

April 2018

Editor, Keith Sharp

Designer, William Stewart



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

In This Issue...

- **Statement About Saved People in Denominations**
- **Question About Hope from Louisiana**
- **Behavior of "The New Self" (Ephesians 4:25-29)**
| *Patrick Farish*
- **The Need for Authority** | *Jefferson David Tant*
- **Rightly Dividing The Word of God (4)**
| *Tommy J. Thornhill*
- **"What Does The Lord Require"** | *Jim Mickells*
- **Understanding The Church of Christ (8)**
| *Wayne Fancher*
- **Calvin's Gospel** | *Mike Thomas*
- **Brethren And Business Meetings** | *William Stewart*
- **God Be Gracious** | *Sean P. Cavender*
- **Prayer and Providence** | *Keith Sharp*

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

PHILIPPIANS
4:8

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

Statement About Saved People in Denominations

Statement from Student of Bible Correspondence Course

I am a United Methodist minister. I believe there are saved people in other denominations.

Answers

Thank you for taking the Bible correspondence course and for honestly, plainly stating your disagreement. I appreciate your honesty in stating your convictions, and I appreciate your diligence in completing fourteen lessons in the Bible correspondence course.

But, honesty compels me to answer your statement by citing Scripture that sustains the point. When one is saved, the Lord adds that person to His body, the church (Acts 2:47). There is only one such church (Ephesians 1:22-23; 4:4;) and all the saved are in it (Ephesians 5:23). That church may be called by various names (cf. Acts 8:3; 9:2; Romans 16:16; 1 Corinthians 1:2; Hebrews 12:22-24), but we must not be called by sectarian names which betray sectarian loyalty (1 Corinthians 1:10-13).

The church is composed of the individuals the Lord has added to it, those whom He has saved, not of denominations (1 Corinthians 12:20). The various denominations all are characterized by sectarian names (Baptist, Methodist, etc.) revealing sectarian loyalty, in violation of First Corinthians 1:10-13 and the passages that condemn sectarianism (e.g., Galatians 5:19-21).

The basis of fellowship in each denomination is an uninspired creed of mere human production (e.g.,

Methodist Discipline), in violation of the exclusive, divine authority of the New Testament (Colossians 3:17; 2 verses John 9:11; Revelation 22:18-19).

Each denomination has denominational organization tying local churches together in violation of the local autonomy (self rule) of congregations of the church of the New Testament (1 Peter 5:1-2).

Finally, no one can be saved outside Christ (John 14:6), and the only way to get into Christ is by being buried in the waters of baptism (Romans 6:3-4).

Question About Hope from Louisiana

Question

Is hope conditional? Is the expectation of salvation after death conditional?
In other words: Is it possible to have a false hope?

Answers

"And we desire that each of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises" (Hebrews 6:11-12). The passage shows these things about our hope: (1) we must be diligent to maintain it, (2) we can have "full assurance (complete confidence) in our hope until the end, (3) to do this we must exercise faith and patience, and (4) if we do so we will inherit the promises.

The chapter continues with the beautiful undergirding of our hope, the promise to Abraham made sure by two "immutable" (unchangeable) things, God's word and oath (Hebrews 6:13-16). This is recorded for our benefit, to give us "strong consolation" (Hebrews 6:17-18). This hope is therefore "an anchor of the soul, and which enters the Presence behind the veil, where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek" (Hebrews 6:19-20).

Yes, hope is conditioned on faith, diligence, and patience. But if we exercise these, we have "full assurance in our hope"; it is the "anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast."

Behavior of "The New Self" | Ephesians 4:25-29

Patrick Farish | Waxahatchie, Texas, USA

Paul has talked to the Ephesians about Jesus' provisions and expectations for them, and for all Christians, to grow into "mature manhood" (4:13). In our text at this time he begins enumerating specifics of that growth.

He begins with the tongue. Consider the wisdom of that beginning. James wrote that if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his own body (James 3:2; and confer verses 1 through 12). He had earlier exhorted Christians to "be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger" (1:19.)

Speech is one of God's greatest temporal gifts to man, but the devil tempts most effectively through our speech – by seeking to deceive, by outright lying, cursing, careless handling of the name of God, by inappropriate innuendo. Christians drenched by foul speech in the workplace, or the classroom, need to be careful lest they be overwhelmed by such and their tongue takes them astray.

So Paul starts: "put away falsehood .. speak the truth" and "Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear" (4:25, 29). He will have more to say on this subject (4:31; 5:4), but we will reserve it for later. We should take these admonitions soberly.

