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

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Finally, brethren
WHATEVER THINGS are true
are noble
are just
are pure
are lovely
are of good report
IF THERE IS ANY 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.

"Christians can easily forget that their service is to God. If they do, they become ill tempered and agitated by mistreatment for doing right. But keeping in mind that one serves the Christ enables one to look beyond the miserable present and the suffering being endured to the inheritance that God has promised to his children who serve him faithfully. One's life is given meaning, purpose, and dignity by this relationship to God, whatever ignominy may be visited upon one by the unrighteous" (Clinton D. Hamilton, **Truth Commentaries: 1 Peter**. 111 [comment on 1 Peter 2:21])

Question from Nigeria about When to Take the Lord's Supper

Question

From the scriptures, I observed that the first day of the week is a day the disciples usually gather together. I have not come across any scripture stating they gathered during the days of the week. Putting to consideration what is written in the book of 1Corinthians 11, verses 25 and 26 precisely, there says "as often as you eat..." is it then wrong to take the Lord's supper any other day or is it meant to be taken only on the first day of the week?

Answer

Disciples may meet any day of the week to study the Bible, sing, and pray (Acts 2:46), but we are only authorized to eat the Lord's Supper and take a collection on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:1-2).

"But He Lied Unto Him" | 1 Kings 13:18

Sunday Ayandare | Ibadan, Nigeria

This passage has to do with one of the most pathetic stories of the Bible. Following the break-up of the kingdom of Israel in the hands of Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, Jeroboam was made the king of Israel consisting of ten tribes. Rehoboam, nevertheless, retained the kingship of the attenuated kingdom of Judah made up of only the tribes of Judah and Benjamin (1 Kings 12:12-24).

Jeroboam the son of Nebat soon set up two golden calves. He placed one at Dan, in the northern part of his kingdom, the other at Bethel, the southern extremity and fatuously described these as "the gods which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt" (1 Kings 12:29). Besides, he made shrines of high places and made priests "from every class of people which were not of the son of Levi" (1 Kings 12:31). Moreover, he changed the Feast of Tabernacles from the fifteenth of the seventh month to the fifteenth of the eighth month "which he had devised of his own heart" (1 Kings 12:31-33). The obvious reason for this infringement of the law of God by Jeroboam was political expediency. He did not only fear the loss of his firm grip on the newly founded kingdom but also the loss of his life (1 Kings 12:27). But the dummy he sold to the people was that he was saving them the trouble and expense of distant journey to Jerusalem (1 Kings 12:28-30). Anyway, "this thing became a sin unto Jeroboam" (1 Kings 12:30).

However, this was a sin the Lord was not going to overlook. By the word of the Lord, a man of God from Judah came to Bethel and cried against the altar which Jeroboam had devised of his own heart. In the mind of Jeroboam, this was the height of audacity, if not stupidity, on the part of the man of God and so the exasperated king commanded that he be held. But to his consternation, the hand he stretched forth to give the command could not be pulled in again. Nevertheless, the king pleaded with the man of God from Judah and "the king's hand was restored in again and became as it was before" (1 King 13:1-6).

But the charge the Lord gave to this man of God from Judah was that he should "eat no bread, nor drink water, nor turn again by the same way that thou camest" (1 Kings 13:9). A very clear and unambiguous charge, you would say! However, there was an old prophet at Bethel, who upon hearing of the miraculous feat of the man of God went after him and brought him back to his house to eat and drink, deceiving him into believing that an angel spoke to him, reversing the earlier command of God. Sadly, the word of God says, "but he lied unto him" (1 Kings 13:13).

The question now arises: why did this prophet deceive this man of God? Some have supposed that the humanity of the old prophet seeing the man of God sitting under an oak possibly faint with fatigue might have led him to practice this deception. Some others have argued that it might be that the old prophet was himself deceived by Satan, masquerading as an angel of light (cf. 2 Corinthians 11:14-15). Whichever way one looks at it, the word of God says, "but he lied unto him." That is the fact of the case!

That the old prophet who deceived the man of God is abhorrent to God is without question (Psalm 5:6). Isaiah spoke of "a rebellious people, lying children that will not hear the law of the Lord; which say to the seers, see not; and to the prophets, prophesy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits..." (Isaiah 30:10). In any case, the word of God says he lied to the man of God and to that extent, he has his just recompense of reward – "all liars shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone (Revelation 21:8). The only exception here is genuine repentance (Acts 17:30).

On the other hand, what about the man of God from Judah that believed lies? "A lion met him by the way and slew him and his carcass was cast in the way for disobeying the word of God" (1 Kings 13:23-30). The New Testament speaks of people who "received not the love of truth that they might be saved." It goes further to state that "for this cause God shall send them strong delusion that they should believe a lie; that they might be damned who believed not the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness" (2 Thessalonians 2:10-12). Thus it is clear from the word of God that it is a serious thing not only to lie, but also to believe lies, especially in our service to God.

Application

1. Today, many religious leaders present themselves as “General Overseers,” “Supreme Apostles” and “International Prophets” and tell their members that God has revealed to them that they should bring their tithes to them to avert the wrath of God. If the Bible is the word of God – and we believe it is – these religious leaders who so pontificate are all liars! How? It is the very God Who gave the law upholding tithes that says He was going to change that law (Jeremiah 31:31-34). It is in this regard He changed the Levitical priesthood of the Old Testament to the High priesthood of Christ under the New Testament (Hebrews 7:5-13). According to the New Testament, Christians are to give in proportion to their prosperity (1 Corinthians 16:1-2; 2 Corinthians 8:12; 9:6-11). But now, what about those who believe these religious leaders as men speaking for God? Simply put, they believe a lie!
2. It is common nowadays to hear “Pastors” and “Prophets” over the Radio and Television networks announcing that God has asked them to declare seven-day gathering of people to a camp or mountain or valley for “breakthrough” and “anointing.” That is a lie! The New Testament under which we live today commands that we “pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17) and “always” (Luke 18:1). Besides, prayer, like other acts of Christian worship, has no regard for valley or mountain or any other place. What is important in this dispensation is that all acts of worship be “in spirit and in truth” (John 4:20-24).
3. Similarly, one hears these so-called “men of God” saying God has given them special blessings to be given to certain number of people who would “sow the seed of faith” for various sums of money. Friends, that is a lie! To so pontificate as these men do proves the veracity of God’s word that such men “serve not our Lord Jesus Christ but their own belly” (Romans 16:17-18).
4. It is also common in this day and age to hear of bricklayers, welders, carpenters and other artisans throwing away their tools of trade, claiming God has called them to go and establish “churches.” That is a lie! There is one body (Ephesians 4:4) and this is the church (Ephesians 1:22-23). Jesus Christ is the builder and foundation of this church (Matthew 16:18; 1 Corinthians 3:11). And so, “other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.”

