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In This Issue...

- **Answers to Questions from Nigeria**
- **Four Men's View of Jesus (John 1)** | *Jim Mickells*
- **Why Do We Need Church Creeds? 3** | *Jefferson David Tant*
- **Submitting To One Another (Eph 5:21-6:9)** | *Patrick Farish*
- **Preach The Man, Not The Plan (5)** | *Tommy J. Thornhill*
- **Is it Scriptural for a Woman to Ask Questions in a Bible Class of the Church?** | *Ezekiel A. Akinyemi*
- **Troubled Marriages** | *Mike Thomas*
- **The Molded Calf** | *William J. Stewart*
- **Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6)** | *David Cooper*
- **By Grace You Have Been Saved Through Faith**
| *Keith Sharp*

Finally, brethren

**WHATEVER
THINGS**

are true
are noble
are just
are pure
are lovely
are of good report

PHILIPPIANS
4:8

IF THERE IS ANY VIRTUE AND IF THERE IS ANYTHING PRAISEWORTHY –
meditate on these things.

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Answers to Questions from Nigeria

(1). Can brethren from different congregations sponsor a TV or radio programme if they use their personal resources without using funds their congregations?

Answer: The self-governing, local church is the specific organization the Lord has authorized for the church to do its work (1 Corinthians 1:2; Philippians 1:1; 1 Peter 5:1-2). A church supported human organization is a corruption of this divine organization (2 John verse 9). However, individual Christians may do evangelistic work together, as long as they do not set up a church supported organization through which to do that work. Paul and his companions comprise an approved example of this (e.g., Acts 20:2-6).

(2) Is Preacher's forum (i.e a meeting where preachers of various congregations gather to discuss the word of God and matters affecting them or the local churches) biblical?

Answer: There is nothing sinful about brethren, preachers or otherwise, getting together to discuss the Lord's work. Actually, Acts 15 is an example of members of different congregations coming together to discuss spiritual issues. However, neither an individual preacher nor a group of preachers from various congregations has the authority to make decisions involving the work or teaching of one or more congregations (1 Peter 5:1-2). On the basis of my own experience, I would caution against any meeting of preachers being lowered to a forum for gossip (2 Corinthians 12:20).

(3) Can a local church bear the transportation costs of her members who attend gospel meetings or lectureships organized by another local church?

Answer: Yes, this is generally authorized as a part of the edification work of the local church (Ephesians 4:11-16).

(4) Is it scriptural for the church to provide refreshments for brethren during business meetings and lectureships if brethren stay long for this programme?

Answer: The church should never come together for the purpose of those attending to eat their own meals or take refreshments (1 Corinthians 11:17-34). However, it could be a hardship on those attending to go without food and drink (cf. Mark 8:1-3). In this case the church is authorized as an incidental to its evangelistic and edification work to supply necessary refreshment in the same way it is authorized to provide toilets and drinking water.

(5) A local church appealing to rich members of other congregations to support the church's building project financially.

Answer: The local church is to finance its work through a free will offering of its own members each first day of the week (1 Corinthians 16:1-2). Members of other congregations may assist another congregation in doing its work if they so choose and if they do not hurt the work of the church where they are members (Romans 16:1-2).

(6). Quiz competition, both within a local church and between local churches e.g Children Bible Quiz.

Answer: There is nothing wrong with the church having enjoyable Bible classes as long as the purpose is teaching (1 Thessalonians 1:6-8). Ezekiel taught Israel by engaging in a children's game in their presence (Ezekiel 4:1-3), and the parables of the Master were undoubtedly very enjoyable to hear (cf. Matthew chapter 13).

Reply by Querist:

Sir, I'm not sure I agree with your answer to my last question which was on quiz competition. I think that quiz competitions should not be encouraged in the church. Quiz competitions involve rewarding winners of the competition with prizes which shouldn't be a way of edifying. We are to serve God out of love and not for gain. Again, I think that local churches are not supposed to compete against one another but work towards the achievement of the common goal - preparing members for heaven.

For Men's View of Jesus (John 1)

Jim Mickells, Lewisburg, Tennessee, USA

It is interesting to hear what men today say about Jesus. The Jews rejected Him as being divine and certainly do not believe He was the long-awaited Messiah. The Muslims do not believe He is the Son of God, yet acknowledge He was a prophet, but not in the same class as the last and great prophet, Mohammed, according to them. Those who follow the teachings of the Jehovah's Witnesses deny the deity of Christ and proclaim He is a created being. This list could go on and on. Yet notice with me what four men in John chapter one had to say about Jesus.

John the Baptist: "The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29) He viewed Him as a sacrificial Lamb sent from God to be offered so the sins of the entire world could be taken away. The prophet Isaiah said, "He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, And as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth" (53:7). In Peter's description of Jesus as a lamb, he said He was "without blemish and without spot" (1 Peter 1:19). It is because of the precious blood shed by this sinless Lamb of God that we can be redeemed from our sins (1 Peter 1:18). Without His sacrifice we would be hopelessly lost. Yet because of the Father's love and the love of the Lamb of God we can be forgiven and become sons of God.

Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. "He first found his own brother Simon, and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated, the Christ)" (John 1:41). The word "Messiah" is defined as "a consecrated or anointed person. Messiah, corresponding to the Gr. Christós, Christ" (**The Complete Word Study Dictionary – New Testament**). Andrew was convinced, after listening to John and Jesus, that this was the Christ, the long-awaited Messiah. He was anointed by God to be priest, prophet and king (Acts 3:23; Hebrews 5:6: Revelation 17:14). Not much is revealed about Andrew in the Bible. Yet there are two great things we can certainly learn from him. First and foremost is that he recognized Jesus as the Messiah. Secondly, he wanted to tell his brother about Him. All of us, if we believe Jesus is the Christ, should have such priorities, wanting to tell others who we have found.

Philip. "Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote--Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph" (John 1:45). There are many Old Testament Scriptures which reveal Jesus Christ to us; His birth, work, suffering, death, resurrection, etc. I have read on numerous occasions there are over 300 such prophecies in the law and the prophets. Moses spoke of a prophet who would be raised up like him. He told those to whom he wrote "Him you shall hear" (Deuteronomy 18:15). This tells us the town in which He grew up, Nazareth of Galilee (Matthew 2:23). And also, His physical father, who was Joseph. Philip was so convinced he was willing to follow Jesus and to tell others about Him as well.

