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Editor, Keith Sharp

Designer, William Stewart



- 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 VIRTURE AND IF THERE IS ANYTHING PRAISEWORTHY –
meditate on these things.

PHILIPPIANS
4:8

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

*How often do we feel this in times of trouble! How often do we wish that we could get beyond the reach of enemies; of sorrows; of afflictions! How often do we sigh to be in a place where we might be assured that we should be safe from all annoyances; from all trouble! There is such a place, but not on earth. David might have borne his severest troubles with him if he could have fled - for those troubles are in the heart, and a mere change of place does not affect them; or he might have found new troubles in the place that seemed to him to be a place of peace and of rest. But there is a world which trouble never enters. That world is heaven; to that world we shall soon go, if we are God's children; and there we shall find absolute and eternal rest. Without "the wings of a dove," we shall soon fly away and be at rest. None of the troubles of earth will accompany us there; no new troubles will spring up there to disturb our peace (Albert Barnes, **Notes on the Psalms**, comment on Psalm 55:6: "So I said, 'Oh, that I had wings like a dove! I would fly away and be at rest.'")*

There is nothing that constitutes a stronger bond of friendship and affection than being united in the worship of God, or belonging to his people. Connexion (sic) with a church in acts of worship, ought always to constitute a strong bond of love, confidence, esteem, and affection; the consciousness of having been redeemed by the same blood of the atonement should be a stronger tie than any tie of natural friendship; and the expectation and hope of spending an eternity together in heaven should write heart to heart in a bond which nothing - not even death - can sever (Ibid. comments on Psalm 55:14).

Questions from Nigeria about When Jesus Was Crucified

Questions

1. According to Mark 16:1 and Luke 23:56, how many sabbaths were there in that week? Because I see that there was an annual passover sabbath and weekly sabbath.
2. When was the actual resurrection day of Jesus Christ? What day was He crucified? In the book of Matthew 16:21, Jesus Christ was to be in the tomb for three days and three nights. Many believe that He rose on Sunday morning because of the rendering in the book of Mark 16:9. Please I need

to be cleared on this.

Answer

The gospel accounts plainly state the Lord died the day before the Sabbath, i.e. Friday (Mark 15:42-45; Luke 23:50-54; John 19:30-31). That should settle the matter.

Furthermore, there is no doubt Christ was raised on the first day of the week. "Now when He rose early on the first day of the week, He appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom He had cast seven demons" (Mark 16:9).

But the statement the Master made in Matthew 12:40 confuses many. "For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." If Jesus was buried Friday afternoon, in the tomb all day the Sabbath, and raised very early on the first day of the week, that's not three days and three nights.

The problem is a Jewish idiom, a characteristic way of expressing time. The Jews counted any part of a day as a full day. Rehoboam told the leaders of Israel to come back to him "after three days" (2 Chronicles 10:5). "So Jeroboam and all the people came to Rehoboam on the third day, as the king had directed, saying, 'Come back to me the third day'" (2 Chronicles 10:12). To the Jews, "after three days" meant "on the third day." Queen Esther commanded Mordecai, "Go, gather all the Jews who are present in Shushan, and fast for me; neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will fast likewise..." (Esther 4:16). But on the third day the queen ate a banquet with King Ahasuerus and Haman (Esther 5:1-5). It was exactly 72 hours, three full days, from the time the angel appeared to Cornelius until Peter spoke to him (Acts 10:3, 9, 23-24, 30), but Cornelius called it "four days" (Acts 10:30).

There were seven Jewish Sabbaths, times when no customary work was to be done: the 7th day of each week (Leviticus 23:3), the 15th day of the first month (Leviticus 23:6-7), the first day of the seventh month (Leviticus 23:24-25), the seventh month, the 10th day of the month (Leviticus 23:27,32), the seventh month, the 15th day of the month (Leviticus 23:34-35), the seventh year (Leviticus 25:2-4), and the fiftieth year (Leviticus 25:8-12). The Sabbath after Jesus was crucified was a "high day," not just an ordinary Sabbath (John 19:31), because it was a Sabbath in two senses, the usual weekly Sabbath and the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

The Lord was crucified on Friday.

A Case Study in Contentment

Jefferson David Tant | Roswell, Georgia, USA

"Contentment" is a word that may not well describe many people. There are many causes of discontent in this 21st Century—family discord, health issues, job stress, financial concerns, government corruption, joblessness, worries about the threat of Islamic terrorism, and sometimes church problems. These are struggles that most all of us have to deal with from time to time.

And yet our "Owner's Manual" teaches us to learn to be content. One on occasion "Some soldiers were questioning him (John) saying, 'And what about us, what shall we do?' And he said to them, 'Do not take money from anyone by force, or accuse anyone falsely, and be content with your wages'" (Luke 3:14).

I suppose if anyone is qualified to teach about contentment, it would be the apostle Paul. In his letter to the Corinthians, he chides those who present their "credentials." He asks if they can match his:

"Are they servants of Christ? --I speak as if insane--I more so; in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. I have

been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches” (2 Corinthians 11:23-28).