Next he says, “Be angry and do not sin....” Among things that “tick us off” is that which we have just discussed: sin with the tongue. Now, this cuts both ways: anger may be aroused because of garbage being spewed out of the mouth of people disdainful of innocent ears, and we are offended; and anger may occur as we fail to be quick to hear and slow to speak (James 1:21). Paul is not saying that anger per se is sinful but that it should be controlled, should not be allowed to take us over – “let not the sun go down on your anger”.

In discussions of this subject and this passage we sometimes hear the expression, “righteous indignation” as descriptive of acceptable anger; even so, the limitation stands: even if the indignation is righteous, “let not the sun go down” on it. Anger held overlong is corrosive, destructive; it will produce bitterness of spirit and an outlook that is totally unacceptable in a Christian.

The next instruction reflects the fact that the church and sinners are not exclusive. Paul made this clear when he itemized for the Corinthians those who will not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 6:9-10) and then says, verse eleven, “And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God” – they had obeyed the gospel, they were forgiven. Such circumstance may describe one who has been a thief. Paul does not blush nor stammer to instruct him to steal no more, that he may be able to help the needy.

Speaking of those who are in need, perhaps we need to reconsider our reaction to people we do not know, who come to us from time to time with their hand out. They may be unworthy; but they may be worthy. If the money we are able to give such a one is used improperly, that is their problem. If I refuse to “take a chance” and their need is genuine, that is my problem (James 2:1-5).

We come back to the tongue. and “corrupting talk.” We said in the beginning of considering this passage that speech is a great gift of God to us. He has given instruction about our use of it – as for instance, “A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver”(Proverbs 25:11), or, “Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person” (Colossians 3:5); **and**, Jesus said, “I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned” (Matthew 12:36-37).

Speech that is good for building up may give grace to those who hear; so, let us all, always, speak in view of judgment. A word fitly spoken....

The Need for Authority

Jefferson David Tant | Roswell, Georgia, USA

When He entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to Him while He was teaching, and said, 'By what authority are You doing these things, and who gave you this authority?' (Matthew 21:23)

That was a legitimate question. Acting by authority is essential to an orderly life on this planet—in government, in school, in the home, and in the church.

Moses instructed Israel: “You shall not do at all what we are doing here today, every man doing whatever is right in his own eyes” (Deuteronomy 12:8). One problem America faces today is the extremely high rate of incarceration. Why are so many in prison? Because they did not respect authority. They did what was right in their own eyes.

A church that pleases God must respect authority. We all know Colossians 3:17: “Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus....” We know that “in the name of” has reference to authority.

Thus our words (teaching) and deeds (practice) must be according to the authority that Christ had (Matthew 28:18).

There is no clearer statement of the need for authority than Matthew 7:21-23:

“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you who practice lawlessness.’”

“Lawlessness” is from the Greek “anomia,” which is literally “without law,” and thus “without authority.” These people were engaged in “good works” and are represented as reasoning with God: “But Lord, look at all these good things we have done.” But God’s reply was, “You may have done what seemed good to you, but it was not according to my will.” If we are going to do the “will of the Father,” we need to follow the terms of the will—the New Testament.

Isaiah’s answer to the people of his day was, “To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn” (8:20).

Sadly, many churches of Christ today are “doing whatever is right in their own eyes.” I have read and heard many strange statements justifying things that these churches are doing. A Texas church involved in a questionable practice justified it with these words: “But effectiveness must be the final justification...--positive results—must be the real reason” for what they were doing. Wouldn’t it be better to say, “The Word of God must be the final justification...”? If effectiveness is the final justification, then we must applaud the Catholics, for their practices have produced the largest “Christian” denomination in the world. “Positive results?” What about the Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses who seem to have great results in converting people?

An Oklahoma City church sponsored some area-wide effort, and evidently anticipated objections. Their Sunday bulletin said: “CONVERSATION IN HELL REGARDING CAMPAIGNING FOR CHRIST. Once upon a time Satan asked his helpers to propose ways and means of hindering the Campaign for Christ effort of the 25th and Geraldine Church of Christ...(One) said, ‘Let’s tell them to argue over the Scripturalness of this effort.’”

Are we to understand that questioning whether or not something is scriptural is a tactic of Satan right out of hell? What about I Thessalonians 5:21: “But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good.” We remember Paul’s commendation of the Bereans. “Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so” (Acts 17:11). We could also say they were “examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were Scriptural!”

“Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes, so that in us you may learn not to exceed what is written...” (1 Corinthians 4:6). Church leaders in Jerusalem sent a letter to Antioch in an effort to correct a problem there: “Forasmuch as we have heard that certain who went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls; to whom we gave no commandment” (Acts 15:24). In other words, certain ones were teaching things “without authority.”

Balaam’s statement of principle is a good guide for us.

“Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not do anything contrary to the command of the LORD, either good or bad, of my own accord. What the LORD speaks, that I will speak” (Numbers 24:13).

In answering a lawyer’s question, Christ replied: “What is written in the Law? How does it read to you?”

(Luke 10:26) May we ever strive to have “book, chapter and verse” for all we do.

Rightly Dividing The Word Of God (4)

Tommy J. Thornhill | Etna, Arkansas, USA

We continue our study of “rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15). When people fail to “rightly divide” or properly handle the word of God it creates religious division. Previous lessons dealt with problems that arise when people mix human opinions with the word of God. This adulterates God’s word and makes it useless as a proper guide. Then we dealt with problems that develop when people fail to properly distinguish between the Old and the New Testaments. Even though both are inspired, Christians are no longer under the Old Testament law. People cannot go to the Old Testament for doctrinal practices. Now let’s notice another area where people fail to rightly divide the word of truth. Problems and division exist today because people do not understand the difference between a citizen of God’s kingdom and an alien.

Difference Between a Citizen and an Alien

Most people understand there are differences in the world and in society between one who is a citizen of a country, and one who is a stranger or alien (non-citizen of their country). But, let me be clear. In this article I am not writing about the difference between citizens and foreigners in the physical world. I am writing about the difference between one who is a citizen of God’s kingdom and one who is an alien (not in God’s kingdom). And there are differences to be sure.

There is a failure to understand the religious difference between a person who is a child of God and an alien sinner in the area of salvation. One who is a citizen in the Lord’s kingdom has been born anew by being “born of water and the Spirit” (John 3:5), “by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:5), and has been “delivered from the power of darkness and conveyed into the kingdom of the Son of His love” (Colossians 1:12-14). The alien sinner is one who is not in the kingdom. He has not experienced the new birth. He has not answered the call of God to leave the world of sin and enter into His kingdom.

We read of this call in Second Corinthians 6:17-18, “Come out from among them (the world - t.t.) and be separate, says the Lord...and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the LORD Almighty.” While people remain in the world, they remain alien sinners, separated from God because of their sins (Isaiah 59:1-2).

Just as there are different physical requirements for an alien to become a citizen of this country than the requirements for one who has been born a citizen, the same is true in the spiritual world. In the spiritual world, the alien (one who is lost, not yet saved from sin, and that includes all mankind - Romans 3:23) must obey the gospel to become a citizen, i.e., believe and be baptized (Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:38, 41, 47). After one becomes a citizen, when he commits sin, he does not have to be baptized again, since he is already in the kingdom. A citizen who sins is told to repent of having sinned, confess the sin, and pray to God for forgiveness (1 John 1:8-10; 2:1-2).

Simon the sorcerer is an example of one who had been an alien, but obeyed the gospel by believing and being baptized (Acts 8:12-13). He is a citizen, not an alien sinner, but he sins by trying to buy the gift of laying on of hands from the apostles to impart miraculous gifts. He is severely rebuked by Peter, who tells him to repent and pray to God for forgiveness of his wickedness (Acts 8:18-24). Do you see the difference between Simon as an alien and later as a disciple? People fail to rightly divide the word of truth, by telling alien sinners they can be saved like Simon the citizen was told to do, just pray to God. This is not handling the word of God correctly.

There are also differences between the alien sinner and a citizen of the kingdom in the privileges and benefits. We know this is true in the physical world, but many people have a problem seeing the difference

in the spiritual world. Those outside the kingdom are aliens. It is the citizen, not the alien who has the right to call God his Father, and pray to Him. God has promised to hear the prayers of His children through Christ (1 John 5:12-14; 1 Peter 3:12; James 5:16), but He has not promised to hear the prayers of the aliens, even though many in the world pray to Him. He will hear the prayer of an alien who is seeking to find the truth as He did for Cornelius Acts 10. Yet, He will not save anyone by prayer. They must first obey His will (Matthew 7:21-23; Hebrews 5:9).

Christians as citizens are the ones that have the privilege of eating the Lord's Supper with fellow disciples. In this activity Christians show their gratitude for being made citizens through Christ, by assembling each first day of the week and remembering the Lord's death, eating of the unleavened bread and fruit of the vine, symbolic of Jesus' body and blood (Matthew 26:26-29; 1 Corinthians 11:23-33). This memorial supper is for Christians who have been bought and redeemed by the blood of Christ. Sometimes aliens also partake of it, since we do not practice closed communion, but, in reality it means nothing to God that they have done so, since they are not part of His family.

