Scripture as His body (which it is, Ephesians 4:4; Colossians 1:18).

This distinction which Melton makes (Haun made no such distinction, nor does the Bible) between the PHYSICAL and SPIRITUAL church seems to be Melton's way to allow for various denominations (the PHYSICAL) to all be part of the same SPIRITUAL body. Though this is a convenient 21st century ecumenical approach to religion, it is not based on what the Bible says about the church. The Lord's church, as we read about it in the New Testament is separated by geographical location (ie. Jerusalem, Antioch, Rome, Philippi, etc.), not by denominational affiliation (ie. Baptist, Methodist, Mormon, Pentecostal, etc.).

He chides Haun for identifying the church as a *"...particular group of people who believe and practice the same things..."* (p. 2). Melton would have us believe the Lord is OK with the doctrinal division which exists because of denominationalism, and that each denominational is simply a part of the whole body of Christ. The apostle Paul agrees with Haun, not Melton, for he wrote to the church in Corinth,
...I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no division among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. (1 Corinthians 1:10, NKJV).

Melton's position allows for, even encourages, doctrinal division.

Melton charges, *"...these people believe that the true Church ceased to exist for about seventeen centuries, and that THEIR church has restored the true faith for today"* (p. 5). However, the citation he gave from an Exum Press tract says no such thing.

ZME Science(1), provides a recipe for a 2,000 year old Egyptian bread. If we follow the same recipe today, we will end up with the same style of bread. There are a variety of bread styles in the world today, but if you want an authentic loaf of first century Egyptian bread - you need to follow the right recipe. The same is true with the church. There are all kinds of different churches today. Why are they different? They are using different recipes (doctrines & practices). If we want to be the church that Jesus built, we need to follow His recipe (the doctrine & practices that are revealed in the New Testament).

I have no doubt the true church has continued to exist since the day Jesus started it. Wesley, Luther, Knox, and Whitfield were not part of the true church, not because it didn't exist in their day, but because they believed, taught and practiced things contrary to sound doctrine. They didn't follow Jesus' pattern for the church.

Melton writes, *"If you have received Jesus Christ as your Saviour, then you are a member of the true*

church, no matter WHAT denomination you are associated with..." (p. 6). Again, Melton discounts the importance of believing and doing what Jesus says; doctrine and practice are unimportant factors in his mind, so long as you believe you have "received Jesus Christ." This would be like saying, "If you believe fitness is important, then you are a member of the YMCA, no matter what gym (Fit4Less, GoodLife Fitness, Planet Fitness, etc.) you are associated with." It doesn't work that way. The Baptist church is no more part of the true church than Fit4Less is part of the YMCA. They are distinct organizations. They may have many similarities, but that doesn't make them the same organization or one part of the other.

If one wants to be part of the church Jesus built, they need to forsake the denominational mindset that is prevalent in today's religious world, and meet and worship with those who are teaching and doing what Jesus commanded, not what Wesley, Luther, Knox, Whitfield, or other influential religious leaders have taught and practiced.

1 zmescience.com/science/archaeology/ancient-bread-roman-recipe-17032017/

The Autonomy of the Local Church (2)

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

I possess a legal document entitled, **"Amended Constitution of Church of Christ - Nigeria."** This document was adopted by many churches of Christ meeting in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State (where I taught 111 preachers in classes on the authority of the Scriptures in January, 1992), Nigeria in 2003. While declaring, "The Church shall uphold the Supremacy of the Bible in all matters of doctrine as the standard of her practice and faith," the document nonetheless declares, "WE THE MEMBERS of Church of Christ - Nigeria, ...DO HEREBY MAKE, ENACT AND GIVE TO OURSELVES the following Constitution." I thought the Bible was the constitution of the church of Christ. The Constitution declares the organization to be composed of churches of Christ in Nigeria. It provides for the selection of a board of trustees and states, "All landed property of the Church shall be registered in the name of the Registered Trustees." The document decrees a "National General Meeting" of the church at least annually. It claims for the organization the power to deny any congregation the right to bear the name "Church of Christ" if they are not approved by this national organization.

