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

PHILIPPIANS
4:8

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

The Invitation of Our Lord

Jim Mickells | Lewisburg, Tennessee, USA

"Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me" (Matthew 16:24).

"If Anyone Desires" – Jesus died on the cross, so all mankind could be saved, not just a select few as some contend (1 Timothy 2:4). He sent His apostles into all the world to preach the gospel to every creature (Mark 16:15), so tax collectors and sinners could be saved, not just those who were righteous (Matthew 9:11-13). Though the Lord wants to save everyone not all have a desire to come after Him. Far too many love the world and the things it has to offer (1 John 2:15). They are too busy with their jobs, sports are more important to some, or it could be a sinful lifestyle is just too pleasurable to give up. What ever the reason they have no desire to come to the Lord. Yet if you desire salvation, it is available for you.

"To Come After Me" – He is leading the way to the Father, but I must come after Him. As He prepared His disciples for His death, when He would no longer walk among them, He said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). It is His way, not the way of the majority (Matthew 7:13-14). One must follow His word, not the traditions of the elders, the doctrines of men, nor trust in one's feelings (Matthew 15:1-9; Acts 26:9). Christ does not force us to come after Him, but He does exhort us to do so through His word.

“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light” (Matthew 11:28-30).

“Let Him Deny Himself” – This is not telling us to sacrifice some of our worldly comforts or some of our material possessions, but to deny self. It is no longer about me. The Lord must come first. What a great example Jesus set before us. Just prior to His crucifixion, while praying in Gethsemane, notice what Matthew says, “He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, “O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will” (Matthew 26:39). Self must be crucified or put to death (Romans 6:6). We need the servant’s mentality, humbly putting the Lord and others to the forefront of our lives (Matthew 23:11-12).

“And Take Up His Cross” – All have a cross to bear. Notice this definition of the word “cross.”

“The judicial usage which compelled those condemned to crucifixion themselves to carry the cross to the place of punishment, gave rise to the proverbial expression which was usually used by those who, on behalf of God’s cause, do not hesitate cheerfully and manfully to bear persecutions, troubles, distresses thus recalling the fate of Christ and the spirit in which he encountered it” (Thayer).

I may be persecuted because of my faith. Others might ridicule me because I am a follower of Christ. A job may have been denied me because of my honesty and integrity as a child of God. Yet I must cheerfully and manfully bear my cross and press on toward the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus my Lord (Philippians 3:12-14). Whatever shame and reproach I must bear as a Christian it will certainly be worth it when I pass through the gates of the eternal city and dwell with my Maker throughout eternity.

“And Follow Me” – He is the One who must lead, we must follow. It is a choice we each must make. It is not our way but His. There are many paths in life but only one which will take us where we need to be. Where do the steps of Jesus lead? The old hymn “Footprints Of Jesus” tells us very plainly.

*“Sweetly, Lord have we heard Thee calling,
Come follow Me!
And we see where Thy footprints falling
Lead us to Thee.
If they lead thru the temple holy,
Preaching the word;
Or in homes of the poor and lowly,
Serving the Lord.
Then at last, when on high He sees us,
Our journey done,
We will rest where the steps of Jesus
End at His throne.
Footprints of Jesus,
That make the pathway glow;
We will follow the steps of Jesus
Wher-e’er they go.”*

Are you willing to follow Him?

Question from Nigeria about Churches of Christ Observing Easter

Question

The Purpose of this letter to you sir is that the Church were am preaching had a debate with a denominational Pastor about Easter celebration, we invited the Pastor over to the Church after Sunday service, when he spoke of his own point of view why Christians celebrate Easter. But after my teaching and references he was humbled to the word of Truth.

During the Discussion, he made Reference to a write up he saw on Facebook concerning the WESTHILL CHURCH OF CHRIST, the write up on the Facebook page Reads, A WONDERFUL EASTER SUNDAY @ WESTHILL?

Now the Question comes, does it mean that some Churches of Christ celebrate Easter, if yes. Why can't we preach one thing and practice one thing.

Answer

You are certainly correct that the New Testament does not authorize the church to remember Easter as a holy day. The term "Easter" is found one time in the **King James Version** of the English Bible. "And when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him; intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people" (Acts 12:4). This is an unfortunate translation. The Greek word that is here translated "Easter" is "pascha." It is found twenty-nine times in the **Textus Receptus**, the Greek version of the New Testament from which the **King James Version** was translated. In every other occurrence it is translated "passover." Of course, the Passover is the Jewish feast in commemoration of Israel's deliverance from Egyptian slavery (Exodus chapter 12). Acts 12:4 is speaking of Herod's action in pleasing the Jews (Acts 12:3). He killed the apostle James, the brother of John, and imprisoned the Apostle Peter, intending to kill him after the Passover so as not to offend the Jews by executing him during their holy feast. Rather than being concerned about a holy day observed by Christians, Herod was harassing the church (Acts 12:1)

In fact Easter was unknown to the first century church. Rather, each first day of the week Christians assembled as a local church to remember the Lord's death by eating the Lord's Supper (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26).

We should not be surprised that many churches of Christ today have abandoned this and other New Testament practices. Paul rebuked the Galatians for practicing the holy days of the Jews (Galatians 4:10-11). He warned of the great falling away which gathered momentum after the apostles died (2 Thessalonians 2:1-12). The practice of observing Easter in place of the Jewish Passover was one of the corruptions introduced in the second century.

Just because a church calls itself a "church of Christ" doesn't mean it actually belongs to Christ. I could wear a sign around my neck saying "Mack Truck," but that wouldn't make me a Mack truck. Don't have a sectarian attitude toward the church of Christ. Rather than defending what churches of Christ do, which in many cases is wrong, defend the faith (Jude verse 3).