What does Paul think about all of this? Would he have the right to be discouraged, to complain, to think about giving up, to wonder where God was? Obviously, from a human viewpoint, we could easily understand such thoughts. But we turn to Paul’s letter to Philippi. At this writing, he is in prison, and rejoicing that his situation is even causing the gospel to be spread (1:12-18). Very likely, Paul was in the Mamartine Prison in Rome. It was not a pleasant place. I have been there, and descended into the dungeon two levels below street level to see a cell hewn out of rock—dark and damp. While there, Paul shared something with his beloved brethren that makes us wonder. He thanks the brethren for sending to his assistance:

“But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned before, but you lacked opportunity. Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me” (4:10-13).

How could Paul have such an attitude? Because he was not alone. There was someone with him—his Lord Jesus Christ. On one occasion when he was on trial, he stood alone, except for his faithful friend. “At my first defense no one supported me, but all deserted me; may it not be counted against them. But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me” (2 Timothy 4:16-17). In First Timothy six, Paul wrote about certain evil men “who suppose that godliness is a means of gain” (verse 5b), and then goes on to counteract that false notion by stating in verses 6-8:

“But godliness actually is a means of great gain when accompanied by contentment. For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either. If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content.”

Some might be thinking, “Well, Paul was an apostle. He had divine revelation. He was not an ordinary human like we are. We can’t be as strong as he was.” If that is your thought, please allow me to share with you the following story about Mabel, a human being just like you and me. Well, maybe not exactly as we are. The story is told by her friend, Tom Schmidt.

“The state-run convalescent home is not a pleasant place. It is large, understaffed, and overfilled with senile and helpless and lonely people who are waiting to die. On the brightest days it seems dark inside, and it smells of sickness and stale urine. I went there once or twice a week for four years, but I never wanted to go there, and I always left with a sense of relief. It is not the kind of place one gets used to.

“On this particular day I was walking in a hallway that I had not visited before, looking in vain for a few who were alive to receive a flower and a few words of encouragement. This hallway seemed to contain some of the worst cases, strapped onto carts or into wheelchairs and looking completely helpless.

“As I neared the end of this hallway, I saw an old woman strapped in a wheelchair. Her face was an absolute horror. The empty stare and white pupils of her eyes told me that she was blind. The large hearing aid over one ear told me that she was almost deaf. One side of her face was being eaten by cancer. There was a discolored and running sore covering part of one cheek, and it had pushed her nose to one side, dropped one eye, and

distorted her jaw so that what should have been the corner of her mouth was the bottom of her mouth. As a consequence, she drooled constantly. I was told later than when new nurses arrived, the supervisors would send them to feed this woman, thinking that if they could stand this sight they could stand anything in the building. I also learned later that his woman was eighty-nine years old and that she had been here, bedridden, blind, nearly deaf, and alone, for twenty-five years. This was Mabel.

“I don’t know why I spoke to her—she looked less likely to respond than most of the people I saw in that hallway. But I put a flower in her hand and said, ‘Here is a flower for you. Happy Mother’s Day.’ She held the flower up to her face and tried to smell it, and then she spoke. And much to my surprise, her words, although somewhat garbled because of her deformity, were obviously produced by a clear mind. She said, ‘Thank you. It’s lovely. But can I give it to someone else? I can’t see it, you know. I’m blind.’

“I said, ‘Of course,’ and I pushed her in her chair back down the hallway to a place where I thought I could find some alert patients. I found one, and I stopped the chair. Mabel held out the flower and said, ‘Here, this is from Jesus.’

“That was when it began to dawn on me that this was not an ordinary human being. Later I wheeled her back to her room and learned more about her history. She had grown up on a small farm that she managed with only her mother until her mother died. Then she ran the farm alone until 1950 when her blindness and sickness sent her to the convalescent hospital. For twenty-five years she got weaker and sicker, with constant headaches, backaches, and stomachaches, and then the cancer came too. Her three roommates were all human vegetables who screamed occasionally but never talked. They often soiled their bedclothes, and because the hospital was understaffed, especially on Sundays when I usually visited, the stench was often overpowering.

“Mabel and I became friends over the next few weeks, and I went to see her once or twice a week for the next three years. Her first words to me were usually an offer of hard candy from a tissue box near her bed. Some days I would read to her from the Bible, and often when I would pause she would continue reciting the passage from memory, word-for-word. On other days I would take a book of hymns and sing with her, and she would know all the words of the old songs. For Mabel, these were not merely exercises in memory. She would often stop in mid-hymn and make a brief comment about lyrics she considered particularly relevant to her own situation. I never heard her speak of loneliness or pain except in the stress she faced on certain lines in certain hymns.

“It was not many weeks before I turned from a sense that I was being helpful to a sense of wonder, and I would go to her with a pen and paper to write down the things she would say...

“During one hectic week of final exams I was frustrated because my mind seemed to be pulled in ten directions at once with all of the things that I had to think about. The question occurred to me, ‘What does Mabel have to think about—hour after hour, day after day, week after week, not even able to know if it’s day or night?’ So I went to her and asked, ‘Mabel, what do you think about when you lie here?’

“And she said, ‘I think about my Jesus.’