Obviously this constitution simply creates a national denomination calling itself "Church of Christ" and wielding power over local congregations to keep them in line. It would be hard to imagine a more obvious denial of the autonomy, self rule, of local churches. It would be difficult to conceive of a more dramatic proof that, when local autonomy is ignored, denominational tyranny results.

The creation of a Church of Christ denomination in Nigeria was the result of a half century of American missionary influence. Let's see how.

The Sponsoring Church

For most of my lifetime (I'm now 72), among the majority of brethren, before a preacher goes overseas, the eldership of some church assumes oversight of his work and solicits other congregations to send money to them to support the preacher and his work. The elders of the sponsoring church exercise authority over both the work of the congregations which send money and the congregation the preacher establishes in a foreign country. This is called "missionary work," and the preacher is called a "missionary." Both the terminology and the organization are borrowed from denominations.

Lewis G. Hale, a notable defender of the sponsoring church, thus described the part of contributing churches to a radio or TV program:

There are hundreds of churches which send financial aid to help keep the program on the air. They have no part in the management of the program. They have no part in the selection of the preacher, singers, nor sermon topics. Their part is solely that of financial assistance (2).

This is the work of all involved churches.

The principle of representative work is involved when a church sends a gift to another church to assist in a work which it is doing. If the gift is to help pay the expenses of the evangelistic effort, the contributing church is preaching the gospel just as surely as if it had used those finances to have the preacher come to its own locality to do the preaching. In either case, the church is preaching by means of a representative, the preacher (Ibid. page 57).

Thus, the elders of the sponsoring church oversee the work of a number of churches.

This violates all scriptural principles governing congregational cooperation for evangelism. One church acts as the agent of other churches, one church assumes the oversight of an evangelistic work belonging to several churches, and the equality of each congregation relative to oversight is destroyed. The sponsoring church violates the New Testament pattern for congregational cooperation and destroys the autonomy of local churches.

Human Organizations for Spread of Gospel

World Bible School is a notable example of an organization begun by men to preach the gospel. Its founder and long time head, the late Jimmy Lovell, wrote:

Legally, and again I have never been questioned, we are incorporated under the laws of California as West Coast Publishing Co. - a non-profit, tax deductible religious organization. We have another corporation in Texas known as World Bible School, with directors who are on the WCC board (Action, Sept., 1983. 2).

It is funded by churches of Christ. Again, Jimmy Lovell wrote:

We would like to see more churches financially supporting WBS. Small churches that do no mission work because they are small would find themselves responsible for more baptisms than more large churches if they simply sent a monthly check to WBS to help with this good work. Mention it to the leaders and elders where you worship and ask that they consider doing it (Action. March, 1986, 2).

When churches support a human organization to do the work of the church, they establish ties of fellowship with the human institution, since a contribution by a local church is an expression of fellowship (2 Corinthians 8:4; Philippians 4:15-16). The only tie in Christ is that of fellowship (1 John 1:3). Thus, by donating to the Missionary Society, World Bible School, or any other human organization, that man-made institution is attached to the churches in ties of fellowship. It becomes in reality a church organization. It thus is a violation of the New Testament pattern for the organization of the church (2 John 9).

Church support of human institutions violates the independence of the local church. Churches send the money; World Bible school provides the over-sight. "All of this is handled through our follow up work in Visalia, California with funds provided by churches and individuals who want someone to follow-up on their students" (Action, January, 1986. 4). This clearly violates local church independence (1 Peter 5:1-4).

WBS is a missionary society parallel in structure to the American Christian Missionary Society of the Christian Church that divided the Lord's people in the USA in the nineteenth century. The Missionary Society was a human organization supported by churches and individuals for the furtherance of the gospel.