Positive and Negative

Patrick Farish | Waxahatchie, Texas, USA

Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. (Ephesians 4:31-32)

Anguished voices demand "positive preaching." Often these "anguished voices" belong to people whose practices are being exposed by "negative preaching." Throw a rock into a pack of dogs, the one who yelps will be the one that got hit. Paul warned Timothy to be wary:

"For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions." So, "preach the word" (2 Timothy 4:1-4).

Preaching the word must include pointing to the right way; **and** exposing wrong ways. Ephesians 4:31-32 exemplifies the godly combination of positive and negative instruction. Paul says oppose bad things (verse

31) and embrace good things (verse 32).

First of all, here are things that should be opposed. The list begins with “bitterness.” This indicates a bad heart. I never read this without thinking of the person who, emerging from a confrontation with another member of the body, said “I will forgive, but I won’t forget.” How deep did that forgiveness go? The “bitter” person has perhaps been wronged in some way, which caused pain. Rather than seeking to put it away and rise above it, he nourishes it, brings it up to dwell on it from time to time, so he can hold that spirit, that bitter spirit., “See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no ‘root of bitterness’ springs up and causes trouble...” (Hebrews 12:15).

Then, “wrath.” “Bitterness” unrestrained may eventually begin to express itself in words of wrath. This will move on to “anger”, looking back to the bitterness that was the root of it all. “Clamor” is abusive yells which typify the wrath and anger motivating them. “Slander” brings the admonition full circle: bitterness, inseparable from someone instigating it; followed by wrath, anger and racket, culminating in smears directed toward the one causing the bitterness.

“All malice” wraps it up, inclusive of all other manifestations of hatefulness.

Verse 31 concentrated largely on problems of the tongue. James (3:2) wrote, “For we all stumble in many ways. And if any one does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body.” He had earlier written, “... let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God” (1:19-20).

Now we turn to verse 32, with its sweet inducements to godly living. These are things we should embrace. They are, as Paul said about the fruit of the Spirit (“against such things there is no law”) things with which no fault can be found.

First, “be kind to one another.” I remember my father observing, about brotherly kindness, that it doesn’t really need definition, just practice. Is that not the case here? I will be 82 years old this summer, the Lord willing; and that is not nearly as old as it was when I was sixteen. I am, though, more conscious of older people now; often I see the elderly coming to a heavy door, and some youngster – I am talking about teenagers now – step up to help them get in; and this is not just an isolated incident. Being kind means being gentle, helpful, encouraging.

Kindness proceeds from one being “tender-hearted.” A tender heart produces sympathy, a willingness to help whenever possible. Our own lives have their problems and we wrestle with them, but a tender-heart will find room for compassion for our embattled brother or neighbor. Being tender-hearted we will be “forgiving one another.” When we are mistreated, our choice is, to be like the bitter fellow of verse 31 or like our God, who in Christ forgave us. You know, when we are sorely mistreated, and called on to forgive this monstrous (?) offence, we may feel like it is unreasonable to demand that we forgive. Hold on. Remember Jesus, abused fearfully, then nailed – nailed! – to a cross, there by the shedding of His blood to enable man to have remission of sins. In the midst of His suffering, He said “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). Have you – or I – suffered innocently as He did? Yet He said, “Father, forgive....” And He calls on us today, to forgive “as God in Christ forgave you.”

We should preach positively (“Christ died for our sins” - 1 Corinthians 15:3) and negatively, (“preach the word ... reprove, rebuke, and exhort” - 2 Timothy 4:2).

What Does Your Bible Mean to You?

Jefferson David Tant | Roswell, Georgia, USA

When Poonam quietly left Hinduism in 2012 and placed her faith in Christ, her Bible immediately became her most prized possession. The young Indian wife and mother of three secretly read God's Word in her

home each day, growing in her understanding of God's love for her. But she feared her husband would find out about her new faith, and he soon did.

After overhearing her praying to God one day, he found her Bible and angrily tore it to pieces. "From today on you stop reading the Bible, and as long as you live in this house you better not pray!" he threatened.

When Poonam refused to stop praying to God, her husband beat her and eventually kicked her out of the house, refusing to let her see their young sons and daughter. Following Jesus cost her everything.

In India, a rise in persecution of Christians has paralleled the rise in Hindu nationalism. Bibles are a precious resource that helps new believers to grow in faith amid persecution.

Poonam reads and studies God's Word using her new Bible, but she refuses to give up the tattered, torn Bible that her husband tried to destroy. It is, after all, how she first learned about Jesus.

"My Bible is everything to me," Poonam said. "It is the living word of God. Without it, I can't live."

The foregoing is adapted from material I regularly receive from Voice of the Martyrs, an organization that works to provide Bibles and help to those who are persecuted for their faith in Christ. It is a denominational organization, but I respect their benevolent work, and the great work they do in providing Bibles in many nations.

Poonam's experience is not unusual, except in the fact that many in such situations do not have the better ending that she has had. Many are killed for their faith.

But the real question is, "What does your Bible mean to you?" Those of us who have Bibles all over house might need to do some soul searching. I'm afraid in some homes the Bible is just decoration. The Bible is brought home from church, placed on a table or in a cabinet, and there it sits until time to go to church again. It is then picked up, the dust is blown off, and it is carefully carried to church.

Consider the value of the Word of God to the Psalmist. Take time to read the 119th Psalm. In these 176 verses, the author refers to God's Word in nearly every verse, except for perhaps two verses. I challenge you to read the psalm and contemplate on the great value that the writer places on God's Word—the Bible.