“I sat there, and thought for a moment about the difficulty, for me, of thinking about Jesus for even five minutes, and I asked, ‘What do you think about Jesus?’

She replied slowly and deliberately as I wrote...:

I think about how good he's been to me. He's been awfully good to me in my life, you know...I'm one of those kind who's mostly satisfied...Lots of folks wouldn't care much for what I think. Lots of folks would think I'm kind of old-fashioned. But I don't care. I'd rather have Jesus. He's all the world to me.

"And then Mabel began to sing an old hymn:

*Jesus is all the world to me,
My life, my joy, my all.
He is my strength from day to day,
Without him I would fall.
When I am sad, to him I go,
No other one can cheer me so.
When I am sad he makes me glad.
He's my friend.*

"This is not fiction. Incredible as it may seem, a human being really lived like this. I know. I knew her. How could she do it? Seconds ticked and minutes crawled, and so did days and weeks and months and years of pain without human company and without an explanation of why it was all happening—and she lay there and sang hymns. How could she do it?

"The answer, I think, is that Mabel had something that you and I don't have much of. She had power. Lying there in that bed, unable to move, unable to see, unable to hear, unable to talk to anyone, she had incredible power" (Tom Schmidt).

What was the source of Mabel's power? Perhaps Paul can give us the answer. "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13).

As exceptional as Mabel is, she is not alone in her remarkable attitude. Let me tell you about Sandra Green. One summer when I was driving our van picking up children for VBS in Montego Bay, Jamaica, I gave a ride to a woman and six children walking beside the road. Sandra's husband had long since left her with five children. Then a friend died leaving a 12-year-old girl whose father did not want her. Sandra took her in. After Sandra started bringing the children to our VBS, I asked if my wife and I might visit with her. She directed us to the place where she lived. Poverty is rampant in Jamaica. It is truly a third-world nation. I had seen poverty, but was not prepared for the sight before us as we climbed the hill to her home. It was a shed made of scrap lumber, zinc, boards and what-have-you. It may have been 8 x 10, with no furniture except for two beds, if you would call them that. She cooked outside in a lean-to on a two-burner kerosene stove. She had no utilities—no running water, no electricity.

When Sandra opened the door to invite us in, the first thing I saw was a poster she had made and put on the wall. It read, "Thank you, Lord. My needs are met, and healing is mine. Hallelujah! Thank you, Jesus." I wept, as the tears coursed down my cheeks. This poor woman had virtually nothing, but she was content.

Ruth Pascual is the daughter of a faithful preacher in the Philippines. When I stayed in the Pascual's home, I saw a five room home with electricity and water from a pump out back. There was no back door, so a board was put up at night to keep the animals out. My bed was made of bamboo strips with only a sheet for padding.

When talking with Ruth one day, I asked how many dresses she had. "Four." Then I said, "If you could

have anything in the world, what would it be?" She thought a moment, and then replied, "I need nothing, Uncle David. I am content." I persisted that there must be something she would like to have. "Well, maybe a Jeep for my father." Rogelio preached for two churches several miles apart. He had already had two accidents on his motorcycle on the muddy roads, so a Jeep would help him do his work better. That's all she could think of. When I got home and told the other elders, she got her wish—a Jeep for her father.

Now, what was your problem? What was it you were complaining about? We, who are so blessed, so often are not content. We want more of this, more of that. Bigger this, bigger that. Newer this, newer that. Latest fashions, bigger closets. And on it goes with our want list.

And what do we do with our abundance? Spend it on ever more things for ourselves? Do we ever make sacrifices for the Lord and his work? I am reminded of the brethren in Macedonia whom Paul commended as he was writing to Corinth.

"Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia, that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality. For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, they gave of their own accord, begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints, and this, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God" (2 Corinthians 8:1-5).

Consider what Paul said about them. (1) They had affliction and deep poverty; (2) they had an abundance of joy; (3) there was an overflowing in the wealth of their liberality; (4) they gave beyond their ability; (5) they gave willingly, not from coercion; (6) they had to beg Paul to receive their benevolence, as he knew they could not afford to give as they did; and (7) this was made possible because "first they gave themselves to the Lord."

What a spirit. What a testimony. Furthermore, we note that the church in Philippi (which was in Macedonia) was the only church that, at some point in time, had supported Paul.

"You yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone; for even in Thessalonica you sent a gift more than once for my needs" (Philippians 4:15-16).

Let us learn something from the examples of these three good women, Mabel, Sandra, and Ruth, as well as those given by inspiration—the Macedonians and Paul. Let us learn (1) to be content, and not always looking for bigger and better, and (2) to be willing to give to the Lord's work, yea, even to make sacrifices that the Kingdom of God may be spread and his name glorified.

*"Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, 'I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you,' so that we confidently say, **'The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What will man do to me?'**" (Hebrews 13:5-6).*

Question: Have you ever made a real sacrifice? I mean really given up something that cost you dearly? Maybe in giving to help further the gospel in some way? Consider Paul's willingness to sacrifice himself. "But even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all" (Philippians 2:17). And what word did he use to describe what they had done for him?

"But I have received everything in full and have an abundance; I am amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God" (4:18).