Conclusion

It could be clearly seen from these premises that as there were false prophets among the people of old, so there are as many false teachers today (2 Peter 2:1). These men bring damnable heresies and many follow their pernicious ways by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of (2 Peter 2:2-3). Remember, to believe the lies of religious leaders is to follow pernicious ways which lead to damnation (2 Thessalonians 2:10-12). To follow blind leaders is to fall together with them into the ditch (Matthew 15:14).

It is a serious thing to lie to people. That is abhorrent to God (Revelation 21:8). On the other hand, it is damnable to believe a lie. Our plea is: put a stop to lying words that cannot profit (Jeremiah 7:8).

The Superiority of Christ

Jefferson David Tant | Roswell, Georgia, USA

Hebrews chapter one contains a wealth of information as to Christ's identity, and his unique position in all creation. This is what sets him apart from all other so-called “prophets” and would-be “saviors.” None other can match his credentials. Neither Joseph Smith, Muhammad, Zoroaster, Buddha, Mary Baker Eddy, Ron Hubbard, Vishnu, Charles Taze Russell, nor Ellen G. White, to name a few. Indeed the whole Hebrews epistle confirms the fact that God’s New Covenant with man is superior to Israel’s Old Covenant. But the beginning focuses on Jesus Christ, the Son of the Living God.

There are seven characteristics in the chapter that are worth considering, as well as a few other noteworthy statements.

(1) Christ is God’s spokesman. “God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son” (1:1-2a).

While God revealed himself through various means in the Old Testament, he unfolded the mystery that had been hidden from eternity through Jesus Christ. Paul, in contrasting the wisdom of the world with God's wisdom, said, "Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away; but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God predestined before the ages to our glory" (1 Corinthians 2:6-7).

Furthermore, we are told that there will be no further revelations, no more so-called prophets, for Christ told the apostles that he was soon leaving them, "But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come" (John 16:13). If that promise was fulfilled, then no one today has any new truth to reveal. He said the Spirit would guide them into all the truth! Joseph Smith, the Mormon "prophet," Ellen G. White, the Seventh Day Adventist "prophet," and all such are false prophets. If Christ's promise to the apostles did not come to pass, then Christ is a false prophet, and we are all without hope.

(2) Christ is conqueror. The fact that he was "appointed heir of all things" (verse 2) indicates that he is living, and thus conquered death through his resurrection. Those who are dead do not inherit. My wife and I have a will for the disposition of our earthly goods when we leave this world. But if any of our children, our heirs, had preceded us in death, that one would not be considered an heir.

Revelation 1:5 indicates that Christ is "the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth." That's present tense, not past tense. He is the ruler, and thus is living, having conquered death.

Christ referred to his conquering of Satan and death in his message to the church at Laodicea: "He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne." (Revelation 3:21). As one of our hymns states, "We serve a risen Savior."

Josh McDowell was speaking to a group of college students in Uruguay on the topic of evidences. He said a Muslim student spoke to him, and expressed sympathy in these words. "I feel sorry for you Christians. We know where the tomb of our prophet Muhammad is, but all you Christians have is...", and he hesitated. McDowell said a strange look came over the young man's face as he realized the implication of what he was saying. The "empty tomb" means that our prophet is alive, while the Muslim's prophet is dead. Josh said he wished he had a camera to capture the look on the student's face.

While it is not the purpose of this writing to consider the evidence for the resurrection, let it be known that the evidence is overwhelming. I can say that the evidence for the resurrection is as strong as, or even stronger, than that of any event in ancient history. Muhammad is dead; Joseph Smith is dead; Ron Hubbard is dead; Christ is alive!

(3) Christ is creator and sustainer. The writer of Hebrews goes on to state that Christ is the one "through whom also He made the world. And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power" (verses 2-3). Verse 10 continues the thought: "You, Lord, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the works of your hands."

The familiar statement in John 1:1-3 reads: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being." Then John goes on in verse 14 to identify this being: "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth."

"He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together ("consist" **American Standard Version**)" (Colossians 1:17). "The meaning is, that they are kept in the present state; their existence, order, and arrangement are continued by his power" (Albert Barnes Commentary).

What other prophet has ever claimed to have created the universe, or to have the power to keep the universe humming along smoothly?

(4) Christ is deity. He is referred as “Son” in verses 2, 5 and 8, and “firstborn” in verse 6. Note 4 and 5: “having become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent name than they. For to which of the angels did He ever say, ‘**You Are My Son, Today I Have Begotten You**’? And again, ‘**I Will Be a Father to Him and He Shall Be a Son to me**’?”

This presents a real problem for various groups, including Muslims and Jehovah’s Witnesses. The Jehovah’s Witnesses claim Christ is really Michael the archangel. “Previous to the Son’s coming to earth as a man he was not known in heaven as Jesus Christ, but as Michael; when we read in Jude 9 about Michael the archangel, we are to understand this expression as a designation of Jesus Christ in his prehuman state.” (**New Heavens and a New Earth**, pages 28-30, Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, Brooklyn, NY).

Muslims are horrified at the thought of God having a Son. “They say: ‘(God) Most Gracious has begotten a son!’ Indeed ye have put forth a thing most monstrous! At it the skies are ready to burst, the earth to split asunder, and the mountains fall down in utter ruin, that they should invoke a son for (God) Most Gracious. For it is not consonant with the majesty of (God) Most Gracious that He should beget a son” (Qur’an, Sura 19:88-92). To them, having a son means God had a sexual relationship with Mary, not considering that the God who created the universe could implant the seed in Mary’s womb.

Hebrews 1:3 claims that Christ “... is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power” (**New American Standard Version**). Other renderings read: “who being the brightness of his glory and the express image of his person” (**King James Version**); “He brightly reflects God’s glory and is the true image of his substance” (Weymouth’s New Testament).

“Radiance” or “brightness” is from the Greek *“apaugasma,”* “an off-flash, i.e. effulgence: --brightness” (Strong’s). “The word *augasma* is that which has splendour in itself *apaugasma* is the splendour emitted from it; but the inherent splendour and the exhibited splendour are radically and essentially the same” (**Adam Clarke’s Commentary**). The idea is that if you look at the sun in a mirror, you see the exact brilliance and image.