It is called "the law of the Lord," "testimonies," "ways," "precepts," "statutes," "commandments," "righteous judgments," "Thy word," "ordinances." (I hope I have not overlooked any description.)

Consider just a few of the phrases that are used to describe the value the author has for God's Word.

verse 24 - "Thy testimonies also are my delight; They are my counselors."

verse 27 - "Make me understand the way of Thy precepts, So I will meditate on Thy wonders."

verse 38 - "Make me understand the way of Thy precepts, So I will meditate on Thy wonders."

verse 48 - "And I shall lift up my hands to Thy commandments, Which I love; And I will meditate on Thy statutes."

verse 72 - "The law of Thy mouth is better to me Than thousands of gold and silver pieces."

verse 93 - "I will never forget Thy precepts, For by them Thou hast revived me."

verse 97 - "O how I love Thy law! It is my meditation all the day."

verse 104 - "From Thy precepts I get understanding; Therefore I hate every false way."

verse 105 - "Thy word is a lamp to my feet, And a light to my path."

verse 123 - "My eyes fail with longing for Thy salvation, And for Thy righteous word."

verse 148 - "My eyes anticipate the night watches, That I may meditate on Thy word."

verse 167 - "My soul keeps Thy testimonies, And I love them exceedingly."

These are but a few of the manifold statements the author makes concerning the value of God's Word.

Consider Paul's admonition to young Timothy: "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15).

Then there is Paul's commendation of the brethren in Berea: "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). Did you catch that—examining the Scriptures daily?

What do we learn from reading and studying God's Word?

We learn (1) the wealth of evidence that is the foundation of our faith in the existence of God, (2) the countless prophecies fulfilled by Christ, thus establishing his divinity, (3) the plan of salvation God has provided for us, (4) the way to live in a sinful world, and (5) the blessed hope that awaits us in the resurrection. And there is much more.

What a great source of treasure God has provided for us. If you not a regular reader and student of God's Word, you are missing some great blessings. Yes, we are often busy with the things of this world, but there is great value in turning off the TV, shutting the internet down and turning the cell phone off to spend some time with God through His word.

There are many things that set the Bible apart from any other written document, and one of those things is that it is ever fresh and new. You can read a novel, a science textbook, or other work of men, and in time there is nothing more to glean from it. There is no new information. But the Bible is far different. There are fresh insights and understandings that come from reading and studying. Perhaps this idea has some connection with Christ's statement in Matthew 13:52: "And He said to them, 'Therefore every scribe who has become a disciple of the kingdom of heaven is like a head of a household, who brings forth out of his treasure things new and old.'"

As an example, I will refer to an experience of mine. I don't know how many times I have read and studied Hebrews, but recently I was preparing new material for the class I was teaching, and came to chapter 9:1 – "Now even the first covenant had regulations of divine worship and the earthly sanctuary." All of a sudden, a light went on!

Suppose I tell my 16-year-old daughter, "Look, your 10-year-old sister knows how to keep her bedroom clean." What's the implication? The 16-year-old is more mature and should know to do even better than her sister. Now, apply that to the situation today when we have those who claim they don't like the rules. They want freedom from the restraints that they feel Bible conservatives put on them. Now let me paraphrase verse 9:1 – "Look, even the first covenant had rules to follow..." What's the implication? Well, the second and better covenant also has regulations.

We had a friend some years ago who was a good Bible student as well as a good Bible teacher. She was relatively young when she was diagnosed with cancer. One of the study projects she was involved in was a good study of Ezekiel before she died. Her reason? She said when she met him in heaven, he might ask, "How did you like my book?" And that's a good incentive for us to think about.

Here are some suggestions that will help you get started—planning, prayer, reading, studying and application. And making notes in your Bible's margin is also helpful if your Bible has margins wide enough.

Make a plan to begin – pray for guidance and understanding – read the text you have chosen – then go back and spend some time studying what you have read – then if the particular text you have studied has a life application, put it into practice.

Try it. You won't regret it. When Satan tempted Christ, we remember the words Christ spoke to Satan: "But He answered and said, "It is written, '**Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God**'" (Matthew 4:4).

Understanding The Church of Christ (9)

Wayne Fancher | Searcy, Arkansas, USA

So far in this series of articles I have tried to explain why we believe the way we do and why we do things the way we do them as members of the Church of Christ so people could better understand us. We sincerely believe the Bible is the word of God. We believe the body of Christ today is meant to be under the authority of the New Testament alone, and we view the New Covenant as a covenant of grace and truth with that truth being law. Today I would like to introduce the last of what I call foundational doctrines of the Church of Christ. Again I would like to state that I do not speak for everyone in the Church of Christ, I am just trying to explain what I have determined to be the foundational doctrines of many in the Church of Christ.

The last subject I would like to present to you to better understand us is the idea of the fixed pattern perspective of the church and Christianity. When I say fixed pattern perspective of Christianity what I mean by this is that the way Christianity was in the beginning is the way we believe it was meant to continue for every generation of mankind till the Lord comes again. In other words, the way people became Christians in the beginning is the way they are meant to become Christians always. The morals of Christians in the beginning of the Church is meant to be the morals of Christians always. The organization of the local churches in the beginning of Christianity is the way the churches are meant to be organized always. The way the local congregations worshiped in the beginning is the way we are meant to worship today and always. We do the best we can with the scriptures to determine the way Christianity was in the beginning and then we try to do it that way today. Of course there are debates among us as to what original hristianity was like. It is this overall desire to be as much like the original churches in the beginning as we can be that is truly a foundational doctrine of the Church of Christ that must be understood about us to understand us. Since this perspective of Christianity is so important among us we should try to explain to you how we have come to this fixed pattern perspective of Christianity.