Or maybe making a sacrifice to help someone in a desperate situation? Have you ever given up a vacation, or neglected to buy something you wanted, because you saw a greater need?

There is another sacrifice that we must make—and that is ourselves. “Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship” (Romans 12:1). Dear reader, if you have not made this sacrifice, then the sacrifice Christ made through his crucifixion is of no value to you. “And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself” (John 12:32). If you have not sacrificed yourself in obedience to God, please do not delay.

The Role of Jesus in Salvation

Jim Mickells | Lewisburg, Tennessee, USA

I remember several years ago, June 15, 2001, to be exact, there was an article in “The Tennessean” (which is the local paper for Nashville, Tennessee) which discussed the role of Jesus in the salvation of man by the Presbyterians. One side said that Jesus was the only way for one to obtain salvation while the other side contended that there could be other ways to be saved. The only way to solve such a discussion is to go to the Bible and see what it teaches on this subject.

In the gospel of John, he records what the Lord said to Thomas, “Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me’” (John 14:6). Is there another way one has access to the Father? Christ said, “No one” can come to the Father unless it is through Him. That should forever settle the matter! It is quite apparent the side arguing people can come to God in other ways didn’t rely on what the Scriptures said for their proof.

One said, “I don’t have the right to say that other people can’t find God in other ways.” The Lord has the right and He has spoken. We are to preach and teach only what we find written and revealed in His holy word. Peter said, “If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God...” (1 Peter 4:11). Warnings are sounded throughout the Bible about adding to and taking from the word of God. It plainly teaches that those who would do such will be condemned. The apostle Paul said, “But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed” (Galatians 1:8).

They mentioned in this article “the church’s confession of faith” and place it right along side the word of God. True followers of Christ depend solely on His word for their guidance, not some creed book written by men. Listen to the words of our Lord while teaching His disciples, “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life” (John 6:63). His word gives life, not the doctrines of men. He even revealed worship offered according to the commandments of men would be in vain, which is useless and unacceptable (Matthew 15:7-9).

This article went on to say, “In the end, neither side got its way at the General Assembly, the governing body of the Presbyterian Church (USA)...” How different from the church which we read about in the Bible. The Lord’s church has only one Head, and that would be Jesus Christ (Ephesians 5:23). It has no earthly governing body, relying solely upon its Head for salvation and direction. It has only one book to use in determining how it is to worship, the work it is to be involved in and the doctrine which it is to teach and practice, etc. That book is the Bible, which

“...is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Each local church, regardless where it is located, if it belongs to the Lord, is autonomous, which means self-governing or independent. It is subject only to its Head and follows only the Bible for what it believes and practices.

Let me urge our Presbyterian friends to turn back to the word of God. It is only through Christ man can be

saved (Acts 4:12). Follow Him and be only a Christian, not a Presbyterian, Baptist, Methodist, etc. Be a member of His church, subject yourself unto Him and not to some governing body of a man-made organization. It is the only way to please our Lord.

Submitting, Ephesians 6:1-9

Patrick Farish | Wauyahatchie, Texas, USA

It is obvious that "submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ" (5:21) involves a larger segment of the congregation than just the wives. The church is to submit to Christ, of course (5:24); but in this text children, bondservants, and masters are specifically charged.

Children, "Obey your parents." To the Ephesians Paul writes, do it "for this is right." To the Colossians, do it "for this pleases the Lord" Colossians 3:20. No significant difference in these renderings; they serve to underline the fact that doing what pleases the Lord is doing what is right.

"Honor your father and mother" is the specific connected with "obey your parents." Jesus – and Paul -- used a statement from Moses (Exodus 20:12) to drive home their point (Matthew 15:4, Mark 7:11). To "honor" father and mother, in this context, has reference to making provision for them, acknowledging their great debt to them, as in a circumstance where they would be unable to provide for themselves. The significance of this requirement is indicated by the promises attached: first, that it may go well with you, and second, that you may live long in the land.

"That it may go well with you." The word "well" may have reference to health, as opposed to sickness. So Jesus used it in Matthew 9:12, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick...." It may be commendation: "His master said unto him, Well done ..." (Matthew 25:21, 23). Or, to indicate sufficiency, as Paul wrote the Philippians (4:18), "I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts that you sent...." So, when Moses said, and Jesus and Paul used his words, "that it may go well with you," this was a promise of the desired outcome for righteous behavior.

The second promise is, "that you may live long in the land." This is a further expression of the blessing of God to those who "honor your father and mother." To "live long in the land" echoes the language of Moses, "And when the Lord your God brings you into the land that he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give you – with great and good cities which you did not build. ..." (Deuteronomy; 6:10)

How do we explain this promise? I do not know, for sure, but it occurs to me that to the child chafing at parental limitations, these thoughts might be helpful: I have never heard of a child who honored father and mother being arrested for grand larceny; or for DWI; or getting in trouble because of association with bad company. Living "long in the land" is not necessarily guaranteed to the child who honors father and mother; but obedience is an essential part of the successful life. After Paul has enumerated things which are the fruit of the Spirit, he says "against such things there is no law." Perhaps the thought there, from Galatians 5:22-23, leads us in the right direction (and Proverbs 23:23).