There are so many benefits that belong to the citizen that do not belong to the alien. Forgiveness of sins, redemption, reconciliation, adoption as children of God, the promise of an eternal inheritance. All these blessings, and others belong to the citizen, for "in Christ" is every spiritual blessing (Ephesians 1:3). None of the blessings can be enjoyed by the alien sinner. Let's make sure we recognize the difference between a citizen and an alien.

"What Does The Lord Require"

Jim Mickells | Lewisburg, Tennessee, USA

Far too many people have the mind-set that God requires little or nothing of them to obtain their eternal salvation. They can just live anyway they want and if they recognize that Jesus is the Son of God, in eternity they have nothing to worry about. Sounds good! Easy enough to do! Yet it is totally false. Notice something Micah said by inspiration.

"He has shown you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you But to do justly, To love mercy, And to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8).

First of all, the prophet says God has shown His people what is good. "Good" is defined as, "An adjective meaning good, well-pleasing, fruitful, morally correct, proper, convenient" (**The Complete Word Study Dictionary – Old Testament**). Such a life style described in this verse is morally right. It is that which is pleasing to the Lord. He approves of such a course of conduct. Certainly, this kind of life is fruitful, to the individual, to others and it brings honor and glory to Jehovah as well.

Then he says it is "required" by the Lord. This word means to "ask for, require, demand" (**Brown-Driver-Briggs**). The Father is willing to save you by His grace, but He requires you to live in harmony with His will. The Scriptures did not say this is optional, it is something demanded by Him. Do you know of any who are not interested in going to heaven when life here is over? Yet how many are willing to consider the cost and pay the price necessary to be saved by the mercy of the Almighty (Luke 14:25-33)? Know and understand what is required of you.

One of the requirements is to do justly. "Justly" is defined as "justice, right, rectitude" (**BDB**). We should be fair and upright when dealing with our fellow man. The principle stated in the "golden rule" must be applied to all our relationships (Matthew 7:12). A just person would never seek to harm or hurt another person in word or in deed. Likewise, one's conduct toward God must be morally upright and righteous as well: submitting to God's way of making one just and holy and then living according to His principles of righteousness daily (Romans 10:1-3; Luke 9:23). The Bible sets forth the standards we must follow if are to meet this requirement.

Not only must one be willing to show mercy, he must love to do so. The definition of “mercy” is “A masculine noun indicating kindness, lovingkindness, mercy, goodness, faithfulness, love, acts of kindness” (**CWSD-OT**). Peter asked the Lord how many times he should forgive his brother, up to seven times? The answer given by Jesus was up to seventy times seven (Matthew 18:21-22). Then the parable of The Unmerciful Servant was given (Matthew 18:23-35). Please take time to read this parable and notice several words used in the text: forgive, forgave, patience, compassion, released, and pity. The person who will receive mercy from God is the one who is willing to show mercy toward others (Matthew 5:7). Someone has well described God’s grace as receiving what we don’t deserve; and His mercy is withholding what we do deserve. Let us be a people of mercy, forgiveness, patience, compassion and pity.

The individual who is seeking to meet the requirements set forth by God will walk humbly with Him. Certainly, one does not literally walk with the Father, but he has fellowship with Him. “Humbly” is defined as “A verb meaning to be humble. It is used to describe those who are and act meekly. They are not arrogant, boastful” (**CWSD-OT**). The humble recognizes the greatness of Jehovah, His Sovereignty, His power, and infinite wisdom. He willingly submits to Him, seeks His help, and honors Him by the way he conducts his life. In the Parable of Pharisee and the Tax Collector, stated because some trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised others (Luke 18:9-14), notice how these individuals were described. The Pharisee was proud, arrogant and looked down on others; while the tax collector was humble, begging for mercy, knowing he was a sinner. It was the humble tax collector who left justified by the Lord. “Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time” (1 Peter 5:6).

Are you willing to meet the requirements set forth by the Lord? Then do what is good, do justly, love mercy and walk humbly with your God. Heaven awaits those who will obey!

Understanding The Church Of Christ (8)

Wayne Fancher | Searcy, Arkansas, USA

In the last article we saw how Jesus used the word of God in the Old Testament to establish scriptural authority for His actions by obedience to direct commands and statements of truth. Today I would like to continue the study of how the Son of God used the word of God.

Matthew 12:3: But He said to them, “Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those with him (1 Samuel 21:4-6).

Matthew 12:5: Or have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless (Numbers 28:9).

In the context here Jesus’s disciples are being condemned as sinners for eating grain from a field on the Sabbath day. In answering this accusation Jesus refers to two examples in the Scriptures to prove their actions are not sinful. Thus we learn that an example of action that is approved by God in the Scriptures has an authoritative nature and may be used as scriptural authority for our actions today.

Matthew 22:31-33: “But concerning the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God, saying, “I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living” (Exodus 3:6).