Colossians 1:18: "And He is the head of the body, the church...."

Hebrews 13:8: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever."

Jesus is the head of the church and He is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

1 Peter 1:25: "But the word of the LORD endures forever. Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you."

Philippians 3:16: "Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing."

2 Thessalonians 2:15: "Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle."

Philippians 3:16: "Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing."

The truth of the word of God is an absolute truth, not a relative truth. Absolute truth endures forever. Jesus the unchanging head of the church directs us through the unchanging truth of the word of God. His desire for the body of which He is head, is for it to walk by the same rule. If the head of the church is the same yesterday, today, and forever, and the truth that directs the church is the same, yesterday, today and

forever, then the body being directed by that truth should be the same yesterday, today, and forever.

1 Corinthians 11:2: "Now I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things and keep the traditions just as I delivered them to you."

1 Corinthians 11:23: "For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread."

Revelation 22:18-19: "For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book."

The traditions and doctrines taught in the written New Covenant were received by the apostles from the unchanging Lord. The Lord directs His followers under this covenant to keep those traditions and doctrines just as they have been delivered to them. We are warned not to add to or take from the word of God. The result of following these commands is an unchanging, fixed pattern of Christianity, not being tossed around by traditions of men.

Ephesians 4:14: "That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive."

Matthew 19:4: "And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female."

Matthew 19:8: "He said unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so."

1 Corinthians 11:23-24: "For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me."

Revelation 2:5: "Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place."

Rightly Dividing The Word Of God (5)

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 people replacing God's word with human opinions, a failure to properly distinguish between the Old and the New Testaments, and a failure to understand the difference between a citizen of God's kingdom and an alien sinner (one who is not yet a Christian). Now let's notice what happens when people fail to understand the difference between the church universal and the church local.

Difference Between the Church Local and the Church Universal

A failure to rightly divide the word in this area has contributed to a great deal of the false doctrines and religious division that exists today. The misunderstanding between the church universal and the church local has given birth to: (1) a denominational concept of the church, (2) a metropolitan concept, or (3) an unscriptural functioning of the church. Such concepts make the church either too small or too large to be the Lord's church. These concepts will be explained later.

In discussing this problem, I feel it wise to first define what is meant by the word "church." The Greek word "ekklesia" is a compound word ("ek" out of, "klesia" a calling), literally, "the called out," translated by the English word "church" which in turn has been derived from the Latin word "kyrikon." The word "church" by itself simply describes a company, an assembly or congregation of people, who are brought together and act as one (a unit), for a definite purpose. One must refer to the context to explain the purpose for the usage.

For example, the word "church" appears in the New Testament in a secular sense to describe a group of people in Ephesus, brought together and assembled as a mob, in opposition to the preaching of Paul and his companions (Acts 19:32, 39, 41). It is used in a religious sense to describe the Jewish nation in the wilderness, after coming out of Egypt (Acts 7:38). It is mainly used in the New Testament in its religious sense to refer to Christians as a group or company of professed believers, whether assembled or unassembled (Acts 2:47; 20:28; Ephesians 1:22-23), as well as a host of other passages in the New Testament.

Another thing we need to understand is that the word "church" is a collective noun. It is composed of a plurality of elements that function as one. A collective noun never refers to one element, thing, or person alone. For example, you can have a covey of quail, a gaggle of geese, a herd of cows, or a group of Christians. But, one bird is not a covey. One bird may be part of a covey, but by itself it is not a covey. The same would go for a goose, a cow, or a Christian. They may be a part of a gaggle, herd, or group of professed believers, but one alone will not fit the definition. To fit the definition of church there must be a plurality (two or more persons, a group of professed believers).

Having noticed these things about the church, it is time for us to notice that the Bible makes a distinction between the church universal and the church local. Admittedly, the Bible doesn't use the terms "universal" and "local" in reference to the church, but that doesn't mean there is no difference. A study of the scriptures will show this to be true.

In passages such as Matthew 16:18, Acts 2:47, and Hebrews 12:22-23, the word, "church," is used in its universal sense. Examine these scriptures carefully and you will note that in these the church involves a spiritual relationship only. There is no earthly function mentioned with such things as a regular assembly, treasury, address, collective action.

But, in passages such as 1 Corinthians 1:2; 1 Thesalonians 1:1; Revelation 2-3 you find the church used in a local sense. As you read the passages, you will find in them that the church has both a spiritual and functional relationship limited by time and place to a certain geographical area. The members of these churches (think individuals, not churches) in their own area, choose to join with other people of like mind and spirit, striving together to follow God's word as closely as possible, in order to work and worship as God's word directs. Although the local church is a body, and just like a physical body (1 Corinthians 12:20-26), each member functions as an individual in the body, following God's revealed plan of organization for work, worship and service, each performing the work prescribed (Philippians 1:1; Ephesians 4:16).

Notice some of the differences between the church universal and the church local.

Fellowship: In the church universal, the members are in fellowship with deity, not man. In the church local the members are not only in fellowship with God, they are also in fellowship with each other.

Entrance: One does not join the church universal, one is added to it by the Lord when one believes and is baptized for remission of sins (Acts 2:38, 41, 47). In the local church one chooses to join himself to the local body when the brethren accept him (Acts 9:26-27).