Bondservants and Masters (Employees and Employers)

The next thing considered in Ephesians 6:1-9 has to do with servants and masters. We are, thankfully, past the time, in this country at least, that human beings are enslaved against their will. The instruction here finds contemporary application in the employee-employer relationship.

Bondservants (employees) are instructed to be respectful and obedient; acknowledging Christ as Lord. Their aim should be, not to offer "eye-service", putting on a show of diligent exertion (when someone is watching) but to labor steadily, being profitable employees. The behavior called for is echoed in Titus 2:10, "... showing all good faith, so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior." Think

about this: no matter how insignificant and demeaning your job seems to be, in that job, behaving as a follower of Christ should, you can “adorn the doctrine of God our Savior!!”

Masters are to “do the same to them,” with the additional requirement to “stop your threatening.” If you are the boss and threats are your motivational tool, you need to re-evaluate your attitude toward your fellowman – brother in the Lord or not.

Someone said repentance is the hardest command to obey; and that may be so. It seems to me, though, that “submitting to one another” would be a close second.

No Tears in Heaven?

Mike Thomas | Kokomo, Indiana, USA

Someone wrote in and asked:

"Let's suppose that God does award an eternity in heaven to me, but not my wife. How can I be eternally happy knowing she is not there but in the other place? What about any of my 4 children, 13 grandchildren, and 11 great-grandchildren who don't make it? How could I be happy knowing any of them did not make it?"

This is a good question that I will try to answer in this brief article.

The Bible says, “And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away” (Revelation 21:4). The challenge we have is in understanding how God will accomplish this without robbing us entirely of our earthly memories. How can we find lasting joy in heaven if we know our son or daughter or wife or husband or parent or sibling is in a place that Jesus describes as a place where “the fire shall never be quenched” (Mark 9:42)? Who can be at peace with anyone going to hell, let alone among people we know and love?

Something to consider is how we now have moments of joy when there are people currently in similar conditions. Jesus gave the account of two people who died and said one was in Paradise (Luke 23:43) and the other in torments (Luke 16:23). He said the one in torments cried out, “Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame” (verse 25). We have every reason to believe this is an actual account since Jesus Himself went to Hades and said others would meet Him there (Acts 2:31; Luke 23:43). Plus, He used specific names in this story, which was never the case in His parables. That being so, and people truly are in torments right now as Jesus said, how are we able to dismiss that thought and still have moments of joy? What makes it possible for us to celebrate on our wedding day, rejoice at our child's birth, or sing at our baptism while others are now suffering? How can we be happy when we know others are in torments right now? I believe a fair explanation is that we are able to do so because joy and pain are a result of our consciousness. We do not feel anything unless our mind is aware of it, which is why anesthetics work when we have surgery. We do not sense that our body is being cut open because our mind is unaware of the procedure. As long as our mind is unconscious of the surgery, we can have our entire body mangled and never feel a thing. Likewise, we now have moments of joy and happiness even in knowing others are in torments because our minds are not focused on them.

Perhaps the same thing will be true in eternity on a much larger scale. We will be so overwhelmed by the presence of God and His brightness that we will be unable to focus on anything else. We will be so elated and filled with joy by the presence of God and His eternal environment that we will only experience happy thoughts. Regardless, His promise is clear:

“there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever”
(Revelation 22:3-5).

Another thought to consider is that we each will be individuals in God's presence and no longer defined by human relationships. Jesus said:

"The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage. But those who are counted worthy to attain that age, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry nor are given in marriage; nor can they die anymore, for they are equal to the angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection" (Luke 20:34-36).

In eternity, there is no such thing as husband and wife, son or daughter, or child and grandparent. Perhaps this will make it easier to understand God's righteous judgment against sin. In allowing us to see each other as individual souls, we will further comprehend why He casts away those who rebel against Him – even if they were once our earthly family.

Frankly friends, the only way to fully understand God's promise of wiping away every tear is to experience it. And the only people promised relief in eternity are those who obey the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Bible says He is coming "with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thessalonians 1:7-8). Behold, now is the time to enter His body (Galatians 3:26-27) and prepare for eternal life (1 John 5:11). Those who leave this world without having done so will experience instead the "weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 25:30).

Preach The Man, Not The Plan (7)

Tommy J. Thornhill | Etna, Arkansas, USA

It cannot be emphasized too often that preaching the gospel of Christ and teaching His doctrine go hand in hand. It is of vital importance to understand that those who advocate "preach the man, not the plan" are preaching and teaching a false doctrine, that will send people to hell. Those who make an unwarranted distinction between preaching the gospel of Christ and teaching the doctrine of Christ, are deceiving people into believing a false gospel which leads to damnation (Galatians 1:6-9). This damnable doctrine proclaims to people it makes no difference about what people believe and practice, as long as they sincerely claim Christ to be their Savior and Lord. The false teaching that everyone has a right to choose for themselves what to believe and practice has long been a mainstay of denominationalism, and in my generation has permeated and divided the Lord's church.