This is further emphasized with the phrase “exact representation,” or express image.” “The very image of his substance (**charaktêr tês hupostaseôs**). “*Charaktêr*” is an old word from “*charassô*,” to cut, to scratch, to mark. It first was the agent (note ending =têr) or tool that did the marking, then the mark or impress made, the exact reproduction” (Robertson’s **New Testament Word Pictures**).

How could an angel or any other created being be an “exact reproduction” or be the “splendour in itself” that emanates from God? The truth is, Christ is divine, as the apostle John declared in John 1:1-2, 14: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God...And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

(5) Christ is priest. “...when he had made purification of sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high” (verse 3). The function of the priests in the Old Testament was to intercede with God on behalf of the people. They did this through the multitude of sacrifices and offerings. The problem was that the blood of bulls and goats would not suffice to take away sin.

“For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near. Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, because the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sins? But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of

sins year by year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins” (Hebrews 10:1-4).

It took something much greater to be efficacious in making provision for our sins—the perfect sacrifice, i.e., the sinless Son of God.

There is something significant in the statement in verse 3: “When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.” In 10:11-12, the writer contrasts the actions of the Old Testament priests with Christ. “Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God.”

The priests, in a sense, could never “sit down,” for their work was never finished. They had to make sacrifices day after day, week after week, year after year. Why? Because their sacrifices were not perfect. But when Christ made the perfect sacrifice, he “sat down,” because the work was finished. What a beautiful illustration of the superiority of Christ.

(6) Christ is King. In Hebrews 1:8, the writer claims: “But of the Son He says, “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, and the righteous scepter is the scepter of His Kingdom.”

This presents another problem for the Jehovah’s Witnesses, Muslims and others who deny the deity of Christ. Why would we think that any created being would be made the spiritual ruler over the creation? Consider Paul’s declaration in First Timothy 1:14b-15a, as he writes about the “Lord Jesus Christ, which He will bring about at the proper time—He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light.”

Note that this Sovereign King and Lord “possesses immortality.” Adam Clarke notes in his Commentary that “All beings that are not eternal must be mutable; but there can be only one eternal Being, that is God; and he only can have immortality.” If Jesus Christ is immortal, then he is not a created being.

Consider this. Our writer states that Christ is both priest and king. In one of Zechariah’s prophecies about the Messiah, he says, “Yes, it is He who will build the temple of the LORD, and He who will bear the honor and sit and rule on His throne. Thus, He will be a priest on His throne, and the counsel of peace will be between the two offices” (6:13). What is the point? At the same time Christ is priest, he is also ruling on his throne.

This presents a problem for the premillennialists, for while they may accept Christ as our High Priest now, they do not believe he is King, for the kingdom will not be established until he returns for the 1,000-year reign. But in both Hebrews and Zechariah, Christ is presented as being both High Priest and King **at the same time**, not at separate times. This, and other Scriptures show that the premillennial theory of a future 1,000 year reign on earth is not true.

(7) Christ is worshipped. “And when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says, ‘And let all the angels of God worship Him’” (1:6). It is forbidden for us to worship angels. When an angel appeared and spoke to John, we are told what transpired in Revelation 22:8-9: “I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed me these things. But he said to me, “Do not do that. I am a fellow servant of yours and of your brethren the prophets and of those who heed the words of this book. Worship God.”

This is another dilemma for those who say Christ is not divine, but merely an angel, a prophet, or some super human. Such beings are not to be worshipped. Only God is to be worshipped, and the Father told the angels to worship the Son, who is Jesus Christ.

Furthermore, in verses 5 and 13 of Hebrews 1, a distinction is made between Christ and the angels. “For to

which of the angels did He ever say, 'You are My Son...'"(verse 5); "But to which of the angels has He ever said, 'Sit at My right hand...'" (verse 13). It is clear that God never said those words to an angel, nor to any human being. Only the Son occupies that exalted position, and thus is worthy of worship.

We remember when Peter came to the house of Cornelius. "When Peter entered, Cornelius met him, and fell at his feet and worshiped him. But Peter raised him up, saying, 'Stand up; I too am just a man'" (Acts 10:25-26). And when the one called "Doubting Thomas" saw the resurrected Christ in person, his doubts fled. Christ "said to Thomas, 'Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing.' Thomas answered and said to Him, 'My Lord and my God'" (John 20:27-28). Note that Christ did not correct him as Peter corrected Cornelius. Why? Because Christ is deity, and worthy of worship. At least 14 passages show Christ received worship, including the Wise Men (Matthew 2:1, 2, 11), a leper (Matthew 8:2), a ruler (Matthew 9:18), the apostles (Matthew 14:33), a Canannite woman (Matthew 15:25), two Marys and the disciples (Matthew 28:9, 17), etc. The Greek word for worship is "proskuneo," the same word Christ used in his rebuke of Satan: "Then Jesus said to him, 'Go, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only,'" If Jesus can rightfully be worshipped, then he must be divine!

Truly, as the song says, "There is none like him, none can compare." Thus we can understand the significance of Christ's response to Thomas in John 14:6: "Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.'"

Christ is truly superior. He is God. He is eternal. He is the only way through whom we can have hope of salvation and eternal life. May we ever serve and honor him. (All Scripture quotations from the **New American Standard**, unless otherwise noted.)

Local Church Autonomy and Human Organization

Ajayi S Ojeva | Osogbo, Nigeria

The only scriptural organization of the Church of Christ is the local congregation. The divine pattern of organization is to appoint elders in every church (Acts 14:22; Titus 1:5). The rule of these elders is limited within the congregation where they are being appointed. They have no authority beyond the local congregation (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:1-3). Each congregation in the New Testament was autonomous, self-ruled by the elders. Any form of organization that gives a man any authority which extends beyond the local church is unscriptural. Any organization that ties two or more churches together bringing them under a centralized oversight is contrary to the divine pattern revealed in the New Testament.

"The church of Christ – Tanzania missions" is not identifying the church of Christ but Tanzania missions of the church of Christ. In a nutshell, such a name is not representing the true church of Christ but a human institution. According to Daniel Gaines,

"This effort (The Tanzania 2000 Mission Effort, A.S.O) has built Bible Schools in Arusha and Moshi and a Preacher Training School in Kisongo This is part of an ongoing 20-year plan begun in 1998 by Cy Stafford and the Kensington Woods Church of Christ to accomplish this work."