Nathanael. "Nathanael answered and said to Him, "Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" (John 1:49). Here was a man who spoke what was on his mind. We might say outspoken. Once he heard that Jesus was from the city of Nazareth, his comment was "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:46). The Lord convinced him that something good could come from this city, even the Son of God. Christ told him where he had been standing before Philip called him (John 1:48), which led to him confessing Jesus as God's Son and that He was the King of Israel. Our Lord was a Rabbi, a teacher come from God with a message of salvation for all (John 3:2). He was the Son of God with whom the Father was well pleased (Matthew 17:5). He came to be King over all of spiritual Israel, ruling over His kingdom.

Who was Jesus to these four men? He was the Lamb of God, the Messiah, the One whom Moses in the law and the prophets wrote about, from the city of Nazareth, the son of Joseph, a Rabbi, the Son of God, and the King of Israel. The question we need to answer is, who is He to us? These men gave their lives in service to Him convinced of who He was. Are we willing to believe and obey Him? Are we willing to sacrifice all we have, take up our cross and following Him daily (Luke 9:23)? It depends on whether we truly believe in who He is!

Why Do We Need Church Creeds? (3)

Jefferson David Tant | Roswell, Georgia, USA

So, what's wrong with the creeds? They contradict one another and they contradict the Bible. Consider just a few examples.

(Hiscox Baptist Manual) --Church Membership, p. 22 --

"It is most likely that in the Apostolic age when there was but 'one Lord, one faith, and one baptism,' and no differing denominations existed, the baptism of a convert by that very act constituted him a member of the church...In that sense, 'baptism was the door into the church.' Now, it is different; and while the churches are desirous of receiving members, they are wary and cautious that they do not receive unworthy persons. The churches therefore have candidates come before them, make their statement, give their 'experience,' and then their reception is decided by a vote of the members. And while they cannot become members without baptism, yet it is the vote of the body which admits them to its fellowship on receiving baptism."

The Bible says we are “baptized into Christ,” not “voted” into Christ. “For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.” (Galatians 3:27) Note—it looks like it is more difficult to become a Baptist than to become a Christian. Question – Who said it was different?

On another point, consider the following quote from Hiscox--Church Ordinances, Note 8, pages 20, 21 – “Baptism is not essential to salvation, for our churches utterly repudiate the dogma of ‘baptismal regeneration’ ; but it is essential to obedience, since Christ commanded it...”

Note—logically, that means that obedience is not essential to salvation, either.

The Bible says baptism IS essential.

“He that believes and is baptized shall be saved, but he that does not believe shall be condemned” (Mark 16:16).

“And now why do you delay? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name” (Acts 22:16).

“And corresponding to that, baptism now saves you--not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience--through the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 3:21).

(Methodist and Episcopalian creeds) “Wherefore, that we are justified by faith only is a most wholesome doctrine and very full of comfort.” (“Faith only” is common in many denominations—Baptist, Lutheran, Church of God, Presbyterian, etc.)

But the Bible says: “You see that a man is justified by works, and not by faith alone” (James 2:24). In other words, it is an obedient faith that God considers.

(The Catholic Church) It is well known that Catholic priests are to be respectfully addressed as “Father.”

But the Bible says: Christ does not agree with this, as he addressed the matter of the Pharisees ascribing to themselves titles of honor.

“And they love the place of honor at banquets, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and respectful greetings in the market places, and being called by men, Rabbi. But do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers. And do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven” (Matthew 23:6-9).

Obviously, this does not refer to our fathers in the flesh, but to giving some religious title.

(The Catholic Church) I have a booklet titled “The Bible Is NOT Our Sole Guide” published by the Catholic organization the Knights of Columbus. The whole text is dedicated to explaining why common people are incapable of reading the Bible with understanding, which is why only the ordained clergy can interpret it. The heading on page 43 states: “Inadequacy of the Bible as the sole rule of faith.”

To further emphasize their point, the KofC book states that

“The Scribes who were professionally trained through long periods of study and instruction were the only ones who had competence in the interpretation of the Books of Moses. The Jews, contemporaries of Jesus, would have been horrified at the principle that anyone is qualified to read and interpret for himself...” (page 10).

But the Bible says, as when Paul wrote to the Ephesian church; “So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is” (Ephesians 5:17). Paul encourages common Christians to understand, and how is this to be done? Consider what Paul said about the people 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).

These common people listened to Paul's preaching, and then went home to check what he was preaching by the Scriptures to be sure he was preaching truth. The common people were able to discern and understand. And Paul commended them. He didn't say, "You cannot understand the Scriptures without some official help." They didn't need some ordained clergyman to do it for them. And we are reminded of a Scripture cited earlier, "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

If the Scriptures can make us "adequate, equipped for every good work," then who says the Bible is "inadequate"? Furthermore, in my copy of The Baltimore Catechism No. 3 on page vii, there is this statement: "All volumes of Catholic teaching, in this time of transition, are outdated by the time they are published." Then what are we supposed to believe? Thankfully, that is not true about the Bible, as it "abides forever" (1 Peter 1:25). Truth does not change!

If it is true that the catechisms "are outdated by the time they are published," then how can anyone ever know the truth? The apostle Paul wrote about those who are "always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth" (2 Timothy 3:7).

Another passage that touches on this is Ephesians 3:3-4: "...that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. And by referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ."

Note that Paul was not writing to the professors in some theological seminary, but to ordinary Christians. And what did he tell them? He told them that when they read what he wrote, they could have the same understanding that Paul, the Biblical scholar, had. That clearly contradicts the Catholic teaching.

(The Catholic Church) One other note about the Catholic creed is that priests, bishops, etc., are forbidden to marry.

But the Bible has other teaching on this matter, as we know Peter was married, and Paul gives the qualifications for those who serve as pastors, bishops or shepherds. Then Paul instructs Timothy that there will come a time when there is a departure from the faith, which will include forbidding to marry and commanding to abstain from meats.

"Faithful is the saying, If a man seeks the office of a bishop, he desires a good work. The bishop therefore must be without reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, orderly, given to hospitality, apt to teach" (1 Timothy 3:1-2).

"And when Jesus had come to Peter's home, He saw his mother-in-law lying sick in bed with a fever" (Matthew 8:14). If Peter has a mother-in-law, wouldn't it be logical to assume he was married?

"But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods, which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth" (1 Timothy 4:1-3).

Furthermore, there is no evidence in the Bible that Peter was ever the pope.