Exodus 3:6: “Moreover He said, ‘I am the God of your father — the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’ And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God.”

Matthew 22:41-46: “He said to them, How then does David in the Spirit call Him ‘Lord’ saying: ‘The Lord said to my Lord, ‘ Sit at my right hand, Till I make your enemies Your footstool.’ If David then calls Him ‘Lord’ how is He his Son?” (Psalm 110:1)

In Matthew 22 we see Jesus using necessary implication from the Scriptures. He quotes from Exodus 3:6 and Psalm 110:1 to establish the scriptural basis for His belief about the resurrection and the Christ being the Son of God. In Exodus 3:6 it is not explicitly stated that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are still alive. However, it is understood by necessary inference through the verb “I am” that these men are still in existence. Psalm 110:1 does not explicitly say that the Christ is the Son of God. However, through necessary inference, since David refers to the Christ as ‘Lord’ we can learn that the Christ is not the son of David.

From our study of how the Son of God used the word of God to establish scriptural authority for His actions and beliefs, we see Jesus using direct commands (Matthew 4:7), statements of truth (Matthew 21:12-13), examples of approved or permitted actions by God (Matthew 12:3-6), and necessary implications (Matthew 22:41-46). Since this is the way the Son of God used the word of God in the Old Testament to establish scriptural authority for His actions and beliefs, it seems to many in the Church of Christ that this is the way we should use the word of God in the New Covenant.

Calvin's Gospel

Mike Thomas | Kokomo, Indiana, USA

Charles Spurgeon once said:

"Calvinism is the gospel, and nothing else. I do not believe we can preach the gospel, if we do not preach justification by faith, without works...nor can I comprehend a gospel which lets saints fall away after they are called, and suffers the children of God to be burned in the fires of damnation after having once believed in Jesus. Such a gospel I abhor" (A Defense of Calvinism, C.H. Spurgeon, p. 172).

The great tragedy with this statement is that it was made by a man who preached to over 10 million people in his lifetime. Spurgeon was the Joel Osteen of the 19th century, preaching to thousands every week in England. Unfortunately, as seen in the given quote, he taught things not supported in the Word of God.

Calvinism, especially the Perseverance of the Saints (“once saved always saved”), contradicts nearly every page of the Bible. From the dawn of time, we see that man has the ability to violate God’s will and lose his fellowship with Him. After mentioning God’s judgment against the Israelites for their disobedience, Paul warned, “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. Therefore, let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall” (1 Corinthians 10:11-12). Why would Paul tell this to Christians if there is no threat of losing salvation? Why reference the disobedience and punishment of the Israelites if God’s people are incapable of doing so today? Alas no one may remain in sin and still be pleasing to God. Paul said “the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: ‘The Lord knows those who are His,’ and, ‘Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity’” (2 Timothy 2:19).

I also realize it is unpleasant to think about people being “burned in the fires of damnation after having once believed in Jesus,” as Spurgeon suggested. I do not enjoy thinking of that fate, either. In fact, there are a lot of things I do not enjoy about reality: taxes, growing old, death, and so on. I wish I could eat what I want and not suffer consequences. But my preferences have no bearing on reality. There are certain things that are true about life whether I accept them or not. Eternal judgment is one of those realities. Our risen Savior said “these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life” (Matthew 25:46).

Whatever Jesus said is true of living forever He also said is true of being punished forever. I can stick my head in the sand and pretend eternity only applies to heaven, but the Son of God also warned of hell—and if I believe Him I will accept all of His teachings. The fact is He “will render to each one according to his

deeds: eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek” (Romans 2:6-9). Calvin and Spurgeon left this world many years ago and must answer for their teachings (James 3:1). In time, we will do the same. “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad” (2 Corinthians 5:10). Hopefully, we will leave this world with faith in Jesus and obedience to His will. This is our only hope past sin (Romans 6:23, 1-7), regardless of what popular preachers say.

Brethren And Business Meetings

William Stewart | Kingston, Ontario, Canada

Each local congregation of God's people is charged with the responsibility of engaging in the work of the Lord. There is a need for edifying teaching, effective outreach, dedicated benevolence, appropriate discipline, etc.. There needs to be an adequate avenue to discuss and make decisions on these and other items.

Men's Business Meetings

The men's business meeting has been the standard practice in many churches of Christ. Just because something is commonplace does not mean it is the necessary way, the only way, or even a Scriptural way of doing things. Consider:

- There is no example of a men's business meeting in Scripture.
- There is little difference between a men's business meeting and a church council or committee. It is a portion of the church, not the whole church, discussing matters that belong to the whole church.
- There is no Scriptural justification for women to be excluded, either in presence or participation, from any part of the work of the local church. The Bible limits the nature of a woman's participation (1 Timothy 2:12), but limitation and exclusion are far from the same.