Also, as can be seen from the constitution, this church actually exists for the sake of the Bible school. This is purely institutionalism.

While we are trying to avoid one error we might find ourselves falling into another error unaware. Autonomous Churches of Christ as a title or name is the same as saying one is a born again Christian. If one is not born again, he is not a Christian. If churches are not autonomous they cannot be the church of Christ. It will be something else- denominational. The church is to be the church no matter what. Tanzania church of Christ council is equally not scriptural.

Registering a board of trustees should be for the purpose of fulfilling the demand of the Law of the Land. Each local congregation should be allowed to register with the government. The board of trustees of the local church should be composed of its elders where there are elders, and where there are no elders, a few men in the church may be select to act as board of trustees. Classifying some churches as affiliated churches sounds denominational. It is the same as denominations where local churches are referred to as branches of the church. We are to do Bible things in Bible ways.

The Church establishing a Bible school – which shall sponsor and be open to all members of the community, is outside the purview of the Scriptures. It is a departure from the biblical pattern. Secular education is the duty of parents, not the work of the church. What the church owes the community is to preach the gospel to them for their salvation.

“Supporting the poor, widows, orphans, the sick and the needy in the community as one of the acts of benevolence with accordance to the Bible, offering education to both Christian and Non-Christian” is beyond the work of the church. The threefold work of the church is evangelism, edification, and benevolence. The benevolence of the church in the New Testament is limited to the saints (Acts 11: 29; Romans 15:26).

A registered board of trustees arrogates to themselves power that God has not given man over His church. Not even the apostles of Christ ever had such power over the church as determining the right of any congregation of the saints to raise and spend her own funds. Some denominational church leaders never arrogate such power unto themselves. One can only know the beginning of a digression from the divine pattern but no one can determine the extent of the departure.

We must hold fast to the pattern of sound words and guard against every innovation in the church. We must make every effort within the scope of the scriptures to maintain the autonomy of the local church that the church of Christ may remain the church of Christ in deed.

References

Daniel Gaines, About the Tanzania 2000 Mission Effort, tanzaniamissions.blogspot.com

The Grace of God

Patrick Farish | Wauxahatchie, Texas, USA

"For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people."

The grace of God, divine favor, is a dominant theme in His dealings with man. Seeing grace as “unmerited” favor, the mind’s eye goes back to earlier times, things like a rock bringing forth water (Exodus 17), the walls of a city falling (Joshua 6), or leprosy cleansed (2 Kings 5). These results occurred due to works that, reasonably, could not make them happen. These things were not “caused” by the actions involved – hitting the rock? marching around Jericho? dipping in the Jordan? How?

The answer, of course, is God and His grace. Obviously the actions of the people involved were not the causes that produced these effects. Whacking a rock does not produce water. That involves digging a well. Dipping in a river does not cure disease; medical attention is prescribed. Grace is more than the favor extended in becoming a child of God; it is the power by which the saved continue to grow, in sanctification. The Macedonians’ generosity to brethren in need is described as “an act of grace” (2 Corinthians 8:6-7). Giving our money – grace!

Grace, which brings salvation for all people (Titus 2:11), is susceptible to abuse. Paul looks at one of these potential abuses, saying “Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?” (Romans 6:1 -- with his rebuttal in verse 2, “By no means!”). Jude speaks of “ungodly people, who pervert the grace of God ...” (verse 4). Modern-day counterparts speak of salvation as “wholly of grace,” and are indifferent to Scriptures which relate grace to faith (Ephesians 2:8). They ignore warnings about falling from grace (Galatians 5:4).

Romans 5:1-2: "Therefore since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God." This statement of the way of entrance into the grace of God is plain: access (entrance) by faith into grace. Just as Moses, the Israelites, and Naaman entered into the blessing of God (grace) by doing what God told them to do (faith), so we today are saved (grace) by doing what Jesus told us to do, (faith), because Jesus is "the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him"(Hebrews 5:9).

Some apparently think they need to "tidy up" after, or correct, God, Who did not know of man's boastful tendencies (?!). The truth of the matter is, He told Gideon that Israel "might boast over me saying my own hand has saved me" (Judges 7:2). For this reason, He reduced Gideon's army, from 32000 to 10000 to 300 soldiers. Going against a numerically greater adversary, the three hundred men God left Gideon were victorious – access by faith into grace!

Ephesians 2:8-9: "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast." This, again, states plainly the way of entrance into the grace of God: through faith. They were saved by grace (the gift of God) through faith. Paul is writing the Ephesians about their conversion ("you have been saved"), and that conversion is recorded in Acts 19:4-5. Paul reminds them that John told the people "to believe in the one who was to come after him that is, Jesus. On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus." When they heard they should believe in Jesus, they were baptized. The "something" no one might boast about, was baptism; so they could be saved by grace.

Why were the Ephesians baptized? Well, obviously, because Jesus said they should be, and they believed Jesus, Mark 16:16. They "received" the word, Acts 2:41, " those who received his word were baptized....." Another passage shedding light on our question is First Peter 3:21, "Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." What is baptism? An immersion in water, certainly; but more than that. It is:

An Appeal to God. Peter said, baptism "is an appeal to God for a good conscience." When I was in the fifth grade in Del Rio, I had a teacher, Mrs. Christian, who told us that, when we needed to go to the restroom, we should not speak, we should just hold up our hand. If she nodded yes, we could go; if not, we could not go. Raising our hand was the assigned appeal. Nothing else worked: no verbal plea, no running to her desk for permission – just, raise your hand to ask (appeal) for permission. And, you know, we understood her; and no substitution of other actions, was ever offered. The appeal she required was hers to reveal – and ours to obey, IF we wanted the release. So baptism, an act of faith, is the appeal for grace God accepts.

"And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified" (Acts 20:32). The grace of God – communicated through "the word of his grace"; embraced through faith.

Preach The Man, Not The Plan (2)

Tommy J. Thornhill | Etna, Arkansas, USA

During the early years of my preaching, the church of Christ (it was the Lord's church, since it belonged to Him) had enjoyed a period of great growth. But, many of those who had been added to the church were not growing strong spiritually, not being well grounded in the scriptures. They did not fully grasp the importance of Bible authority (what it is, and how it is established and maintained). This included many preachers.