(Church Manual of The First Church of Christ Scientist) This denomination, founded by Mary Baker Eddy in 1879, has a creed separate from the Bible, as do all denominations. On page 61 of my edition, under "Communion," we have the following words: "No more Communion. Section I. The Mother Church of Christ, Scientist, shall observe no more Communion seasons."

But the Bible gives different instructions. In the Gospels, an account is given of the Lord eating the last

supper with his disciples before his crucifixion. Then Paul, in giving instruction to the church at Corinth, wrote the following:

“For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it, and said, ‘This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me.’ In the same way He took the cup also, after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me’ (1 Corinthians 1:23-25).

We could go on for hundreds of pages, but I believe the point has been made. The doctrines and creeds of men contradict one another, but more importantly, they contradict the Bible. Time will fail if we go on to write about denominations that are ordaining homosexuals and women to the ministry, although the Bible forbids both (see Romans 1:24-27, 1 Timothy 2:12).

Dear Reader, there are churches throughout the world that wear no name but Bible names, who have no creed other than the Word of God, who only practice what they find in the Scriptures. They still exist from the 1st Century, in fulfilling the prophecy made in Daniel concerning the four earthly kingdoms that Daniel saw in his vision, and the kingdom that was going to be established by Jesus Christ.

“And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed, and that kingdom will not be left for another people; it will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms, but it will itself endure forever” (Daniel 2:44).

It is impossible to reconcile the Bible’s statement in Ephesians 4:4-6 with the condition that we find in the denominations of men.

“There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.”

The passage does not say “many bodies/churches” nor “many faiths” (protestant, Catholic, Mormon, etc), nor does it say “four baptisms” (sprinkling, pouring, immersion, sprinkling rose petals).

Submitting To One Another, Ephesians 5:21-6:9

Patrick Farish | Wauxahatchie, Texas, USA

We submit manuscripts for publication. We submit bids on a job we want. No one is bent out of shape by the necessity of such – unless our manuscript or job bid is rejected, but that is another article.

“Submission“ has the sense of yielding to authority, and here is where some folk say, “Whoa.” A spirit of defiance pollutes many of our relationships, civil and spiritual, from the younger to the older. The fact is, our submission must be to both God and man. Submission toward God: James 4:7 - “Submit yourselves therefore to God” Submission to “one another”: Ephesians 5:21 - “submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.”

An area that needs special attention is submission in the local church. “Obey your rulers and submit to them for they are keeping watch over your souls as those who will have to give an account” (Hebrews 13:17). From time to time, as elders – rulers -- make proper decisions, as they are charged with, some these decisions are unpopular. It is true, as the apostles said, “We must obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29); but that misses the point. Bishops (aka elders, pastors) have responsibilities of spiritual care and admonition, including chastening when needed. There should be no grumbling from the flock; decisions concerning the functioning of the flock should receive respectful submission, as God has spoken (Ephesians 5:22 – 6:9) The inspired writer names specific circumstances calling for submission. In 5:22, “Wives, submit to your own husbands” and 5:24, “the church submits to Christ.” He names other relationships (children/parents; servants/masters; masters/servants) which do not use the specific word, but the meaning is obvious.

The language of 5:21, “submitting to one another”, introduces the discussion in chapter six. The attitude expressed in “submit” is expanded in other terms in the New Testament.

For instance, In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said:

“If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift” (Matthew 5:23-24).

Acceptable worship demands a submissive attitude in dealing with our brother. Nothing is said about who is at fault in the matter: just, “go ... be reconciled.” Because, in all things we must submit to “one another.”

Again in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, “So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 7:12). Jesus taught, in your dealings with one another, submit—yield -- to them as “you would like them to submit to you.” To the Ephesians Paul wrote “Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you” (4:32). He calls for them to be kind and forgiving to “one another.” When we are kind and forgiving to one another, we are imitating God who “in Christ forgave you.”

The writer in Hebrews 10:24 said, “And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works. ...” The importance of love and good works is clear: Jesus said “let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16). Only as we seek to stir up one another unto love and good works are we submitting as we should to “one another” and giving glory to God.

Preach The Man, Not The Plan (5)

Tommy J. Thornhill | Etna, Arkansas, USA

When a preacher properly understands and applies gospel and doctrine, he can with all honesty say, “For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27). And when the hearers accept and properly apply what has been heard, they will have actually been taught both gospel and doctrine at the same time.

In this series of articles on “Preach the man, not the plan,” I have been emphasizing over and over again that one cannot truly preach the gospel of Christ (about the man) without also including what He taught (His doctrine). Some have said that since the words, gospel and doctrine do not mean the same, there must be a distinction between the two. I freely admit the two words are not, by definition, the same. But both words refer to the same thing, but from different points of reference. Gospel and doctrine cannot be separated as far as teaching and application are concerned. They are two sides of the same coin and can be used interchangeably. When people separate the two in teaching the word of God they make a distinction that should not be made. When one considers the words in their proper context, they will see there is no distinction. Let me explain this.

If I correctly understand how words are used in speaking or writing a language, words without a context will not be properly discerned. For example, if I should say, “Stop!”, what am I saying? Yes, the word, “stop,” means, “to cease.” But, cease what? Why cease? How would you know what I meant without further explanation (context)? You would not know what you are to cease doing, or why cease doing it.

Now, let’s apply this to what we are studying about gospel and doctrine. The word “gospel” isolated from a context simply means “good news,” without a reference to what the news is. The word “doctrine” is defined as “teaching,” without referring to what is being taught. ‘Preach’ or ‘teach’ means “to proclaim, herald or announce,” without any reference to what is proclaimed or announced. But, note what happens when we place these words (preach, gospel, doctrine), in the context of the words being used in scripture? When one preaches or teaches the gospel of Christ, he is proclaiming to sinful mankind, the good news of what God has done for sinful and undeserving mankind, by sending His only Son, Jesus Christ, to become the

sacrifice that would provide forgiveness of sins to sinful men and women, which forgiveness is appropriated, only if and when a person will believe and obey the doctrinal conditions required to secure this forgiveness of sins, namely to believe in Jesus Christ, repent of sins, confess the name of Christ, and be baptized. **Question:** Which part of the above sentence can one omit, if one is preaching the gospel of Christ?

Just read the book of Acts and see how preaching the gospel of Christ and His doctrine are combined. All three thoughts (not the exact words, but meanings) are found in Acts 2.