The convention met in Cincinnati, Ohio, October 24-28, 1849, at which time the American Christian Missionary Society was organized. The following resolution was proposed by John T. Johnson, of Kentucky, and passed by the group: 'Resolved, That the "Missionary Society," as a means to concentrate and dispense the wealth and benevolence of the brethren of this Reformation in an effort to convert the world, is both scriptural and expedient.' After full discussion of the matter, a constitution was adopted, ... 'Article 2d. The object of this Society shall be to promote the spread of the Gospel in destitute places of our own and foreign lands.' (Hailey. 148-49)

The missionary society was defended in the same way WBS is defended.

The Christian Missionary Society, too, on its own independent footing, will be a grand auxiliary to the churches in destitute regions, at home as well as abroad, in dispensing the blessings of the gospel among many that otherwise would never have heard it.

(Alexander Campbell, "Millennial Harbinger," 1849. 694-695, as quoted by Hailey. 150-51).

Results of Centralization

Sixty years of American influence in Nigeria has resulted, not in the promotion of nondenominational Christianity, but in the birth of a national "Church of Christ" denomination claiming the power to crush dissent. We have sown the wind and reaped the whirlwind (Hosea 8:7). American churches and preachers operating with commendable zeal to reach the lost but in ignorance of the divine principle of congregational autonomy have caused enormous harm. They have spawned a human denomination.

Please don't accuse me of being "anti" foreign evangelism. I have made twenty-one overseas preaching trips to eight countries and one U.S. territory.

But we try to temper our zeal with knowledge by following the divine plan for congregational cooperation for evangelism. We must maintain the independence of each local church by engaging in concurrent cooperation for evangelism. This is both the most effective plan and the way that will glorify and please God.

Superiority of Divine Wisdom

The sponsoring church system and church supported human organizations corrupt the organization of the church, alter the divine pattern for congregational cooperation, destroy local church autonomy and lay the groundwork for denominationalism. Furthermore, these human schemes just don't work. The last two generations have seen a dramatic increase of sponsoring churches and church supported human organizations for evangelism among churches of Christ. During this time the church of Christ in America has ceased the growth it formerly enjoyed.

This dramatically demonstrates the superiority of God's wisdom to man's (Isaiah 55:8-9; Romans 11:33-36; Ephesians 3:8-11). By the amazingly simple plan revealed in the New Testament, in stark contrast to the elaborate organizational schemes of men, the first century church took the gospel to the whole world in one generation (Mark 16:15; Colossians 1:5-6,23). How could mere men possibly improve on this divine plan? God's way is both right and best.

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This Word of Exhortation : Introduction to Hebrews

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

Author

The author of the book of Hebrews chose not to identify himself. From the second century until the Protestant Reformation the overwhelming consensus of opinion was that Paul was its author. Since Martin Luther tentatively concluded that Apollos wrote Hebrews, scholars have increasingly agreed with his assessment. References to chains, Timothy, and prison seem to point to the apostle (10:34; 13:23). But scholars appeal to the elegant, polished Greek of Hebrews in contrast with the rough Greek of Paul's known letters as evidence that the evangelist known for being "eloquent" and "mighty in the Scriptures"

(Acts 18:24) penned Hebrews. I accept the fact the author chose to be anonymous.

Audience

The very earliest Greek manuscripts of Hebrews still in existence contain on the outside of the scroll "To Hebrews" (in Greek of course). This term can be used of Jews who spoke Aramaic, the language of Palestine in the first century, and followed Jewish customs (Acts 6:1), or it can be used of Jews in distinction to Gentiles (Philippians 3:5). Here it seems to be used in the latter sense.

It is apparent from the text of the book that it was written to a community of Jews who had been Christians for years. There is no mention in Hebrews of idolatry, eating things sacrificed to idols, or other Gentile issues Paul dealt with in First Corinthians. According to the author, Christ became a man in order to help "the seed of Abraham" (2:16). Hebrews is the sole New Testament book which designates Christ as our High Priest, doing so twelve times (2:17; 3:1; 4:14,15; 5:5,10; 6:20; 7:26; 8:1,3; 9:11; 10:21). In fact, the high priesthood of Christ is a dominant theme of Hebrews (4:14 - 5:10; 7:1 - 8:5). Extended and detailed argumentation is made concerning Moses (3:1-6), the history of national Israel (3:7 - 4:13), the Old Covenant (8:6-13), the tabernacle (9:1-5), the service of the Jewish priests (9:6-11), and the animal sacrifices of the Law (9:6 - 10:17). The writer exhorts them to leave the camp of Israel (13:12-13).