A Bible Pattern for Discussion & Decisions

In Matthew 18:15-17, Jesus supplied a 3-step process to deal with sin, and if need be, discipline in the local church. In verse 15, the Lord says "if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone." If such does not result in repentance of the sin, the next step is to "take with you one or two more, that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established'" (verse 16). If the one who is in sin will still not repent, Jesus said, "tell it to the church" (verse 17). The church IS NOT the men of the church, but all - men and women.

In 1 Corinthians 5:4-5, concerning one who was to be withdrawn from for unrepented sin, Paul wrote, "when you are gathered together ... deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." This is a reference to the whole church (1 Corinthians 11:18; 14:23; Hebrews 10:25), not a few members.

In Acts 6:1-6, Luke records an issue which arose in the church at Jerusalem. After hearing the gospel on the day of Pentecost, many stayed in Jerusalem longer than they had intended to.. This resulted in the need for a daily distribution to provide for needy saints. The problem - the needs of the Hellenistic widows had been neglected. The complaint was brought to the attention of the apostles, who "summoned the multitude of the disciples" (v 2) and told them to "seek out from among you seven men ... whom we may appoint over this business" (v 3). We are told "the saying pleased the whole multitude" (v 5). The apostles called the whole multitude together, not a part of the multitude (ie. just the men). Then they instructed the whole multitude, not part of the multitude, to seek out from among them men to set before the apostles, whom they might appoint over this business. The whole church (men and women) took part in the process, the apostles, who were leaders in the Jerusalem church, made the decision.

In Acts 15, we read of a doctrinal controversy instigated by Judaizing teachers who had gone out from Jerusalem to Antioch. Paul and Barnabas disputed with them (verse 2), but with no resolution. It was determined that they should go up to Jerusalem, where this controversy had originated from. Verse 3 tells us they (Paul and Barnabas) were "sent on their way by the church." No one, whether man or woman, was excluded. Arriving in Jerusalem, they first met with "those who were of reputation" (apostles and elders) to determine the extent of the false teaching (Galatians 2:2). After that, they were "received by the church and the apostles and the elders" (verse 4). There was no exclusivity or secrecy in what took place. All the brethren were aware and present. In the course of debate, several people addressed the assembly. When a conclusion had been reached, a letter was written and messengers were chosen. The whole church was involved, not a select few (Acts 15:22-23). The circumstances of Acts 15 differ from the other texts we've considered, for Paul and Barnabas and certain others (v 2) were present. This assembly to debate a doctrinal issue was not limited to members of the local church, but included Christians from another area, who had been affected by the falsehood that proceeded out of Jerusalem. It would be more akin to a debate than a business meeting, but let us still note, no one was excluded. The church, not a select few from the church, were gathered (v 4, 12, 22, 23, 25). When Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch, along with Judas and Silas, they "...gathered the multitude together..." (v 30). Again, no one was excluded.

No Bible text justifies excluding any member of the local church, whether male or female, from any assembly of the church, whether it be for worship, to exercise discipline, to deal with issues, to plan activities, to consider a doctrinal position, etc.. Every member of the church, whether male or female, have the right to have their concerns and opinions heard, and to participate in the process leading up to decisions. It would be foolish and dismissive in Acts 6, if the thoughts and ideas of the Hellenistic widows were not sought. Hearing from them would help those responsible for making a decision (the apostles in Acts 6) to make the best possible decision.

The consistent pattern of the Bible is that all members of the local church ought to be present and participants when the work of the church is under consideration. If there are elders in the congregation, they are responsible for the decision to be made (Acts 20:28; 1 Timothy 5:17; Hebrews 13:17; 1 Peter 5:1-2). If the church doesn't have elders, decision making belongs to all the men of the church (1 Corinthians 11:3; 1 Timothy 2:11-12).

Let us follow God's word, not human tradition, when it comes to discussion and decisions in the church.

God Be Gracious

Sean P. Cavender | Bald Knob, Arkansas, USA

One of the greatest difficulties we ever face is admitting our sin and humbling ourselves before God. We must appeal to His mercy, asking for God to relent of His anger and free us from guilt. We also seek God's grace, too, where God will make us new and offer a new life. No matter what our sins may be, we can turn to God.

God's mercy and grace is magnified in Psalm 51. David, the great king of Israel, is the author of this psalm. He had committed adultery, he had murdered, he had lied, and he had conspired to try and cover all these things up. How could someone like that ever be described in the Bible as a man after God's own heart? The answer is rather simple: he acknowledged his sin and sought God's salvation.