Preaching (proclaiming, heralding, announcing). “Men of Israel, hear these words” v.22a, “Men and brethren, let me speak freely to you” v.29, “Therefore, let all the house of Israel know assuredly” v.36. About what? **The Gospel** (the good news). “Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you ...that God has made this Jesus, who you crucified, both Lord and Christ” (verses 22b-36). When the people heard the good news of the gospel they were cut to the heart, and asked Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” How obtained? **The Doctrine**. “Then Peter said to them, ‘repent, and let everyone of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit...’” (verse 38). As a gospel preacher teaching someone the gospel of Christ using Acts 2 as your guide, which of these concepts would you leave out? The preaching (telling) of the gospel? The gospel? (the good news of God’s promised plan of salvation) The Doctrine? (teaching how to obtain the promised salvation). I do not believe that who claims to be a gospel preacher, can omit or belittle any of these things.

Does this mean each time one preaches or teaches the gospel, that he must mention all three of these things? No! That is not the point. What I have been trying to do in writing this series of articles is to point out the danger of declaring the doctrine of Christ to be of little importance in Christianity. Teaching Jesus Christ the man is the subject of the gospel and is always of greatest importance. This must never be belittled. But, neither can one belittle the doctrine He taught. I mentioned at the beginning, that one of the reasons people want to de-emphasize the doctrine of Christ is to open the door to fellowship people who do not “hold fast the pattern of sound words” (the doctrine of Christ) which is learned from the writings of inspired men in the New Testament (2 Timothy 1:13). Words in parenthesis are mine – t.t. People believe and practice many humanly conceived doctrines that are unscriptural, but still want to be fellowshiped simply because they claim to believe in Christ, even though they will not accept His teaching.

Let me pause a moment, and point out briefly what I understand the basic meanings of the words “gospel” and “doctrine” mean. The word “gospel” simply means “good news” about anything.

W. E. Vine writes that “gospel” “in the New Testament, denotes the good tidings of the kingdom of God and salvation through Christ, to be received by faith, on the basis of His expiatory death, His burial, resurrection, and ascension (e.g., Acts 15:7; 20:24; 1.Pet.4:17.” (W.E. Vine’s **Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words**). In other words telling the good news about God’s plan of salvation in the New Testament. “Doctrine” basically means teaching or instruction, as it refers to that which is being taught or learned (Matthew 7:28; Mark 4:2; Romans 16:17; 1 Timothy 4:16; Titus 1:9).

Vine also points that while the “gospel” is used to declare the basic facts of Jesus Christ (the Death-Burial-Resurrection, 1 Corinthians 15:1-3), it is also used to interpret (teach the meaning) of the facts, historically and doctrinally, with reference to the interpretation of the facts.

When you study the New Testament you find several terms that are used in connection with the gospel. You communicate the gospel (Galatians 2:2). You speak the gospel (1 Thessalonians 2:2). You testify the gospel (Acts 20:24). You preach the gospel (1 Corinthians 15:1; Galatians 1:11).

In my last article I dealt with their misuse of Second John 9-10, “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,” which clearly shows to one “rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15), that you can’t separate Christ from His doctrine.“

This concept grew out of a desire to include “fellowship” with people who claim a belief in Jesus Christ, but are not willing to follow His doctrine. This is connected to the false doctrine that was formulated by people who were (and still are) seeking to broaden the boundaries of “fellowship” to include religious persons who want to go “beyond what is written,” i.e., to accept doctrines that are not authorized in the word of God. 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. People today have little religious conviction according to recent statistics made by the Bama Group (a Christian research company). David Kinnaman, president of the Bama Group reached the conclusion that one reason America’s views are so inconsistent is because they hold few convictions about their faith. Here are some things he stated in the article. “Most Americans do not have strong and clear beliefs,” mainly because “they lack a consistent and holistic understanding of their faith.” “Most Americans have one foot in the Biblical camp and one foot outside it.” “They are committed, but to what? They are spiritually active, but to what end?” The survey showed this lack of conviction. Eighty-three percent claim Christianity but only forty-nine percent are committed to it. Kinnaman also observed, “There is increasing pressure on Christians to bend and shape their views into something that’s popular, something that fits the pop culture’s view of what spirituality ought to be.” So why would 7 out of 10 people surveyed say they have made a personal commitment to Jesus but show so little evidence in their lives? One of the conclusions he reached was that the church had failed to teach the young people to think as Christians, so that many of them put Jesus on the shelf after they reach adulthood. This includes teaching on how to determine Bible (scriptural) authority.

Another person quoted in the article, D C Hart, a church historian, said: “America is awash in faith but people are not clear in what their religion teaches.” He observed that many people are shaky on the teachings of their faith because pastors (not the term I would use t.t.) often don’t teach certain doctrines and biblical gospel on certain topics, especially those that pastors suspect might offend people. He then stated another reason for a shaky faith was the weakening of church discipline. Churches are not holding people accountable if they do not follow the tenets of their faith. The disciplinary aspects of the faith have been compromised for the sake of evangelism, in order to draw more people to come to church.

David Roozen, religion and society professor at Hartford Seminary observed in the article that the reason why 83% claim Christianity but only 49% are committed to it, is the “trend toward a religion a la carte, i.e., people putting together their own religion.” He said this leads to “increasing numbers of people who live their lives without serious attention to religious practice.” He quotes a couple of people. One said, “I’m a Christian, but I don’t think Christianity is the only path.” Another said, “I’m a Christian, but I’m not going to die for it because there may be some truths in other faiths.”

Hart, quoted earlier, said, “They want to be able to pick and choose beliefs according to their needs and preferences.” “That is the nature of having this marketplace of ideas and faiths.” “The weakening of biblical and doctrinal knowledge among evangelicals is affecting their religious practices and their morale.”

When men lose respect for God’s authority as revealed in His word, spiritual death and eternal destruction will be the outcome. When one reads such things as above, one should have no trouble seeing that there is a definite need for following God’s authority and not our own.

Is it Scriptural for a Woman to Ask Questions in a Bible Class of the Church?

Ezekiel A. Akinyemi | Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria

(The first Nigerian I ever met was Ezekiel Akinyemi, in 1991, when, at my request, he was the first black man ever to preach in the pulpit of the Van Dorn Street Church of Christ in Grenada, Mississippi and ate in my home. Since then I have eaten in his home and preached at the Challenge Road Church of Christ in Ibadan, where he is the local preacher, twice. Brother Akinyemi is a notable Bible scholar, and I urge you to seriously consider his meaty discussion of this controversial topic. We do not have the same approach to the passage, but we agree that women must not speak in the worship assembly or in Bible classes in such a way that they violate their subjection to the men (1 Corinthians 11:3; 14:34-35; 1 Timothy 2:11-12 - Keith Sharp).