It was during the late 1960s onward that many preachers, some whom I knew personally, and others by name and/or their writings, began to teach that the members of the church of Christ, in the local sense),

were being too legalistic and exclusive in their fellowship. Note: they misunderstood and misused both terms, “legalistic” and “exclusive,” and since many still do, I will write more about these terms later, but for now back to my point. As they saw it, “change agent” minded preachers felt there were many sincere, religious people who were being excluded from fellowship in local congregations simply because they believed and advocated doctrinal and innovative ideas that were contrary to “the doctrine of Christ.” Since they had concluded the church was too legalistic and exclusive they set about to change the image of the church from a “church of doctrine” (as they put it) that was putting too much emphasis on being one in faith, doctrine, and practice. They felt this emphasis failed to properly exalt Jesus Christ as Lord. They said preachers needed to point people to the person of Christ, not to His plan or doctrine. They needed to “preach the man, not the plan.”

Needless to say, this created a lot of confusion and controversy among brethren. These “change agent” preachers were challenged about what they preached. So, to justify their teaching, but failing to “rightly divide the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15), they began teaching the unwarranted assumption that there was a difference between preaching the gospel of Christ and teaching the doctrine of Christ. They said you only preach the gospel (the core facts of Jesus’ death, burial and resurrection) to a sinner, then you teach the saved the doctrine (that which Jesus taught to be practiced). They were making a gospel-doctrine distinction that is not true. The distinction is not valid. Let’s go to the Scriptures to learn the truth.

A scripture that clearly refutes the idea that one can preach the man (belief in the person of Christ, without also teaching one must accept His doctrine (the plan) is Second John 9-11.

“Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house and greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds.”

Those who advocate “the man, not the plan” tell us that “the doctrine of Christ” in the passage is the fact that Jesus is come in the flesh (verse 7). They tell us the doctrine is about who Jesus is, not about His teaching or doctrine. The context teaches otherwise. Turn back to verse 6, “This is love, that we walk according to His commandments...” To “walk according to His commandments” is to “abide in the doctrine of Christ.”

It is absurd to think one can separate the gospel about Christ, and the doctrine He taught. You can’t have the man without following His plan (His doctrine, His teaching). You can’t believe the facts about Jesus as the Christ without doing what He teaches. Jesus Himself taught there was more to do than just believing Him to be the Son of God and Savior. If they were going to acknowledge Him as Lord, they had to do as He said. “But why do you call Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do the things which I say? Whoever comes to Me, and hears My sayings, and does them...” (Luke 6:46). This sure sounds like, if you have Me, (the man), you will also follow My doctrine, (the plan).

In the Sermon on the Mount He told the people, “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven” (Matthew 7:21). At the conclusion of His sermon, it is said, “And so it was, when Jesus had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at His teaching (doctrine), for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes” (Matthew 7:28-29). His teaching or doctrine was what His Father willed for man to obey. He said, “My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me. If anyone wants to do His will, he shall know, concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God, or whether I speak on My own authority” (John 7:16-17). There is no way one can preach Christ without also teaching obedience to His doctrine. Also, notice Hebrews 5:9: Jesus is “the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him.”

How can one read the things written above, and then still say that one can preach the gospel (the good news about the Man) and ignore teaching the same people to obey His teaching (His doctrine) that must be followed? No, you can’t preach the man without the plan.

Nor can you preach Christ and not teach about His church. Jesus Christ is the head of the church (Ephesians 1:22-23; Colossians 1:18). How will the head function without the body? How will the body function without the head? They must function together, just like the gospel and doctrine.

"Adorn The Doctrine"

Jim Mickells | Lewisburg, Tennessee, USA

"Exhort bondservants to be obedient to their own masters, to be well pleasing in all things, not answering back, not pilfering, but showing all good fidelity, that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things" (Titus 2:9-10)

In recent weeks I have read several articles about leading the lost to Jesus. The church here at Hickory Heights had a series of lessons devoted to this theme. Even several of the songs we sing in our assemblies direct our thoughts toward the lost and the saving of their souls. One such song which comes to mind is "A Soul Winner For Jesus." The first verse says, "I want to be a soul winner for Jesus every day." I'm sure you're very concerned about the lost, especially those whom you love and care deeply for. How can we be more effective in winning souls for the Lord? One thing I believe which will help is what Paul told Titus to exhort bondservants to do, "adorn the doctrine of God."

The word "adorn" is defined as, "to ornament, adorn; metaphorically, equivalent to "to embellish with honor, gain honor" (Thayer. 356). The New International Version says, "...so that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive." W.E. Vine says in his word study, the Greek word "Kosmeo" is where our English word "cosmetic" is derived from. Those bondservants needed to live in a way which would make the gospel beautiful, appealing even to their masters. Does God require any less of us? Our lives should be a clear reflection of the book we claim to believe in and live by.

The text not only instructs the bondservant to whom Titus was to exhort, but also is a great source of information for us as we try to live in a manner to attract others to God.

It would have been very easy for these slaves, now that they are Christians, to feel no sense of obligation to their masters. After all they enjoyed freedom in Christ. Even if they had not been as obedient to them as they should have, now they were to be submissive to them because of who they were, slaves of God. As servants of the Lord you and I experience liberty. Yet that does not mean we are free from obeying others. We are to obey the laws of the land (Romans 13:1), all of them, if they don't conflict with God's law (Acts 5:2). Children are to be obedient to their parents (Ephesians 6:1). Wives are to be submissive to their husbands (Ephesians 5:22). Members are to submit to the elders (Hebrews 13:17). And certainly, all are to be obedient to God (James 4:7). We can beautify the doctrine of our Lord by being a humble submissive servant.

The bondservant was "to be well pleasing in all things." It takes effort to please others, especially one's master. One thing involved is putting others ahead of self. Paul said, "Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself" (Philippians 2:3). One of the great problems faced by many today is that of selfishness. Let those with whom we have contact see that we are genuinely interested in other people, themselves included.

One thing which can certainly turn people off about the gospel of Christ is the speech they hear coming from one's mouth. The instruction to be given to these slaves was "not answering back." The **New American Standard Version** says, "not argumentative." They had to use caution when speaking to their masters. We need to guard our speech as well. How do we answer the boss at work? When outside, do our neighbors hear us screaming disparaging remarks at our children? When we have friends over, do we use our tongues to belittle our spouse? What do our children hear us say about the preacher, the elders, deacons, song leader, etc.? Being able to communicate with people is a great blessing from God. We

should use our tongues to edify others, to impart grace to the hearers, and to honor and glorify God (Ephesians 4:29-32).