One cannot truly believe and obey Christ without also believing and obeying what He teaches. If one is going to have Jesus Christ as his Savior and Lord, he must also abide in His doctrine. Jesus made this plain when He told the Jews who had believed Him, "If you abide in My word you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and truth shall make you free" (John 8:31-32). Jesus' word is the truth (John 17:17), i.e., His teaching or doctrine. Jesus is declaring that the truth, His doctrine, really matters. If Jesus is going to have meaning in our lives as Christians, we cannot separate Him from His word. In fact, He warns us that when we stand before God at His judgment throne it will be His words, His doctrine, that will judge us. He 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).

Preaching the gospel is the proclamation of the good news of Jesus' advent into the world, and teaching His doctrine is explaining what these facts mean, and how they are to be applied to our lives as Christians. Those who advocate drawing a distinction between the two, saying you must only preach the gospel to the sinner, and after conversion, you teach the saints His doctrine, are leading people astray by teaching false doctrine. They relegate Jesus' doctrine as being of less importance than Jesus Himself. Jesus didn't see it this way. He was teaching His Father's teaching. When the Jewish leaders disputed with Him over His doctrine He bluntly told them, "My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me" (John 7:16). If Jesus was speaking for His Father, and He surely was, those who choose to reject His doctrine as being of little importance are rejecting the doctrine of His Father, and love not the truth that saves (2 Thessalonians 2:10-12).

Today, when preachers belittle Jesus' doctrine and relegate it as being of little importance in establishing fellowship with God, they are teaching serious false doctrine, and certainly are not in fellowship with God and Christ, and should not be in religious fellowship with His people. The apostle John writes, "If we say that we have fellowship with Him (God), and walk in darkness, we lie and do not the truth" (1 John 1:6). Walking in darkness is following that which is sinful. This is borne out in the context of Ephesians 5:8-11, which shows walking in darkness is following that which is sinful, and warns us "to have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them" (Ephesians 5:11). So, those who delegate Jesus' doctrine to a secondary role in the lives of Christians, i.e., not of great importance in fellowship, are treading down God's right of authority to choose who He and His people (Christians) will fellowship. We must not forget 2 John 9-11, where John, one of Jesus' inspired apostles, declared that one must not go beyond the doctrine of Christ. One who chooses to do so does not have fellowship with Jesus or His Father. In other words, one cannot preach the gospel about the man, without also preaching His plan, His doctrine.

Preaching the gospel must not be done to simply persuade people to accept and obey Christ, without at the same time teaching them the responsibilities they are committing themselves to, becoming true followers of Christ. Believing in Christ is more than simply submitting to baptism (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38, 41). Real belief is not just getting wet, it means a lifetime commitment to fully follow Christ and faithfully live the life Jesus teaches His followers to live. They must be warned that once they have started their lives as Christians they must not deviate from Christ's sound doctrine (Matthew 28:19-20). Christ's apostle Paul warns:

"If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness, he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions, useless wranglings of men with corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose godliness is a means of gain. From such withdraw yourselves" 1.Tim.6:3-5.

He later exhorts Timothy, and other preachers, to "hold fast the pattern of sound words which you heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 1:13). He charges us to

"preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season (when people like it or not like it, when convenient or not convenient -t.t.). Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up to themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside unto fables. But you be watchful in all things..." (2 Timothy 4:1-5).

By writing these things some charge me with being a legalist and too exclusive in my teaching. I deny the charge, and plan to answer this in another article.

In writing this series of articles, my aim has been to show from the scriptures that preaching the gospel of Christ and teaching the doctrine of Christ is in reality one and the same thing. One cannot really preach Christ without also including what He taught, and continues to teach us today through "the apostles' doctrine" (Acts 2:42). The apostles were authorized to speak for Christ. What they said and wrote are just as binding on people as if Jesus was speaking the words Himself in person.

Many may deny this, but to do so is to deny the doctrine (teaching) of God Almighty. Just as Jesus was authorized to speak for His Father, so Jesus authorized His apostles to speak for Him. Recall what Jesus told His apostles in John 14-16. In these chapters Jesus told His apostles He was going to leave them and return to heaven, but He was not going to leave them alone. He said, "I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you." How would He come to them? He would come by sending another like Him, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, to be their Helper. And, when He comes He will not speak on His own authority. Rather,

when He comes “He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it unto you” (John.16:12-15). Jesus had earlier told His apostles that when they taught people the gospel they did not need to be concerned about what words to use, for the Holy Spirit would guide them, both as to what they were to speak and how they were to speak it (this promise would also include what they would later write (Matthew 10:19-20). Jesus was promising them their inspired words would come from heaven and would carry as much weight and authority as if He was speaking them in person. He then told His apostles, “He who receives you receives Me, and He who receives Me receives Him who sent Me” (Matthew 10:40). So, those who reject “the apostles’ doctrine” as having less authority than what Jesus Himself taught are also rejecting the doctrine of Jesus as being of less importance than God Himself.

Evidently Paul, an inspired apostle, thought doctrine was important, for he tells the Roman brethren they are to

“note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you have learned and avoid them. For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple” (Rom.16:17-18).