I have followed, with concern, some recent debate on the subject of women asking questions during Bible class of the church, I observed that a lot of sentiments rather than truth have been dogmatized, binding and loosing where God has not. It is unfortunate that some are making it an issue to cause division. It is a fearful thing to cause division in the Lord's church over a matter that no scripture has made an issue.

We must lay our sentiments aside and approach the subject more objectively and soberly. All of us, I suppose, understand there are some things peculiar to the assembly in 1 Corinthians 14. Let each of us re-examine these peculiarities and compare them with the realities of our own present-day assemblies. This, I believe, will help all who are sincere to see clearly principles taught in 1 Corinthians 14 that are universally applicable. With our understanding that rightly dividing the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15) goes beyond knowing the difference between the Old and New Testament we will readily recognize immediate and remote or general context. Then let us avoid treating one passage of scripture on any subject in isolation of another passage on the same subject. This will help us from making erroneous conclusions.

Furthermore, when your belief is challenged on any issue, don't say that is what I or many of us have believed for many years. Be sincere, be humble, search the scriptures prayerfully with diligence (Acts 17:11; 2 Timothy 2:15), and in the fear of God. And resolve to please God, not yourself or any man (Galatians 1:10-11).

The Assembly of 1 Corinthians 14

Paul's teaching in the book of 1 Corinthians concerning miraculous spiritual gifts is covered in chapters 12, 13 & 14. He gives a list of the spiritual gifts, the source of these gifts and the purpose for which they were given in chapter 12. In chapter 13 he warns those who were given these gifts against arrogance and self-conceit (verse 1-7), stressing that those miraculous gifts were temporary and would cease (verse 8-9), when the purpose for which they were given has been accomplished (verse 10-13). In chapter 14, Paul focused on regulating how the speakers (verse 3-5), that is, those who had miraculous spiritual gifts, particularly prophesying and speaking in tongues, among the brethren, should conduct themselves and lead the church in a decent and orderly manner, so that all, both male and female, may learn and be encouraged (verses 26-31, 40). Now, let us take note of some other things that were peculiar to this Corinthian assembly and compare them with our own present-day assemblies:

1. The assembly of 1 Corinthians 14 is that of "the whole church comes together in one place" (verse 23).
2. We learn from 1 Corinthians 14 and some other passages that the whole church, when gathered together in one place (1 Corinthians 11:18, 20), engaged in five items of worship: The Lord's Supper, Contribution of money; Preaching of the word of God; singing of hymns and songs of praise and prayers (Acts 2:42, 47; 20:7; 1 Corinthians 11:17-34; 14:26; 16:1-2; Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16). These five items of worship were performed together when the whole church came together in one place on the first day of every week (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 11:26).
3. In this assembly of the whole church there were brethren who had miraculous spiritual gifts who were the speakers, leading in all items of worship (verse 3-5, 29-31). At that time the New Testament had not been completed as we have it today. Therefore, only those who had miraculous spiritual gifts were competent to speak (i.e. teach or preach in that assembly). In this Corinthian assembly, the Holy Spirit was directly

responsible for those who taught, preached, led in singing and prayers and other items of worship (1 Corinthians 14:3-5, 14-16, 26). But now in our present day assemblies, evangelists, elders or leading men are responsible for selecting spiritually mature men to lead every item of worship, which includes the maintenance of orderliness and decency (1 Corinthians 14:40).

4. Paul referred to other brethren who had no miraculous spiritual gifts in the assembly as the "uninformed" while the rest as "unbelievers" (verses 15-16, 23).
5. In that assembly in which all the five items of worship were performed, there was no room for asking questions, even by men. The only ones who would raise questions are those who had the gift of "discerning of spirits" (12:10). They were the only ones who could judge (14:29). The nature of that assembly "when the whole church comes together in one place," and the speakers were speaking by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit gave no room for others, even men, to ask questions. And this assembly could not be divided into classes (1 Corinthians 11:17-22). Even today, whenever the whole church comes together in one place to observe the Lord's Supper, contribute money for the work of the church, preach the word of God, sing and pray, there is no room for anyone, man or woman, to ask questions. Under normal circumstances would you not feel embarrassed if a brother should attempt to ask questions in this assembly? Furthermore, we will be sinning if we divide this assembly into classes (1 Corinthians 11:17-22).
6. In that assembly of 1 Corinthians 14, "when the whole church come together in one place" women were forbidden from speaking in the church as men who had miraculous spiritual gifts were doing "Let your women keep silent in the churches for they are not permitted to speak but they are to be submissive as the law also says, And if they want to learn something let them ask their own husbands at home, for it is shameful for women to speak in church" (verses 34 & 35). The issues of consequence in this passage are: Women who had miraculous spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 11:5; Acts 21:8-9) were forbidden from doing the speaking in the church as men who had miraculous spiritual gifts were doing (verses 3-5). At that time, only those who were inspired were competent to speak, i.e. teach or preach in the assembly of the church since the New Testament complete in written form was not in their hands as we have it now. Those women must not be leaders, but be submissive, learning under obedience. They must be silent in the church in respect of teaching, preaching and leading. But why should Paul add, "And if they (the women) want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home" since there was no room for asking questions in the assembly? Yes, we should understand Paul's statement in the light of the fact that there was no room for questions in the assembly. That is, if the women wanted to learn something, they should learn it from their own husbands at home. That is the import of Paul's statement since there was no room for anybody asking questions in that assembly.
7. Furthermore, learning from husband or anyone at home is not an issue of consequence, just as in 1 Corinthians 14:28, which reads: "But if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in church, and let him speak to himself and to God." The issue of consequence in this passage is that one who speaks in tongues without an interpreter must keep silent in the church. Speaking to himself and to God in the church is not an issue of consequence at all same is true with "if they want to learn something let them ask their own husbands at home." This is not an issue. For instance, if the woman who wanted to learn something in the assembly of First Corinthians 14 decided not to ask her husband or anyone at home, would she be sinning? What if a woman in our own assembly today who wants to learn something decides not to ask her husband or any brother at home, but just decides to study her Bible to learn what she wants to learn by herself, would she be sinning? No! Can anyone accuse her of being disobedient? But she will be rebelling and sinning against God if she refuses to be silent in the assembly in respect of teaching, preaching and leading. Making First Corinthians 14:35 an issue to divide the people of God is a fearful thing. If you can understand First Corinthians 14:28, consistency demands you deal with verse 35 the same way. Do not behave like many denominational preachers who will whip up sentiments and dismiss you as a heretic when you correctly explain First Corinthians 14:1 contextually.