Enrollment: In the church universal, God controls the enrollment (Luke 10:20). He enrolls those who are saved from sin in His book He keeps in heaven. In the church local people are enrolled when they ask to

join the local group of people who share a common salvation and like precious faith (Jude 3; 2 Peter 1:1).

Beginning: The universal church began on Pentecost (Acts 2). The local church begins wherever the seed, the word of God, is planted.

Organization: The church universal maintains a spiritual relationship only, no earthly function. The local church is organized with elders (bishops) deacons, saints (Philippians 1:1). One first becomes a member of the church universal, then chooses to join the local church to function and exercise assigned responsibilities.

A Response to "THE BIBLE VERSUS THE CHURCH OF CHRIST" (3)

William Stewart | Kingston, Ontario, Canada

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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
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Music In Worship Service

The author quotes from a Dub McClish publication which cites Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16, and then calls upon the reader to notice that worship in song is an activity "which all assembled worshipers are to be involved in." Mr. Melton then emphatically tells us Paul's instruction pertains to "PERSONAL FELLOWSHIP WITH CHRIST, not worship services," and charges McClish and others of taking the texts out of context. We can do an extensive study on the context of both verses in a separate study, if anyone desires to do so, but let me point out two words that appear in the texts which reveals this is not about an individual worshiper engaged in private worship. The words are "one another." Notice:

- "speaking to **one another** in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" (Ephesians 5:19)
- "submitting to **one another** in the fear of God" (Ephesians 5:21)
- "do not lie to **one another**" (Colossians 3:9)
- "bearing with **one another**, and forgiving one another" (Colossians 3:13)
- "teaching and admonishing **one another** in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" (Colossians 3:16)

Anything that is done to or with one another is not a personal, private, individual thing. Are these texts necessarily about a public worship service? No, I don't think that can be established. But, that is beside the point. What do the texts reveal about worship in song? Melton confidently declares, "Neither chapter forbids musical instruments." He's right. Neither text says, "Thou shall not use instrumental music in worship." In fact, there is no New Testament text which condemns the use of instrumental music in worship. So, why do we not use instrumental music in worship? Why do we believe it is wrong to use instrumental music in worship?

Melton derides L.R. Wilson's statement, "...we are not governed by what He did not forbid, but by what He has authorized" (p. 3). He calls this "unscriptural logic." Really? If we read just once verse further in Colossians 3, we find this:

And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him (v 17)

That sure sounds like the Lord expects us to have authority for what we do.

The author states, "There are MANY things that are used in worship services that are not specifically authorized." He mentions hymnals, microphones, and pitch pipes. There are a host of things we could add to the list: seats, a pulpit, PowerPoint presentations, communion trays, etc.. How can we use these things, if God has not specifically authorized them? We need to understand the difference between specific and generic authority. I'll use a couple Old Testament examples to illustrate. God commissioned Noah to build an ark of Gopher Wood (Genesis 6). The Lord didn't say, "Don't use Spruce..." (Pine, Poplar, Ash, etc.). When He told him what kind of wood to use, that excluded every other kind. Where was he to get the Gopher wood from? It didn't matter. God didn't specify, and so Noah was free to gather it from the hillside or the valley, from 2 miles away or 20 miles away. The Lord also gave Noah the dimensions of the ark, and commanded that there be three levels. He couldn't build it with four levels. God specifically authorized three levels. However, the height of each level was left to Noah's discretion. God has not specified. The number of levels was specifically authorized, variant heights of the levels was generically authorized.

Consider another example - Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 10). These two sons of Aaron were excited to burn incense before the Lord. No specific instructions are given in the Law about how to fashion the censers. Something was needed to burn the incense in, so they were generically authorized. The composition of the incense was specifically authorized (Exodus 30:35-38), and so they could use no other incense in the tabernacle than what God had commanded. The censers and incense were fine, the problem in Leviticus 10 was the fire they used. We are told "...they offered profane fire before the LORD, which He had not commanded them." I don't believe these eager priests went to a local dump or pagan temple to get fire. We don't know where they got the fire from but the indication is they wanted to worship God and they thought the fire they selected would be fine. It was not. Leviticus 16:12 tells us the fire was to come from "...the altar before the LORD..." We don't know where they got their fire from, but it was not the fire which God authorized, and because of that, they perished before the Lord.

So, what does all this have to do with using instruments or not? In Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16, a specific type of music is authorized - singing. The Lord doesn't have to tell us not to use instruments any more than He had to tell Noah not to use Maple trees. Search through the New Testament, and you will not find a single verse authorizing the use of instrumental music in worship. What you will find is multiple references to singing. If we are going to "...do all in the name of the Lord Jesus..." (Colossians 3:17), then we are going to sing (Colossians 3:16), not play instruments in worship. Still don't think it's a big deal? Ask Nadab and Abihu if it matters whether we do what God authorizes or not.

What about hymnals, microphones, pitch pipes, etc.? We don't have specific authority for these. They are all in the realm of generic authority; they are expedients to help us obey the command to sing. We can sing words that we have memorized, we can sing words projected on a wall, we can sing words that are recorded in a hymnal. None of these alter the nature of our worship - it is still singing. The same is true with the microphone and the pitch pipe. They will amplify the sound and make sure we start on the right note, but they do not change the nature of what we are doing - it is still singing. However, instrumental music is a different kind of music. It is not an expedient. It does not help us to sing, it is something in addition to our singing. It is a different kind of music being added to (or in some cases replacing) singing.