Psalm 51 is a wonderful psalm to gain a picture of God's gracious attitude towards those who turn from their sin. "Be gracious to me, O God, according to Your loving kindness..." (verse 1). David asked for God to "wash me" and "cleanse me" (verse 2). David no longer tried to hide his sin; instead, he said "I have sinned" (verse 4). David did not say "I told a white lie" nor did he say that "he fudged the rules a little bit." David said he had sinned! We should never seek to make excuses for our sin.

David continued to describe the need for salvation. He asked for purification, washing to be made whiter

than snow (verse 7). David wanted to be restored to the joy of salvation (verse 12). David had a guilty conscience. He asked for deliverance from the guilt of blood on his hands (verse 14).

No matter what our sin might be, we need to appeal to God's grace for forgiveness. Have we been unfaithful to a spouse? Have we stolen from our employer? Have we lied to a friend? We can be forgiven!

David first turned to God for forgiveness. He asked for God to cleanse him and to give him salvation. God is the only One that we can gain salvation from and it is through His gracious, loving attitude. We must turn to God and seek His grace. Let our plea be "God, be gracious!"

Prayer and Providence

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

As a small child lies limp and burning with fever in the still of night, a mother's prayer is fervently whispered, unheard by any mortal. As a preacher steps to the pulpit with all apparent confidence, a request undetected by the audience that wisdom might guide the spoken word is silently lifted to the throne of God. As a young Christian realizes the enormity of the sin he has committed, a broken and contrite spirit humbly petitions the Father of mercy for forgiveness. Each of these events, occurring thousands of times a week, are knit together. Each person involved has manifested, consciously or otherwise, his faith in the providence of God. What is the providence of God? How does it relate to prayer?

Definition

The Term "providence" is found but once in the scriptures (**King James Version, New American Standard Bible**), and there it is descriptive of the work of a dishonest, Roman ruler and was uttered by a lying lawyer hired by infidel Jews bent on destroying the apostle Paul (Acts 24:2). The word here translated "providence" means "forethought, provident care ... to make provision for a thing" (Thayer, p. 540). It is rendered by the English term "provision" in Romans 13:14. The verb form of the term, translated "provide," is found three times in the New Testament (Romans 12:17; 1 Corinthians 8:21; 1 Timothy 5:8), and, like its noun form, is always applied to men. The English word "providence" is from the Latin "providentia" and also refers to foresight (McClintock & Strong, p. 707). Thus, as exemplified in Tertullus' flattery of Felix (Acts 24:2), the term "providence" implies foresight, rule, and care. Therefore, by the phrase "providence of God" I mean the foresight, rule, and care God exercises in all things.

Basis

The nature of the rule of one who governs is based on the character of that person. History records that Felix possessed an evil character and that, as the result, his rule was bad.

The nature of the providence of God springs from the character of God. There is none other like Jehovah. The Lord is eternal and infinite in knowledge (including foreknowledge), power, holiness, righteousness, and love (Psalm 90:2; Isaiah 46:9,10; 40:12-31; Leviticus 19:1-2; Psalm 97:2; 1 John 4:8). His providence is but a reflection of that character.

Purpose

The ultimate purpose of God's rule is that "in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ...That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ" (Ephesians 1 :3-12). Thus, all the Lord's providence is intended for the ultimate spiritual good of all men. This does not mean it is always for our material benefit, nor that we will see at the time how it is to our spiritual profit. God's thoughts and ways are not ours (Isaiah 55:8,9; Romans 11:30-36).

Proof

When the apostle to the Gentiles stood courageously before the gathering of the most learned in human philosophy of his day to expose their spiritual ignorance, he chose to inform them of the God of providence. He reasoned with them of "the God that made the world and all things therein" and revealed

that he is "Lord of heaven and earth," i.e., he rules all things (Acts 17:24). With telling force he then taught those haughty philosophers God's rule, care and forethought (verses 25-31). One cannot believe in the God whom Paul proclaimed without accepting his providence. In all things the Lord exercises His forethought, rule and care. More specifically, a loving Father has in His providence made provision for the fulfillment of every legitimate need you and I have, whether it be material (Matthew 6:29-34) or spiritual (Ephesians 1:3).

Nature

God's providence is an expression of and in harmony with his will (Ephesians 1:11). His will is revealed in his word (Ephesians 3:1-11). All I have the right to affirm concerning divine providence is what is made known in the scriptures (Deuteronomy 29:29). It is true that because of the existence of the world I can know that God exercises providence (Romans 1:18-20; Acts 14:15-17), but the details of his rule, forethought, and care must be learned from his word

Miracles and Providence

Denominational folks see a miracle in every event of life and "witness" to their neighbors what God has done for them. A "miracle" can be defined either as a temporary suspension of natural law or the direct, supernatural intervention of God into the natural realm. Water turns to wine by a slow, natural process involving rain, soil, sun, a grapevine, etc. The Son of God temporarily suspended this natural process, directly intervened into the natural realm and instantaneously turned water to wine (John 2:1-11). He worked a miracle.