The Bible Class of the Church

We have learned that when the whole church comes together in one place to perform all five items of worship there must be no division into classes. Perhaps, because of this some have argued against the church have different classes. This argument has no Biblical backing because the Lord recognizes classes in His church. We read in First Peter 2:2, "As newborn babies, desire the pure milk of the word that you may grow thereby." "...But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil" (Hebrews 5:12-14). There are other

passages that show, by necessary inference, that God has authorized Bible class or classes in the Lord's church. I believe there is no faithful preacher or teacher who will argue against what God has authorized.

Have you seen a mother in her normal senses giving solid food to her newborn babe or breastfeeding her teenage child? I have not seen or heard of such. Though the Lord has not specified the number of classes any congregation should have at any given period, each congregation is authorized to determine the number of classes as the need arises and as it is expedient. This reminds me of the church now at Koloko, Ibadan. I was the preacher of this church when it began in 1965 at Alafara-Oje, Ibadan. The number in attendance on the first Sunday worship was less than 10 which included a married woman whose husband was not a believer. All of them were newborn babes in Christ at that time. Therefore we had only one Bible class of new converts. But now the same church at Koloko, with average attendance of over 200, there is more than one Bible class, as brethren there consider expedient for the spiritual growth of every member. Therefore, to have a class to learn how to sing praises to please God or learn any other specific Bible subject is scripturally sound. Older women who are spiritually mature can teach and lead in the classes of women and children as indicated in Titus 2:3-5 and Second Timothy 1:5.

Now, back to our question, can a woman ask questions in any of the church's Bible classes? We have seen that the issue of asking questions by anyone does not arise whenever the whole church come together in one place to observe the Lord's Supper, contribute money for the work of the church, preach the word of God, sing songs of praise and pray. This is true of the Corinthian assembly of 1 Corinthians 14 and true of our own present-day assemblies. No one asks questions in this assembly because there is no room for it. And this is the assembly we cannot divide into classes. All must be together in one place including our children for this worship service. I hope we have understood that the Corinthian assembly of 1 Corinthians 14 had no room for anyone to ask questions. And this has further made women asking questions in that assembly a non-issue. With this understanding, the question about women asking or not asking questions in a Bible class or classes of the church has become unnecessary. Therefore, anyone teaching that women cannot ask questions in a Bible class of the church is making a law that God has not made. And making it an issue to divide the Lord's people is a fearful thing. The restrictions placed on women in 1 Corinthians 14:34 are confirmed in 1 Timothy 2:8, 11-12. We must be guided by these passages in any of our assemblies today, whether that of "the whole church come together in one place" or that of divided classes or classes combined. What do we learn from these passages?

1. Women cannot teach or preach. They must be silent and submissive in this respect.
2. Women cannot lead in any activity where brothers and sisters are gathered for any spiritual activity.
3. Women cannot share leadership role with men. They cannot share with men in decision making of the church. Only men can be evangelists, elders or deacons (1 Timothy 3 & 4; Titus 1 & 2).

In any other activity that does not contradict any of the above, both men and women are equally privileged to participate in spirit and in truth. Women must respond to the leadership of men actively and not passively (1 Corinthians 14:15-16), but with a meek and quiet spirit which is precious in the sight of God (1 Peter 3:4).

Many of our study or class materials are written to promote students' active participation. Interactive Bible classes, during which both teacher and students (male and female) interact by way of questions and answers, are scripturally sound. A good teacher can ask his students questions to gauge their level of understanding. Likewise, active students can ask good questions for clarification or more enlightenment. This is helpful to both teachers and students. The Bible teaches faithful teachers to refuse foolish and unlearned questions either from man or woman (2 Timothy 2:23; Titus 3:9). This means a good and faithful teacher will refuse and correct a woman who may attempt to usurp authority.

Finally, I appeal to preachers and teachers and every disciple of Christ to example critically, but sincerely, the peculiarities of the Corinthian assembly of 1 Corinthians 14 and compare them with our present-day assemblies. And let those who have been making what the Scriptures does not make an issue to divide the people of God renounce their error in the fear of God and love of souls. Please, call to mind the warning of James in the third chapter of his epistle, verse one.

Troubled Marriages

Mike Thomas | Kokomo, Indiana, USA

Most marriages will have difficulties at one time or another, even among the people of God. If left unchecked these problems can seem unsurmountable and without hope of improvement. How should God's people respond to troubled marriages?

Remove Divorce.

When Jesus was asked if a man may divorce his wife, He said, "What God has joined together, let not man separate" (Matthew 19:6). This was consistent with what He said earlier in His ministry: "I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery" (5:32). He taught against divorce because it not only violates God's original intent in marriage (19:4-5), it also promotes immorality. The only exception He made is with those whose mate is sexually unfaithful (19:9). Other than that, the rule is: "A wife is not to depart from her husband...and a husband is not to divorce his wife" (1 Corinthians 7:10-11).

Thus, divorce should not be in our thinking as Christians. Our goal should be to work past our conflicts with our mate because of our lifetime commitment to one another. "Till death do us part" was more than a phrase in our ceremony; it was a promise we made before God and man. "I will be married to you until death separates us" was a binding contract we made with our mate that was based on Scripture (Romans 7:2-3). If we would remember that promise when trouble enters our marriage, and dismiss the thought of abandonment, we will find ways to forgive, appreciate, and be content with one another.

Render Service.

I fear there are "innocent" parties in divorces for sexual immorality that are not so innocent and have acted in ways to encourage their mate's infidelity. Not that the guilty party is justified in committing adultery because that is never acceptable (Proverbs 6:30-32). However, some people neglect their mate by being unmerciful, unloving, and unwilling to serve them as God instructs (1 Corinthians 7:2-5), then turn to Jesus' exception to divorce when infidelity occurs. God is aware of these motives and will judge accordingly (Hebrews 4:13). So, instead of trying to find ways to disguise our unwillingness to serve our mate, we should commit to a higher calling by actually treating them with honor as "heirs together of the grace of life" (1 Peter 3:7). Indeed, "Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others" (Philippians 2:3) is a principle that is needed in all of our relationships.