These bondservants were also to be taught “not pilfering, but showing all good fidelity.” A footnote in my Bible says for pilfering “thieving” – for fidelity “honesty.” **The Amplified Bible** says, “Nor to steal by taking things of small value, but to prove themselves truly loyal and entirely reliable and faithful throughout...” What master would not like to have a slave like Paul has described in these two verses? How could it not beautify or adorn the teachings of God? Many people are attracted to others when they see such virtuous traits manifested in their lives.

May the Lord help us to be obedient servants, concerned about others, carefully watching what we say and how we say it, and being a people of honesty and integrity. Such lives will adorn the gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and hopefully it will help lead others to Him.

Jesus Failed

Mike Thomas | Kokomo, Indiana, USA

Jesus did not succeed in everything He could have while He was here. There were some things He failed to do:

He Failed to Win the Approval of All Men.

No human has had more love in His heart for humanity than Jesus Christ. “When He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd” (Matthew 9:36). It was this intense love that compelled Him to pray for man’s salvation (verses 37-38). But despite this enormous love for mankind, the more He loved the less He was loved in return. “Then the Jews took up stones again to stone Him. Jesus answered them, ‘Many good works I have shown you from My Father. For which of these do you stone Me?’ Then the Jews answered Him, saying, ‘For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy, and because You, being a Man make Yourself God’” (John 10:31-33). If the Creator of mankind could not win the approval of all men, what makes us think we will? And why should we lose our faith in God when people don’t like us? Jesus told the apostles, “A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you...They hated Me without a cause” (John 15:20, 25). This will always be true (2 Timothy 3:12), so we might as well prepare for it. Yes, we are to be gentle, kind, and as much as depends on us live peaceably with all men. But, when our noble motives and diligent efforts still result in people disliking us, we should accept it as a fact of life. Even Jesus could not win everyone’s approval nor did He try. If anything, He warned against it: “Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for so did their fathers to the false prophets” (Luke 6:26).

He Failed to Persuade All Men to Repent.

There were those who witnessed the miracles and teachings of Christ, and knew He was of God, yet would not follow Him because of the trouble it would cause in their relationship with others (John 12:42-43). This cowardice did not justify their refusal to confess Christ. Instead, Jesus cried out and said, “He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him—the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day” (John 12:48). Fortunately, some of these fearful ones eventually became Christians (Acts 2:36-40), but not all who heard the teachings of Christ were persuaded to obey them. They are now in torments regretting their pride and foolishness.

Our love for mankind should be so intense that all we see when we scan a crowd is a group of eternal souls destined to give an account to God. This love should prompt us to offer them the life-giving message of the gospel. But if they still reject the truth after all of our prayers and efforts to persuade them to repent, we can find peace in knowing that even the Son of God could not convince all men to follow Him. That is a painful outcome we must accept in seeking to save lost souls. Paul cried, “Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.

For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God" (Romans 10:1-3). Even Jesus could not change this reality.

Yes, Jesus failed in some things, but only in things deemed important by this world. From heaven's perspective, He succeeded in all that matters as "the author and finisher of our faith" (Hebrews 12:2).

Who Is The Antichrist?

William Stewart | Kingston, Ontario, Canada

There's no shortage of teaching about the antichrist in religious circles, though the validity of what is taught is certainly questionable. Antichrist theories come and go with major world events or leaders. Generally, folks are looking for "a great antagonist expected to fill the world with wickedness but to be conquered forever by Christ at his second coming."¹ Suggestions in the recent past have included Pope Benedict XVI, Mikhail Gorbachev, Ronald Reagan, and Saddam Hussein, among others. In fact, a 2011 survey by Public Policy Polling found that 13% of Americans believe President Obama is the antichrist, and another 13% are unsure.²

The teaching of a world leader known as the antichrist is prevalent in the religious world, but the Bible says nothing about it. This is a doctrine of man, not God. We need to be concerned with what the Bible says about the antichrist.

Our English word antichrist is transliterated from the Greek antichristos. It literally means "against Christ" or "opposed to Christ." The word only appears four times in the Bible, and contrary to what some think, it is never used in the book of Revelation. That is not to say there is no antichrist in Revelation; but it is not portrayed there or anywhere else as an individual who dominates the world in wickedness until deposed by Christ. The Lord revealed what it means to be antichrist by saying:

He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad. (Matthew 12:30)

Folks will link the antichrist to "the man of sin" from 2 Thessalonians 2, "the little horn" of Daniel 7, and "the beast" of Revelation 13. Are these antichrist? Absolutely, if they are contrary to the way of Christ, then they are antichrist. But none of them are exclusively antichrist. Any who stand in opposition to the way of Christ are antichrist. that would include, but is not limited to the Pharisees of Jesus' day, the Roman empire in the early days of the church, and atheists today. If one is opposed to Christ and His will, they are antichrist.

Let's notice the four occurrences of the word antichrist in the Bible:

- *Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know it is the last hour. (1 John 2:18)*
- *Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son. (1 John 2:22)*
- *...and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world. (1 John 4:3)*
- *For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist. (2 John 7)*

Present since the first century. Many speak of the antichrist as coming in the future. That is not how John spoke of the antichrist. It appears he had warned the saints opposition would come, but not 2000 years in the future - it was a present reality. Antichrists have existed from the time of Christ, and will continue until He comes again.

Anyone who is against Christ is antichrist, but John has a particular antichrist in mind:

They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us... (1 John 2:19)

What made these who had once been with the disciples turn antichrist?

Denial of Jesus. Two distinct ways of denying Jesus are mentioned by the apostle. In the immediate context, John speaks of those who deny that Jesus is the Christ, and in so doing, not only deny the Son, but also the Father who sent Him. Some in the first century were compelled to renounce their faith. To do so was the spirit of the antichrist. The same is true today - if our faith is challenged, may we stand in faith, not bow in shame. It is the difference between being with Christ and being antichrist.

Others partook of the spirit of the antichrist through a tenet of Gnosticism, the denial of Jesus' fleshly existence. It had been taught by some that the Lord could not come in fleshly form, since flesh is evil. This was a false doctrine and a denial of the nature of Christ, that He was God come into the flesh (John 1:1, 14).

Whether it be a denial of Jesus' divine nature, His humanity, His doctrine, His church - any way one sets themselves against the way of Christ is the spirit of the antichrist. There are many antichrists in the world, and they will continue until Jesus comes. Our duty is to guard our faith, to proclaim Christ, and to serve Him diligently until He comes.