It was necessary for God to employ the miraculous to begin both the natural creation, the world (Genesis 1:1 - 2:23) and the spiritual creation, the church (Romans 8:18-22; Acts 2). Having been started, each creation is then governed and sustained by God's mighty word (Hebrews 1:3; 1 Timothy 3:14-15).

The word which governs the world we call "laws of science." That which governs the church we call "the Bible" (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Miracles were performed in order to produce faith. They were to confirm that God is (Romans 1:20), that Jesus is the Son of God (Acts 2:22), and that God's spokesmen did indeed proclaim his word (Acts 8:5-7). The miracles recorded in the Bible fully confirm these great truths (Psalm 19:1; John 20:30-31; Hebrews 2:1-4). God's truth, having been fully confirmed, needs no more confirmation and would neither be more true nor more fully established if mighty works were wrought to the end of time. Thus, miracles have served their purpose in God's providence and do not presently occur (1 Corinthians 13:8-13). One stupendous miracle will occur in the future: when Christ returns at an unknown time (Mark 13:31-33), all the dead will be raised (John 5:28-29), and the material universe will be destroyed (2 Peter 3:10-12).

I accept the fact of God's care for me not because I see him working wonders in my life to produce faith but because the miracles recorded in the Bible give me faith to accept his providence.

It is not mine to "testify" that each event of my life is a special act of God. I can only know what is revealed in his word. Mordecai affirmed the providence of Jehovah but did not venture to affirm in what specific acts it was manifested (Esther 4:13-14).

I must preach God's word to the lost to produce saving faith (Romans 10:13-17). That faith is the product of revelation not speculation.

Having taught his disciples to pray (Matthew 6:9-15), the Master also taught them the providence of God (Matthew 6:26-34). The practice of prayer is based firmly on faith in the providence of a loving Father. If God does not exercise rule, forethought, and care for His children, prayer is utterly vain and foolish, an empty exercise in futility. But, since the Father does hear and answer prayer, our petitions do avail. Since "the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers" (1 Peter 3:12), therefore, "The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much" (James 5:16).

If we would have the Father hear and answer our petitions, we must pray “according to his will” (1 John 5:14-15). His will reveals we may and must pray that He provide our needs, both material (Philippians 4:6; Matthew 6:11; 2 Thessalonians 3:1-2; Philemon verse 22; 3 John verse 2) and spiritual (1 John 1:9).

The providential answer to prayer does not mean we will escape earthly suffering. Paul’s prayer was answered, but he nonetheless did endure affliction and in so doing learned the value of suffering (2 Corinthians 12:7-10). It does mean that a loving Father stands near to turn that suffering, even though it be unto death, to our salvation (Philippians 1:12-21).

The faithless suffer and let it lead them to “curse God and die” (Job 2:9). The faithful suffer (2 Timothy 3:12), are strengthened by the adversity (Romans 5:3-5; 1 Peter 4:1-2; Hebrews 12:3-11), and respond, “Though he slay me, yet will I trust him” (Job 13:15).

Prayer does not eliminate our own responsibilities. We must pray for material needs and work to provide them (Ephesians 4:28; 2 Thessalonians 3:10-12). We must pray for forgiveness and lead righteous lives (1 In. 1:7 - 2:6).

Prayer does not give us the right to tempt God (Matthew 4:5-7). The preacher who moves his family to a difficult place without adequate support may think he is “launching out in faith,” when in reality he is making trial of God.

Prayer does not give us the right to expect God to suspend his law, whether natural or spiritual. We have not the right to ask for a miracle.

Conclusion

Faith in the God of providence is the key to “the peace of God, which passes all understanding” (Philippians 4:7). If I accept without question that God rules all, cares for me, and provides for my every need, I can accept every adversity of life, knowing “that this shall turn to my salvation” (Philippians 1:19). I will thus be able, free from anxiety, “in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving” to pour out my earnest petition before the mercy seat (Philippians 4:6). What a haven for the soul! “Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: Casting all your care upon him; for he cares for you (1 Peter 5:6-7).

Note

The late Edgar J. Dye’s notes were especially helpful to me on this and many other subjects.

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

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

2950 Hwy 5 S
Mountain Home, Arkansas 72653
US



[Read](#) the VerticalResponse marketing policy.