Respect One Another.

Tell your mate you love them on a regular basis and demonstrate the qualities of a loving person (1 Corinthians 13:4-8). Take an interest in life from their point of view. "Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them" (Colossians 3:19). And "let the wife see that she respects her husband" (Ephesians 5:33). We may not be able to control how our mate treats us, but we can control how we treat them, which is why we should strive to always have a kind and loving disposition. Christians in a congregation were told: "Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering" (Colossians 3:12). If showing respect to others is needed in keeping people together in a group relationship, while learning to love one another, it is definitely needed in the most intimate relationship on earth.

Conclusion

Marriage is one of life's richest blessings, which is why God gave it to mankind. He said, "It is not good (beneficial) for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper [one who balances him—a counterpart who is] suitable and complementary for him" (Genesis 2:18, **Amplified Version**). I have been blessed to find the meaning of that statement in my own marriage. Life is so much more bearable with a loving and godly companion by my side. But we both must continue to apply ourselves and let God's will define our behavior if our marriage is to thrive and flourish. Again, "Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it" (Psalm 127:1). Thus, let us remove divorce from our thinking, and learn to serve and

respect our mate instead. Life is too short to miss the beauty of this special relationship.

Remembering Jesus' Death, Burial & Resurrection

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To some Easter weekend is a time for painted eggs, chocolate bunnies, and fine meals with family. For others, the weekend is a time to remember the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

I can't say anyone has ever asked me if I'm hosting an Easter egg hunt, but I have been asked almost every year about our services for Good Friday and Easter Sunday. I'm not into painted eggs and chocolate bunnies, nor am I into observing religious holidays which the Bible says nothing about.

Some might be confused at me saying the Bible says nothing about Easter. In fact, in your KJV, you can read:

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).

The problem is the translators erroneously rendered the Greek *pasca* as Easter. Every other time the word appears in the KJV, it is correctly rendered Passover. What is the difference between Easter and Passover? Should Easter be celebrated as the time of Jesus' death, burial and resurrection?

The Passover was a feast which originated with the final plague God brought against Egypt (Exodus 12). The Hebrews were to keep the feast as a memorial of their freedom from Egyptian captivity (Deuteronomy 16:1). Passover began on the evening of Nisan 14 (Leviticus 23:5) when Jesus and His disciples ate the feast (Luke 22:8, 15), and continued into the day upon which He was put to death (John 19:28). When the apostle Paul refers to Jesus as our Passover (1 Corinthians 5:7), it was not just a loose image - Jesus was sacrificed for us on the day of the Passover!

Passover is a specific day each year found in the Hebrew calendar. Easter is a computed day, the first Sunday on or after the Spring Equinox. In the past 100 years, Easter has been as early as March 23 and as late as April 25. Passover has always been Nisan 14. Typically the anniversary of an event takes place on the same day each year. Jumping around as it does, and being linked to the Spring Equinox, Easter does not celebrate the anniversary of Jesus' death or resurrection.

It is believed that Easter was originally a celebration of the Saxon goddess Eastre, and had nothing at all to do with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. The fact that the Bible says nothing about it should result in us not observing the day as a religious holy day. Desiring to remember the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, but it is not our place to create a holiday on which to do so (or to accept one which others have created).

What shall we do then? Are we to observe the Passover? No, it is a Hebrew holiday commemorating the physical deliverance of Israel from Egyptian captivity. It is not the celebration of our spiritual deliverance from captivity to sin. Nowhere does the Bible command or suggest Christians should keep the Passover.

How then do we remember the Lord's death, burial, and resurrection? What does the Bible say? It is not about a pagan memorial being Christianized. It is not even about the Passover feast during which He was put to death. The apostle Paul tells us,

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; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, 'Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.' In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.' For as often as you eat

this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes.
(1 Corinthians 11:23-26)

The weekly observance of the Lord's Supper (Acts 20:7) is the way Christians are to remember the sacrifice of Christ at Calvary.

Titles of Jesus - Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6)

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Jesus is called the "Prince of peace" in the messianic prophecy of Isaiah 9:6:

"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace."

This is further confirmed in the Hebrew writers analogy of Jesus and Melchizedek.

"For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the most high God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings, and blessed him.... For he testifieth, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 7:1, 17).

Jesus does not, however, bring the peace that many expect, as he states in, John 14:27: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." Instead, Jesus said he came to bring a sword. "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword" (Matthew 10:34). Jesus did not come to give us peace with the world.

"If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also"
(John 15:18-20).

James in fact said to be a friend of the World is to be an enemy of God. "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God" (James 4:4). Yes, We are to try to have peace with all men,, "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14). But only as much as lies with us. We cannot control those that are not Christians. "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men" (Romans 12:8).

The question then is, What Peace did Jesus come to bring? Jesus stated, "These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

The peace that Jesus brought is peace with God. According to Paul, "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1). It must be noted from this passage that faith is necessary to have peace with God. That is the meaning of reconciliation, "For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life" (Romans 5:10). We were enemies but now we at peace again through Jesus. Jesus took our punishment to give us peace. "But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5). The apostles even used peace as a blessing for others in many places such as 1 Corinthians 1:2 and Colossians 1:2, "Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ." But with this Peace comes responsibilities. "Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless" (2 Pet 3:14). Again, to be at

peace with God means we cannot be friends with the world (James 4:4).

Jesus also brought Peace between Jews and Gentiles.

"Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father. Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God" (Ephesians 2:11-19).

To emphasize this peace between Jew and Gentile Paul wrote:

"For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature. And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God" (Galatians 6:15-16).

Our peace is also with our brethren. "For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints" (1 Corinthians 14:33). There is not peace with God without peace among brethren. "Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you" (2 Corinthians 13:11). Paul as an apostles makes peace among brethren a command.

"And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; And to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. And be at peace among yourselves" (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13).

Peace among brethren is achieved by teaching and practicing the same things.

"Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (1 Corinthians 1:10).

We must therefore seek to edify one another to maintain peace. "Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another" (Romans 14:19). Paul says that comes of teaching what he and the apostles taught and practiced. "Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you" (Philippians 4:9).

Jesus also came to bring peace of mind. To the Colossians, Paul wrote, "And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful" (Colossians 3:15). Belief is necessary as well to have peace of mind through God as Paul says, "Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost" (Romans 15:13). In talking of the power of prayer, Paul states it will contribute to peace of mind, "And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:7). As with peace among brethren, study also instills peace of mind. "Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord" (2 Peter 1:2). And why not, because belief is necessary for peace of mind and the word of God is necessary for belief. "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17).