John ten Jesus teaches us that He is that good shepherd He said the people needed. And those who are His sheep will hear His voice (verse 16). His voice would be His commands, His teaching. His teaching is His gospel, His doctrine from the Father (John 7:16), His word (John 6:63), His truth (John 8:31-32), His faith (system of doctrine Jude 3). You can’t claim to follow the shepherd, if you don’t listen to his teaching. If He is to be my shepherd, I will make sure I listen to His teaching.

Regardless of what men say, the doctrine of Christ is important. Read what Paul wrote concerning those who turn to Christ.

“Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one’s slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness? But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness” (Romans 6:16-18). You obey words (doctrine).

What was the form of doctrine Paul is referring to? That form is found in Romans 6:3-5.

“Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection.”

When one obeys the gospel and is baptized he in a figure dies to sin, is buried in water, and is raised to walk a new life. This is doctrine, and one cannot be saved without it.

I See Four Men

William Stewart | Odessa, Ontario, Canada

Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, had set up a huge gold statue. Throughout the land, a proclamation was made, that all people should fall down and worship the image when they heard the symphony of music. The warning was given,

...whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast immediately into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. (Daniel 3:6)

And so it was, when the horn, flute, harp and lyre sounded, the people would bow down and worship the

statue of Nebuchadnezzar, all but a few of the Jews who had been set in authority by the king. Three men were accused of not giving the king honour - Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego (Daniel 3:12). They would not bow to the golden image, nor would they serve the Babylonian gods.

Enraged, the king called for the young men to be brought before him. He charitably gave them an opportunity to mend their ways. But if they would not worship his image, they would be sentenced to death by the fiery furnace. He was wasting his breath, for they, like Daniel, would not defile themselves with the things of Babylon (Daniel 1:8, 17-20).

These young men spoke to the king,

...our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up
(Daniel 3:17-18).

Note, they did not tell the king that God would save them from the fiery furnace, but that He was able. They acknowledged that He could, but did not know if He would save them from the furnace. But even if He did not, that would not alter their devotion to Him or confidence in His goodness.

Nebuchadnezzar was angry at these young men already, but now his rage climaxed. He had the furnace heated seven times more than it was usually heated. The king had his mighty men of valor bind the three Hebrews and cast them into the furnace. The fire had been kindled so hot, the men who cast them in died from the heat.

The king was astonished, for as he looked into the furnace he saw

...four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire; and they are not hurt, and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God. (Daniel 3:25)

What Nebuchadnezzar saw, prompting him to call the fourth man as being "like the Son of Man," we do not know. From a Christian view, do we here see the Christ?

The three Hebrews came out of the fire, not a hair or a thread singed, and no smell of the fire on them. The king then proclaimed,

Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, who sent His Angel and delivered His servants who trusted in Him, and they have frustrated the king's word, and yielded their bodies, that they should not serve nor worship any god except their own God! (Daniel 3:28)

The king went on to decree that destruction would come upon anyone who spoke against the Hebrew God,
...for there is no other God who can deliver like this. (Daniel 3:29)

A Lesson For Today

May we learn from Daniel's friends that we should always trust in God, no matter how dire the circumstances. Had these young men allowed fear rather than faith to guide their actions, then they would have bowed before the image and committed adultery. Many of their countrymen had done so; in fact it was the idolatry of Judah which brought them into captivity in Babylon.

It is important to stand for the faith, not to compromise in order to fit in or avoid punishment by those who are in power. John the Baptist spoke out against Herod's marriage, for it was not lawful (God's law). He was put into prison and eventually beheaded because he stood for truth.

Though Christians today are not being forced to worship idols, other challenges exist. We, like John, must still stand for God's plan for marriage (one man, one woman, for life). We, like Lot, must still oppose

homosexuality (it is contrary to nature). We, like Paul, just still stand against those who try to corrupt the church by leading people away from the word (none, not even an apostle or angel could change God's word). We, like the apostle John, must stand firm against those who claim special knowledge (ie. Spirit-led). Keep the faith; it will benefit you, and may affect those around you also.

The Good Confession

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

Introduction

Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.
(Philippians 2:9-11)

Perhaps you have joined with Christians in singing this beautiful hymn:

*I'm not ashamed to own my Lord,
Nor to defend His cause;
Maintain the honor of His Word,
The glory of His cross* (Isaac Watts).

But if you are unwilling to confess Jesus as your Lord, you cannot honestly repeat these brave words. Surely then you need to know what God's Word teaches about confession. What does the New Testament teach about confession for those who are not Christians?

Necessity of Confession

Does the law of Christ require that we declare our faith? The Spirit reveals that confession is essential if we are to obey and glorify God (Philippians 2:9-11), and one must obey Him to be saved. "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). In order to have God dwell in us and we in Him, we must declare our faith. "Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God" (1 John 4:15). In fact, confession is "unto salvation."

But what does it say? 'The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart' (that is, the word of faith which we preach): that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation (Romans 10:8-10)

The Lord demands we confess our faith as a requirement to enter Heaven.

Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven (Matthew 10:32-33).

Indeed, confession is an absolute essential!

What to Confess

What, then, should we confess? Some would have us repeat, "I believe that God for Christ's sake has pardoned (forgiven) my sins." Not only is this confession unknown to the Bible, it places confession of faith after salvation, in violation of the New Testament (Romans 10:10).