The audience had heard the testimony of those who were witnesses of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, i.e., apostles (2:3; cf. Acts 1:1-8; 10:39-41). They had been Christians for a lengthy time but had failed to grow (5:12-14). But they had been diligent in ministering to the saints (6:10). They had endured persecution (10:32-33), but none of them had died for their faith (12:4).

There were serious symptoms of their lack of spiritual growth. They were ignorant of the meat of the word (5:12-14) and some neglected the public assemblies of the church (Hebrews 10:24-25).

Thus, they were in grave danger of being led astray by false teaching (13:9) and falling away from Christ (3:12-15; 4:1,11,14; 6:4-8; 10:35). The consequences would be terrible indeed (10:26-31).

Thus, the letter was written to Jews who had been Christians for years, had failed to grow in knowledge as they should, and were in danger of leaving Christ and returning to Judaism.

Purpose

The letter is a "word of exhortation" (13:22), the Jewish phrase used to designate and describe the address a Jewish male could make before a synagogue audience (Acts 13:15). The inspired author wrote to believing Jews for the purpose of persuading them to remain faithful to Christ. His repeated plea is "Hold fast" (3:6,14; 4:14; 10:23).

Date

The recipients of the letter had been believers for a rather long time (5:12; 10:32), and the first generation of their leaders (apostles, evangelists, elders) had died (13:7; cf. New American Standard Bible, English Standard Version). The Temple in Jerusalem was still standing, and sacrifices were still being offered there (8:4; 10:11; 13:10-11), but soon were to cease (8:13), and the day of the destruction of the Temple was approaching (10:24-25,37). If Paul wrote the letter, it was shortly before his release from prison in Rome (13:23), which would make it about the same date as the apostle's short letter to Philemon (Philemon 1:1,22). Hebrews was probably written about A.D. 63-64.

From Where Written

It seems to have been written from Rome (13:23-24).

Plan

The inspired writer first advances an argument proving the superiority of Christ over Judaism, then follows the argumentation with an exhortation to remain faithful to Christ. He uses the word "better" thirteen times,

primarily to describe the relationship of Christ to the things of the Old Covenant (1:4; 6:9; 7:7,19,22; 8:6 [twice]; 9:23; 10:34; 11:16,35,40; 12:24) and describes Christ as “more excellent” twice (1:4; 8:6). Whereas the things pertaining to the Old Covenant were “ready to vanish away” (8:13), in regard to Christ there is “eternal salvation” (5:9), “eternal judgment” (6:2), “eternal redemption” (9:12), “the eternal Spirit” (9:14), and “the eternal inheritance” (9:15). Only through Christ can we “draw near to God” (7:18-19; 10:19-22). Christ “has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises” (8:6). He also employs the phrase “let us” thirteen times in exhortations following and based on the arguments (4:1,11,14,16; 6:1; 10:22,23, 24; 12:1 [twice],28; 13:13,15).

Outline

- I. The More Excellent Christ - 1:1 - 10:18
 - A. Better than Angels as Spokesman for God and Savior of Mankind - 1:1 - 2:18
 - B. Better than Moses as Builder of God's House - 3:1 - 4:13
 - C. Better than Aaron as High Priest - 4:14 - 8:5
 - D. Mediator of a Better Covenant - 8:6 - 10:18
- II. Therefore, Let Us Hold Fast - 10:19 - 13:17
- III. Conclusion - 13:18-25

Use

Hebrews has the most detailed study in Scripture of the divine and human natures of Jesus Christ (chapters 1 - 2). It is replete with warnings of the danger of falling away from Christ along with reasons to remain faithful and how to do so. It has the lengthiest discussion of the relationship of the Old Covenant to Christ. And it has the fullest and easiest to understand and apply discussion of the nature of saving faith.



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