Titles of Jesus (3) - Lord

David Cooper | Evening Shade, Arkansas, USA

To begin a Lesson of Christ as Lord one must first define the word as used in the Bible. There are Four words translated as lord in the Scripture. The first is Lord which is used for the tetra-gram YHWH which is Yahweh that we Pronounce Jehovah. The second and third are Adon. and Adonai which in order refer to God and a ruler, usually a king. The fourth is the New Testament term for Master, Kurios. Kurios is used for both God and man, thus replacing both Adon and Adonai which are from the Old Testament. Jesus is given all these titles at one point or another in the scriptures.

Jesus is called Lord or Jehovah in Jer 23:5-6. He is the Righteous branch of David in verse five and Named Jehovah the righteous in verse 6. Matthew speaking of John the Baptist says, "For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight," Matt 3:3. He is quoting from Isaiah 40:3 where Isaiah uses the Lord or Jehovah for term Lord. Jesus also calls himself Lord or Jehovah in John 8:58, when Jesus said unto them, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am." The Jews understood what he meant because they tried to stone him. The word Jehovah simply means "I am" as was told to Moses at the burning bush, when God stated Tell the people The I am that I am, tell them I am hath sent me. Therefore Jesus is I am or always existent as Heb 13:8 States, "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever."

Jesus is called Lord, Adon and Adonay, in Psa 110. He is called Adon in verse 1 and Adonay in verse 5. We know verse one refers to Jesus because Jesus hints that it is him in Matt 22:44 and Luke recite the same instance in Luke 20:42. Peter ascribes it directly to Jesus in the first Gospel sermon Acts 2:34-36. Verse five is in the same contest and just after Jesus is called a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek in verse four. We know this refers to Jesus from a passage in Hebrews (Heb 5:5-6), "So also Christ glorified not himself to be made a high priest; but he that said unto him, Thou art my Son, today have I begotten thee. As he saith also in another place, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek."

Kyrios or kurios (Ancient Greek: kýrios) is a Greek word which is usually translated as "lord" or "master". In religious sense, it is sometimes translated as God. It is also used in the Septuagint translation of the Hebrew Bible and the Greek New Testament. Kyrios appears about 740 times in the New Testament, usually referring to Jesus.

There are at least two other words that are sometimes translated master, [rhāb-bē' and kā-thā-gā-tā's]. They both refer to a religious teacher or guide. Rhāb-bē' is a term showing more honor. But Jesus uses both in Matt 23:8 and places no difference between them, "But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren." Jesus states that both can only be attributed to him. Nicodemus recognized Jesus as a master teacher when he called Him, "Rabbi," John 3:2.

Jesus is the Lord of Lords, master of masters, 1 Tim 2:14-15, "14 That thou keep this commandment without spot, unrebukable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ: 15 Which in his times he shall shew, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords (see also Res 17:14 and 19:16). He was exalted to this State by God the Father, ""Therefore God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, and at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, or those who in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father," Php 2:9-11. He is Head of the Church, Col 1:18, "And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.:And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all *things* he might have the preeminence." Paul makes this even more concrete in Eph 1:22 when he states that, "And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church.

Jesus is Lord over all things can be seen in two instances of instances. First, The lamb will conquer all the powers of the world, Rev 17:14, "These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful." Second He is Lord over even the Devil and his demons. In Matt 4:7, Jesus told Satan he was not allowed to tempt him as the Lord his God, "Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the **Lord** thy God." Furthermore, He proved many times his power over demons, devils. One such example is in Mark 1:34, "And he healed many that were sick of divers diseases, and cast out many devils; and suffered not the devils to speak, because they knew him."

Lord is the most often used term by the Apostles and is most used term for Jesus in the New Testament, (NT), as a whole. As used by the writers of the NT it means master in everything for Christians. We are his servants, citizens, followers, students, and laborers. We as his servants must do as our Lord commands.

Our submission begins at our conversion. Belief and confession, for example, define our submission to Jesus as Lord, Rom 10:9, That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." Repentance and baptism are, also in the name of Jesus Christ or by his authority, Acts 2:38, "Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost."

It continues as the servant, bondservant, of the Lord. Jesus said we should follow him in order to be honored by the Father, John 12:26. As the servant of Christ we must please God rather than man as Paul did, "For do I now persuade men or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ." Gal 1:10. We have Jesus as a perfect example, "5. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: 6. Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: 7. But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: 8. And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. We as servants must be willing to give our life for our master.

Our submission to Jesus is furthered as citizens of His kingdom. Jesus is the sole King of His kingdom as the Father declared, Hebrews 1:8, : But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom. As king all power was given to him, Matt 28:18, "And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth." We are the servants of his kingdom, John 18:36, "Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence." In Christ Kingdom we are the servants of God, Rom 6:22-23, "22. But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life. 23. For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." We are fellow citizens in the Kingdom of Christ and he is the all-powerful king.

A followers Jesus is our teacher and example. As teacher Jesus is our lawgiver, one true prophet, Acts 3:22-23, " 22. For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. 23. And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people. If we want to remain among God's people we must hear Jesus. We must also heed his example, 1 Pet 2:21, " For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps. Those unwilling to suffer and follow Jesus are unworthy of him, Matt 10:38, "And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me.

Being a student of Jesus is our part of the teacher-student relationship. After his plea to the heavy laden he instructs them to learn of Him, Matt 11:29, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. Paul tells Titus in, Tit 2:11, "for the grace of God that bringeth salvation," Jesus, teaches us how to live, Tit 2:12, "Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world;.

Finally, We are Laborers For our Lord Jesus Christ. The Hebrew Writer says we must labor to enter the rest our Jesus offers, as opposed that of Joshua, Heb 4:11, "Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief." We are to be always abounding in the work of the Lord, 1 Cor 15:58, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.:.) As the previous passage states that our labour is not in vain in the Lord, John says our labours will be remembered and our rest is assured, Rev 14:13, "And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them."

Our Lord is Lord of all things and especially to those of us who follow Him. We follow Him gladly now and praise Him joyfully awaiting his arrival. Those that fail to follow him now will not be happy when he returns but **all will bow to him**.

The War in the Soul

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

The story of mankind is the history of war. When the Master informed His apostles, "You will hear of wars and rumors of wars" (Matthew 24:6), His point was this is the normal course of human events.

Yet, of all the wars men have fought throughout time, none is more crucial than the one we each fight within the soul.

"I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish" (Galatians 5:16-17).

The apostle Paul writes extensively of this conflict in two passages: Romans seven and Galatians five. In Romans seven the battle is lost, but in Galatians five we are expected to win. How is this?