Melton gives a list of verses to prove "the Lord loves good music of praise and worship, and this DOES include musical instruments." The list consists of six Old Testament texts and three from the book of Revelation. We can no more use Old Testament texts to justify using instrumental music in worship than we can use it to justify enforcing a tithe, the Sabbath laws, or the requirement of animal sacrifices. The Old Law is obsolete (Hebrews 8:13). The texts from Revelation speak about harps being used in heaven. Is it about praise? Yes. Is it authority to use instrumental music in our assemblies on earth? If it is, then what it authorizes is harps, not pianos, drums, guitars, keyboards, etc.. But the harps are a figure, just like the bowls of incense (5:8). The bowls of incense represent the prayers of the saints. We must be careful not to misuse symbolic language in Revelation to justify what the Lord has not authorized.

Honoring Marriage As God Desires

Marriage is one of the greatest blessings and relationships we can ever enjoy on this earth. It was created by God because He knew what was good for man. He saw that it was not good for man to be alone (Genesis 2:18). So God created woman, and the marriage relationship was sanctified in the sight of God. “For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall be one flesh,” (Genesis 2:24, **New American Standard Bible**). Marriage is honored by God and the sexual relationship between husband and wife does not stand condemned; instead, it is blessed (Hebrews 13:4).

When Jesus was asked whether or not it was permissible for a man to divorce his wife for any reason at all (Matthew 19:3), Jesus said, “they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate,” (Matthew 19:6, **NASB**). The relationship that God instituted, created, sanctified, and blessed is not to be destroyed through divorce. God hates divorce (Malachi 2:16). Marriage is a life-long commitment; ideally, death is the only thing that will dissolve the marriage union between a husband and wife (Romans 7:2; 1 Corinthians 7:39). However, the Lord gave one exception, permitting divorce when one spouse is unfaithful and commits adultery against their spouse. Jesus said, “And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery,” (Matthew 19:9, **NASB**).

The apostle Paul agrees with Christ. Paul told those who were married not to divorce one another (1 Corinthians 7:11). The apostle stated an universal rule to all the married—believers and unbelievers alike. Envisioning a situation where a divorce does take place in cases where there is no adultery, Paul says to remain unmarried or be reconciled to their spouse (1 Corinthians 7:11).

God’s word on the subject of marriage is simple: the unmarried [who have never been married] may marry (1 Corinthians 7:8-9); widows may marry again (1 Corinthians 7:39); those already married are to remain married (1 Corinthians 7:11). Adultery is the only reason God permits divorce (Matthew 19:9). The person who divorces their spouse for adultery has a right to remarry; the person who has been put away for adultery has no permission or authority from the Lord to remarry.

Since God has given us marriage, honoring it and blessing it, we should respect the marriage union. Undermining and perverting the marriage union is frequently done through fornication, freely divorcing, seeking unscriptural remarriages, or being complicit with homosexual unions. Bringing dishonor upon the relationship God has blessed, esteemed, and honored will cause us to fall into God’s judgment. Be sure to stand for the truth of God’s law and honor marriage as God does.

The Divine Plan of the Ages

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

On July 20, 1969, Neil A. Armstrong, American astronaut, became the first human to set foot on the moon. The plan devised by scientists at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration to get him there was truly remarkable for its technical complexity and accuracy and is indeed a monument to the skill of American technology. Yet, the plan that God devised for the salvation of mankind is as much higher in grandeur than the program devised by NASA, or any other human scheme, “as the heavens are higher than the earth.”

“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,” says the LORD. ‘For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts’” (Isaiah 55:8-9).

What is God’s plan of salvation?

Purpose

God’s scheme of redemption first existed in purpose

“To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I

should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him” (Ephesians 3:8-12).

That purpose was in the mind of God “from the beginning of the world” (verse 9), indeed, it is an “eternal purpose” (verse 11). Before there even was a man, an earth, moon or universe, in eternity before time, God purposed His plan for our salvation.

Promise

God created all things and set the first man and woman in the garden of Eden to keep it. But they sinned and fell. God was forced to bring curses upon them. But even with the curses grace was manifested as God promised that the seed of woman (one born of a virgin) would bruise the serpent’s head, i.e., destroy the power of Satan. “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel” (Genesis 3:15). Thus, the scheme entered the state of **promise**.

After many centuries had passed, God appeared to Abram in Ur of the Chaldees, commanded him to depart from there to a country He would show him, and delivered to him a grand, three part promise.

“Now the LORD had said to Abram: ‘Get out of your country, from your family and from your father’s house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.... Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, ‘To your descendants I will give this land.’ And there he built an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him ” (Genesis 12:1-3, 7).

The Lord pledged to make Abraham “a great nation” (verse 2), give his descendants the land of Canaan (verse 7), and through him to bless “all the families of the earth.” (verse 3) When Abraham’s descendants, Israel, were in Egypt, God fulfilled the first part of the promise by making them “a nation, great, mighty, and populous” (Deuteronomy 26:5). Under the leadership of Joshua Israel received in fulness the land of promise, for “All came to pass.”

“So the LORD gave to Israel all the land of which He had sworn to give to their fathers, and they took possession of it and dwelt in it. The LORD gave them rest all around, according to all that He had sworn to their fathers. And not a man of all their enemies stood against them; the LORD delivered all their enemies into their hand. Not a word failed of any good thing which the LORD had spoken to the house of Israel. All came to pass” (Joshua 21:43-45).

But the spiritual promise, “in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed,” remained unfulfilled.

Prophecy

Then the plan entered the stage of prophecy, as prophets foretold the coming salvation. For example, Isaiah prophesied of a Savior to come.

“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this” (Isaiah 9:6-7).

He also promised a Way of Salvation to be revealed.