There are many reasons Jesus is called the Prince of Peace. It is not, however, an excuse to be at peace

with sinful people and their practices. “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?” (2 Corinthians 6:14). It is most definitely the peace that goes beyond anything man can imagine (Philippians 4:7).

May the Peace of God be with you all my brothers and sisters.

By Grace You Have Been Saved Through Faith

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

In Ephesians 2:1-10 the apostle Paul discusses the salvation of the Ephesian Christians. They had been “dead in trespasses and sins.”

And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest (verses 1-3, New American Standard Bible).

But God has made them “alive together with Christ.”

But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus (verses 4-7).

Thus, having once been spiritually dead, with only the dreadful prospect of a devil’s hell before them, they are now alive with the blessed hope of eternal bliss in heaven. How did this wonderful change take place?

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them (verses 8-10).

Since we live under the New Testament, just as the Ephesian Christians did, we must be saved in the very same way they were. What does it mean to be saved by grace through faith?

By Grace You Have Been Saved

“Grace,” when used of our salvation means “kindness which bestows upon another what he has not deserved.” (J.H. Thayer, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament. 666). Thus, the apostle Paul explains:

Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness... (Romans 4:4-5).

The Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32) well illustrates God’s saving grace. Then He said: ‘A certain man had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, “Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me.” So he divided to them his livelihood. And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living. But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want. Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself, he said, “How many of my father’s hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired

servants.” And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. And the son said to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.” But the father said to his servants, “Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet. And bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry; for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.” And they began to be merry’ (verses 11-24).

In this parable the Master paints for us a beautiful word picture of the love of God for lost sinners. Who can forget the tender scene of the loving father receiving back his wayfaring, undeserving boy and restoring him to a position of honor which he had forfeited and did not deserve to regain? But the matchless love of that daddy looked past the sins and mistakes to see a repentant boy whom he loved with all his heart.

Do you need God’s grace? You have sinned. “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23), and “the wages of sin is death”(Romans 6:23). Since you deserve spiritual death, it is only in God’s grace His hope can be extended.

How can you gain access to the benefits of God’s grace? The Father revealed His love for us in sending “his Son to be the propitiation (appeasing, J.H. Thayer, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament. 301) for our sins.”

In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins (1 John 4:9-10).

Jesus’ blood will take away the guilt of our sins. “For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Matthew 26:28). God’s spiritual blessings for us are “in Christ.” “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ” (Ephesians 1:3). To be in Christ is to be in “the church, which is His body.” “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).

Is salvation is “wholly by grace”? If we do anything to obtain salvation, have we have earned it, rather than receiving is as a gift? (Ephesians 2:8) If salvation is wholly by grace, then either God has selected a specific group of people to be saved without regard to anything they might do (as Calvinists teach), He will save everyone (as Universalists believe) or He will save no one (which no one believes). We know the merciful Father has not, without a reason, decided which individuals will be saved, for His grace is for all men. “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people” (Titus 2:11, English Standard Version). Also, we know that not everyone will be saved. Those

who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power (2 Thessalonians 1:8-9).

Finally, Jesus promised that some will be saved. “Then the King will say to those on His right, ‘Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world’” (Matthew 25:34). Thus, salvation is not “wholly by grace.”

When Israel took Jericho, they had to march around the city thirteen times, they had to shout with a great shout, and the priests had to blow on rams’ horns for the walls to fall (Joshua chapter 6). Yet God told Joshua, “I have given Jericho into your hand” (verse 2). Certainly they had to do something to obtain the city, for this was a conditional gift. The fact that salvation is a gift does not prove that God has not set conditions we must meet to receive the gift.

What are the conditions upon which God, by His grace, will give the gift of salvation? Paul says it is “through faith” (Ephesians 2:8).

The faith of which the apostle speaks includes conviction based on evidence. “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1). It also includes trust leading to obedience. “And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him” (Hebrews 11:6).

Faith is the means by which we gain “access” into the grace of the loving Father, whereby we may “rejoice in hope” of eternal glory.

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God (Romans 5:1-2).

What kind of faith saves? Saving faith stands upon “the word of God” rather than human philosophy, men’s opinions, our parents’ religion, church creeds and teachings, or our own good deeds. So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. “So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17). Furthermore, the faith which “avails” is “faith working through love.” “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love” (Galatians 5:6).

But, didn’t Paul say that salvation was “not of works, lest anyone should boast”? (Ephesians 2:9) Why, then, did he say that faith, to benefit, had to work? In spite of denominational doctrine, Jesus declared that faith is a work that we do. “Then they said to Him, ‘What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?’ Jesus answered and said to them, ‘This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent’” (John 6:28-29). Did Paul contradict both himself and Jesus when he taught salvation is “not of works”? No, the Scriptures, being truth, never contradict themselves. Rather, as Paul shows in Ephesians 2:9, he is eliminating the possibility that boastful works will save a person. Salvation is “not of works, lest anyone should boast.”

What works could lead a person to boast of having earned salvation? If we could be saved by keeping the Law of Moses, we could boast. “Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law” (Romans 3:27-28). This is because we would have to be sinlessly perfect to be saved by the Law. “For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them’” (Galatians 3:10). Salvation by keeping the Mosaic law is eliminated in Ephesians 2:9. Also, if a person, by his own human wisdom, could create a plan of salvation, he could glory. Thus, salvation is not by a plan devised by human wisdom.

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).

But, are works of obedience to God also eliminated as conditions of salvation? No, the New Testament plainly teaches we must obey Christ to be saved. “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). Though “He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him” (Hebrews 5:8-9). When we obey, we still do not earn salvation. “So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, ‘We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do’” (Luke 17:10).

Thus, Paul explained that our salvation by God’s mercy is the result of “the washing of regeneration.”

For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life (Titus 3:3-7).

Scholars of every age recognize "the washing of regeneration" as baptism.

Conclusion

Friend, you must be saved by God's grace. But His grace would never benefit one person had God not demonstrated it through an act of grace - the giving of His Son.

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved (John 3:16-17).

By your faith you have access into God's grace. But it is through an act of faith, water baptism, that one gains entrance into Christ where the benefits of God's grace are enjoyed. "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" (Galatians 3:26-27).

Have you been saved by grace through faith? "And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord." (Acts 22:16)



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