In Romans seven the apostle employs his own example as an honest Jew trying to be justified before God by sinless law keeping without Christ. This chapter does not portray Christians; it describes lost sinners apart from Christ. He was dead in sin (Romans 7:5, 9, 11), but Christians are alive in Christ (Romans 6:8, 11). He was carnal (Romans 7:14), but those in Christ live according to the spirit (Romans 8:5). He was sold in slavery to sin (Romans 7:14, 23), but disciples of Christ have freedom from sin (6:12, 14, 17-18, 22; 8:2). He practiced evil (Romans 7:19), but Christians practice righteousness (Romans 6:13). Sin dwelt in his body (Romans 7:17-18), but not so the disciple of the Lord (Romans 6:12, 19).

When he was a child he was alive without the law (Romans 7:9), i.e., he was spiritually alive and the law of the Lord did not apply to him. Thus, little children are innocent rather than dead in sin. But when the commandment came, when he was capable of understanding divine law and its application to him, sin "revived" (intensive, came much alive), and he died spiritually (Ibid).

The honest Jew trying to be justified by the law (and any sinner trying to be justified by law apart from the grace of God), has two great problems. He is deceived by sin, not understanding the real results of sin; i.e., he dies while desiring life. He wants to do good, but gives in to the desires of the flesh. Sin, all sin, is addictive (Romans 7:15-20). The sinner apart from Christ has lost the war and has been taken captive as the slave of sin (Romans 7:23).

But, thanks be to God, in Christ we are victorious over sin, i.e., we become righteous (Romans 7:25 - 8:4). We are freed from the guilt of sin (Romans 6:3-7, 17-18; 8:2) and strengthened through His word (Romans 8:2; 2 Timothy 3:16-17), prayer (Matthew 26:41), and the help of our brethren (Galatians 6:1-2; James 5:19-20). Thus, in and through Christ we conquer sin (Romans 8:31-39).

But, whereas we are now righteous rather than guilty (Romans 6:17-18, 3-6; 7:24 - 8:4), our human nature is unchanged. The Spirit and the flesh still war against each other (Galatians 5:16-17). We are still tempted to sin in the same ways as before (cf. Simon, Acts 8:5-24). Our duty is to follow the Spirit rather than the flesh (Romans 8:12; cf. 6:6, 12-13). We know which we follow by the lives we live (Galatians 5:19-23). Each has its own end: if we live by the Spirit we will live, but if by the flesh we will die (Romans 8:13; Galatians 6:7-8).

You and I are each engaged in a war that will determine the destiny of the soul. "For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live" (Romans 8:13). Which shall it be?

Taught by God

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

Introduction

Evangelist Oral Roberts claimed Jesus appeared to him and told him to raise millions of dollars for a hospital in Tulsa, Oklahoma or he would die. More recently, a preacher was arrested as he and members of his congregation rode together in a car from Texas to Florida. Their offense was public nudity. The preacher claimed God told them to strip off their clothing and drive to Florida. A number of times I have tried to have Bible studies with people only to have them inform me that God speaks to them directly and tells them what to do.

This is a very serious matter. Jesus declared, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). Jesus Christ is not one of many ways; He is the only way to God and His salvation. But, to come to Jesus and to receive salvation through Him, we must be "taught by God." We must hear and learn and thus come in the way the Father directs

No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught by God.' Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me (John 6:44-45).

This raises a question of primary importance: How does God teach us? How does He make known His will? This is really a question of authority. "Authority" is the right to issue commands and the ability to enforce the commands. Our question could be posed: What is our authority in spiritual matters?

Primary Authority

All primary authority, i.e., original or first authority, in every realm belongs to God. "God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands" (Acts 17:24). He has all authority by right of creation. Furthermore, "the earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness" (1 Corinthians 10:26). Were one to travel completely around the globe and view in turn all the cultures of men and the natural beauty of the world, then to turn his gaze in awe upon the limitless, starry space above, one grand thought should crowd all others from the mind - it all belongs to God. God made and owns it all. He has all primary authority.

But no man can by human wisdom search out and discover the mind of God.

Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! 'For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor?' 'Or who has first given to Him and it shall be repaid to him?' For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen (Romans 11:33-36).

If we are to know His will, He must reveal it. How has God made known His authority?

Delegated Authority

Jesus Christ has all delegated authority, i. e., given or secondary authority. He claimed, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth" (Matthew 28:18). Christ has all authority because He makes known God's will to man. Upon this basis He invites all men to come to Him.

All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him. 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 11:27-30).

Because Jesus spoke from the Father, His word will judge us in the last day.

He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him--the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day. For I have not spoken on My own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak (John 12:48 - 49).

In times recorded in the Old Testament, God spoke to men in "various ways," but he has "in these last days spoken to us by His Son."

God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds (Hebrews 1:1-2).

But Christ has not spoken directly to any of us. Paul was the last witness of the raised Lord. "Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time" (1 Corinthians 15:8). How has Jesus revealed the will of the Father to us?

Revealed Authority

The Holy Spirit revealed the Lord's authority to Christ's apostles. John 13:1 - 16:33 is the record of a private lesson Jesus gave to His chosen eleven apostles (Judas had just gone out to betray Him) immediately after the Last Supper. The Lord promised the apostles that the Holy Spirit would guide them "into all truth," because He would receive Jesus' will and show it to the apostles.

However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you (John 16:13-15).

The apostles of Christ, therefore, received the very "deep things of God ... in words ... which the Holy Spirit" taught.

Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual (1 Corinthians 2:12-13).

The apostles of Christ thus became the "ambassadors (i.e., ones sent with authority) for Christ." "Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God" (2 Corinthians 5:20).

Written Authority

But how have the apostles of Christ made known His will to us? They "briefly" wrote the authoritative will of Jesus Christ in the New Testament. We can read these words and understand the apostles knowledge "in the mystery of Christ."

For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles— if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets (Ephesians 3:1-5).

Our Obligation

This New Testament is a "pattern of sound words" which we must "Hold fast" (keep, retain, be consistent with). "Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 1:13). It is a pattern of authority. Thus, we must pattern our lives by its' teaching. "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" (Colossians 3:17). We must refuse to go beyond that which it authorizes. "Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son" (2 John 9).

The New Testament is the divine standard of authority by which God teaches us today. Thus, you can only come to Jesus and be saved in the way it teaches (John 6:44-45). Will you not come to Jesus and be saved by hearing and learning from the New Testament and coming to Christ in the way it directs? (Matthew 11:28-30)



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