“A highway shall be there, and a road, And it shall be called the Highway of

Holiness. The unclean shall not pass over it, But it shall be for others. Whoever walks the road, although a fool, Shall not go astray. No lion shall be there, Nor shall any ravenous beast go up on it; It shall not be found there. But the redeemed shall walk there” (Isaiah 35:8-9).

The prophet further foretold a Realm of Safety to be built.

“Now it shall come to pass in the latter days That the mountain of the LORD’s house Shall be established on the top of the mountains, And shall be exalted above the hills; And all nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, ‘Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, To the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, And we shall walk in His paths.’ For out of Zion shall go forth the law, And the word of the LORD from Jerusalem” (Isaiah 2:2-3).

Preparation

After more centuries had gone by, John the Baptist came preaching repentance and baptizing in the wilderness of Judea in fulfillment of the prophecy:

“Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You. The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; Make His paths straight” (Mark 1:1-8).

Thus, the plan entered the stage of preparation. All things were in readiness. Indeed,

“... after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand” (Mark 1:14-15).

Even the angels in heaven waited anxiously the revelation of the wonderful plan of the ages.

“Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven--things which angels desire to look into” (1 Peter 1:10-12).

Perfection

Then, “when the fullness of the time (the time foreordained by God) had come, God sent forth His Son” (Galatians 4:4). He was the Savior prophesied before by Isaiah.

“Then the angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end” (Luke 1:30-33).

“For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:11).

Salvation is only through Him.

“Let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole. This is the ‘Stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.’ Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:10-12).

He is the fulness of God’s plan for man. “For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell” (Colossians 1:19). God’s eternal plan of human redemption had entered the phase of **perfection**, when the

divine plan was brought to completion.

In God's infinite wisdom, He used whole peoples and nations to prepare the world for "the fulness of the time." The Romans helped prepare the world by developing a sense of the unity of mankind under universal law and by establishing the Pax Romana (Roman Peace) whereby preachers of the gospel could travel to all parts of the Empire on Roman roads protected by Roman soldiers. The Greeks helped by giving people a common language, Koine (common) Greek, in which they could hear the Word and, negatively, by being at a low spiritual ebb, leaving a void for the gospel to fill. The Jews also helped by holding up the one true God to the world, by keeping alive the hopes of the Messiah ("Anointed," promised Savior), by providing the Old Testament, which paved the way for God's plan, by giving the pure morals of the Law of Moses, and by providing the synagogue as a place the Gospel could be preached. How glorious "the manifold wisdom of God" is shown to be (Ephesians 3:10).

God also revealed a Way of Salvation, Christ Jesus. "Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me'" (John 14:6).

We learn how to come to Him by the Gospel. "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek" (Romans 1:16).

Likewise, He built a Realm of Safety, in Christ. "Therefore I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory" (2 Timothy 2:10). We must be in His body, the church. "And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all" (Ephesians 1:22-23). "For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body" (Ephesians 5:23).

At last, In Christ Jesus the Savior, the promise to Abraham, "in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed," is fulfilled. "And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, 'In you all the nations shall be blessed'" (Galatians 3:8). "Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, 'And to seeds,' as of many, but as of one, 'and to your Seed,' who is Christ" (Galatians 3:16).

By faith in Christ and through baptism all people can become "Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."

"For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Galatians 3:26-29).

Conclusion

Indeed, the Way of Salvation is open to you; you are invited to enter the Realm of Safety. "And the Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' And let him who hears say, 'Come!' And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely" (Revelation 22:17). Will you come?

The Spiritual Nature of Man

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

In July 2001 David N. Landon of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Syracuse, New York and I had a written debate in "Faith & Facts" magazine on the nature of man. Mr. Landon affirmed, "The Scriptures teach that all men are by inherent nature totally depraved." I affirmed, "The Scriptures teach that all men are by inherent nature innocent of all sin, able to avoid sinning and able to choose either salvation or

condemnation.” This was one of fourteen written debates I had with my friend David Landon, which were published as a book entitled Calvinism on Trial. The following article is most of my affirmative on the spiritual nature of man.

Explanation

The last two clauses of the proposition affirm that people inherently possess free will. If we by inherent nature cannot keep from sinning and cannot choose to believe, we do not possess free will. The **Westminster Confession of Faith** (statement of faith for Presbyterian Churches) thus defines free will:

God hath endued the will of man with that natural liberty, that is neither forced, nor by any absolute necessity of nature determined to do good or evil (Chapter XI, Article 1)

This is what I mean by “free will.” I affirm that men by inherent nature still possess the same ability Adam was created with to freely choose either good or evil, belief or unbelief, obedience or disobedience, life or death.

What Are the Issues?

I do not deny that all people sin - we do (Romans 3:23), that the consequences of our sins affect our children - they may (Exodus 34:6-7), that Adam’s sin brought physical death on all mankind - it did (1 Corinthians 15:22), that some are so depraved they cannot keep from sinning - they are (2 Peter 2:12-14), or that some have such hardened hearts they are incapable of coming to Christ - they do (Matthew 13:13-15).

What are the issues? Are people by inherent nature sinners? Do we inherit the guilt of Adam’s sin? Are all born spiritually dead? Are we by inherent nature incapable of avoiding sin? Are we inherently unable to believe in and obey the Lord? I answer “No!” to each of these questions.

The issues involve not only the nature of man but the nature of God. I affirm that man by inherent nature possesses free will and that God is just. The denial of my proposition is a denial of human free will and of divine justice.

Proof of Proposition

All Men Are by Inherent Nature Innocent of All Sin.

Genesis 6:9

Noah is the father of mankind, just as much so as Adam (Genesis 1:28; 9:1). “Noah was a just man, perfect in his generations. Noah walked with God.”(Genesis 6:9) If we inherit Adam’s sin, why don’t we inherit Noah’s justice, perfection, and walk with God?

Jeremiah 19:1-6

The inhabitants of Judah sacrificed their sons and daughters to Baal (Jeremiah 7:30-32; 32:35; cf. Psalm 106:36-38). The children they sacrificed were “innocents.” (Jeremiah 2:34; 19:1-6; Psalm 106:38). Therefore, little children, whose nature is inherited, are innocent.

Ezekiel 18

The Jews in Babylonian exile accused God of punishing them for the sins of their fathers (Ezekiel 18:1-2). God replied that each one would be held accountable for his own sin (Ezekiel 18:3-4). The divine principle of justice is “The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself” (Ezekiel 18:19-20). This is because the ways of the Lord are fair (Ezekiel 18:25-29). The term “fair” is translated “just” in the English Standard Version. According to God Himself, to accuse Him of imputing the sin of the father to the son is to accuse Him of being unjust! God says not to accuse Him of imputing the sin of the father to the son (Ezekiel 18:3-4). He says He does not impute the sin of the father to the son (Ezekiel 18:20). Thus, we do not inherit the sin of father Adam.

Matthew 18:1-4; 19:13-15; Mark 10:13-15; Luke 18:15-17

To enter the kingdom of heaven, one must be converted (turn) and become like a little child. Either little children are innocent or one must become totally depraved to enter the kingdom.

1 Corinthians 14:20

We are to be like little children in evil (1 Corinthians 14:20; **New American Standard Bible**). Arndt and Gingrich thus define “evil”:

badness, faultiness. 1. in the moral sense-a. Depravity, wickedness, vice gener. Opposed to virtue.... be a child as far as wickedness is concerned i.e., have as little wickedness as a child 1 cor 14:20....” (A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament. 397; cf. Acts 8:22; James 1:21)

Little children, whose nature is inherited, are either innocent of wickedness (depravity), or Christians are to be wicked, depraved.

Hebrews 2:17

“In all things He had to be made like His brethren.” This included His spirit, for He worshiped and trusted God, activities that necessarily involve the spirit (Hebrews 2:11-13). Whatever we are by nature, the Son of God became in nature. Either we are by inherent nature free from the guilt of sin, or Jesus was by inherent nature totally depraved.

All Men Are by Inherent Nature Able to Avoid Sinning.

Deuteronomy 30:11-14

Moses assured Israel they were able to keep the law of God (Deuteronomy 30:11-14). But to do so, they had to carefully, diligently observe all God’s commandments always with all their hearts and souls (Deuteronomy 5:29,32; 11:13; 31:12). God is just. He has never given any man a law he could not keep.

The Example of Jesus

Jesus Christ “condemned sin in the flesh” in that He demonstrated, by living His entire life as a man without sin, that God is just in condemning us for our sins (Romans 8:3; cf. Matthew 12:41-42; Hebrews 11:7). He was made like us in all things (Hebrews 2:17). He “was in all points tempted as we are” (Hebrews 4:15; cf. Genesis 3:1-6; Matthew 4:1-11; 1 John 2:15-17). He was tempted as man, not as God (James 1:13). He lived in a terribly wicked generation (Matthew 12:41-45; 17:17; 23:33-36). He knew nothing that enabled Him to avoid sin that we cannot know (Psalm 119:11; Ephesians 5:17). He lived His entire life without a single sin (Hebrews 4:15; 7:26-27; cf. John 8:46). We are to live as He did (Luke 6:40; 1 Peter 2:21-22; 1 John 2:6). Thus, we have the ability to keep from sinning.

1 John 5:3

God’s commandments “are not burdensome” (1 John 5:3). To be burdensome is to be “difficult to fulfill” (Arndt and Gingrich. 133). If the Lord’s commandments are not difficult to fulfill, obviously people can obey them. Sin is a violation of God’s commandments (1 John 3:4). Thus, men are able to avoid sinning.

Commanded Not to Sin

We are commanded not to sin (John 5:14; 8:11; Romans 6:12-13; 1 Corinthians 15:34; Hebrews 12:1; 1 Peter 1:15-16; 2:21-22; 1 John 2:1,6). God does not demand of us what we cannot do (1 John 5:3; cf. Matthew 23:14-30). In other words, if I ought, I can. Therefore, men are born with the ability to avoid sin.

All Men Are by Inherent Nature Able to Choose Either Salvation or Condemnation.

Lord’s Command

The Lord commands all people to choose Him (Deuteronomy 30:19-20; Joshua 24:15; Isaiah 56:1-5;

Revelation 22:17). God does not demand of us what we cannot do (1 John 5:3; cf. Matthew 25:14-30) Therefore, all people inherit the ability to choose Him.

Lord's Call

The Lord graciously calls all people to come to Him (Isaiah 1:16-20; 45:22; Matthew 11:28-30; Matthew 28:19-20; Revelation 22:17). The Lord calls us by the gospel (Mark 16:15-16; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14). Either all men are by inherent nature capable of answering the gospel call and coming to God, or the gospel call is nothing more than a cruel taunt to lost sinners unable to respond in obedient faith.

Conclusion

Each part of the proposition has now been sustained by argumentation from the Scriptures. The Scriptures teach that all men are by inherent nature innocent of all sin, able to avoid sinning, and able to choose either salvation or condemnation. We cannot blame our sins on God or Adam. They are our own fault, for we did not have to commit them. We are all by inherent nature capable of believing in and obeying Jesus Christ. Thanks be to God, we have free will, and God is just.



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