Other religious groups demand an "experience of grace" - telling some unusual feeling or incident, supposedly miraculous, as evidence of salvation. This makes an inward feeling our standard of salvation; but Paul declared, "we walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Corinthians 5:7), and "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17).

Still others require a repetition of the falsely so-called "Apostles Creed" or some church statement of beliefs. These all add to the scriptures in glaring violation of the command not to add to or take from God's Word as our standard.

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

It is popular today to ask an unsaved sinner to repeat the "sinner's prayer." Not only is no such prayer found in the Bible, the New Testament never teaches those outside Christ to pray for salvation. "For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers; but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil" (1 Peter 3:12). Furthermore, "Now we know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does His will, He hears him" (John 9:31).

In contrast, the New Testament simply teaches us to confess Jesus is "Christ" (the anointed One, the promised Savior), "Lord" (ruler), and the "Son of God" (which includes the facts that He is divine in nature, born of a virgin, and raised from the dead to live eternally) (Philippians 2:11; 1 John 4:15).

Significance

What is the significance of this confession? Every system of religion has one fundamental principle or grand central fact. If the basic principle is true, the religion built thereon is true; but if it is false, the religion is false. The foundation of Islam is the belief, "None has the right to be worshiped but Allaah, and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allaah." Accept this, and you will be a Muslim. Mormonism contends "Joseph Smith, Jr. is the prophet of God." If you believe this, you will be a "Latter Day Saint" (Mormon). The proposition, "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God" is the grand central theme of the Gospel.

And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name (John 20:30-31).

It is the foundation of the church. "For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 3:11). When Peter confessed, "You are the Christ the Son of the Living God" (Matthew 16:16), Jesus declared, "Upon this rock I will build my church" (Matthew 16:18).

This truth is the saving fact of the Gospel. "And he brought them out and said, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' So they said, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household'" (Acts 16:30-31). If you truly accept this fact, you will become a Christian.

How to Confess

We confess "with the mouth," as well as by our lives (Romans 10:8-10). It must be before witnesses. There might be only one witness, as in the case of the Ethiopian eunuch.

Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, 'See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?' Then Philip said, 'If you believe with all your heart, you may.' And he answered and said, 'I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God' (Acts 8:26-40).

Or it could be many witnesses. "Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses" (1 Timothy 6:12).

Why

Why should we declare our faith? Certainly not to join a denomination, for the Lord adds the saved to His church. "And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47). Rather, you should confess in order to be saved (Romans 10:8-10).

Conclusion

Christ was willing to make this "good confession" before Pontius Pilate even though the truth of it cost Him His life.

Pilate therefore said to Him, 'Are You a king then?' Jesus answered, 'You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice' (John 18:37).

"Christ Jesus who witnessed the good confession before Pontius Pilate" (1 Timothy 6:13).

Some day you too will make this confession. "For it is written: 'As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.' So then each of us shall give account of himself to God" (Romans 14:11-12). If now, it will be to your salvation; if not until the judgment, to your damnation. Why not confess Christ now, that you might be saved?

Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven (Matthew 10:32-33).

Idolatry

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry (1 Corinthians 10:14)

The Scriptures tell us whom to worship and how to worship Him, but they never just command us to worship. Man, with a spirit derived from God and in the image of God, naturally worships something. Those who turn away from the worship of the one true and living God turn naturally to idolatry, sorcery, or both (Galatians 5:20). The Gentiles, who refused to know God, turned to idols (Romans 1:20-23).

"Idolatry originally meant the worship of idols, or the worship of false gods by means of idols, but came to mean among the Old Testament Hebrews any worship of false gods, whether by images or otherwise, and finally the worship of Yahweh (the LORD - KS) through visible symbols" (ISBE; cf. Hosea 8:5-6).

The first of the Ten Commandments forbade Israel to worship idols (Exodus 20:4-6; Deuteronomy 5:8-10). This included not only images of various animals or even humans representing foreign gods (Romans 1:22-23) but attempting to represent the LORD, who is an invisible spirit, in some visible way (John 4:24; 1 Timothy 1:17; Exodus 32:4-5). The primary reason the Lord rejected Israel and Judah and sent them into captivity was their idolatry, the most basic breach of His covenant with them (Acts 7:38-43).

Our Catholic friends are idolaters. They claim they don't worship the images before whom they bow but "venerate" them. Worship is "an act of homage or reverence" (Vine. 686). Veneration is worship. Catholics make a distinction where there is no difference. Catholics pray to Mary and the so-called "saints," but we are to pray to the Father through His Son, Christ Jesus (Colossians 3:17). This leaves out prayers to saints, including Mary, and leaves out Mary as the one through whom we pray to the Father.

The apostle Paul lists idolatry among the works of the flesh, because idolatry's appeal is to fleshly desires. The worship of idols was and is accompanied by the grossest of immorality (Romans 1:24-32; c f. Jeremiah 19:2-6; Amos 2:7-8; Hosea 4:13).

All idols are in actuality nothing; there is no spiritual reality behind the physical image (1 Corinthians 8:4).

The New Testament describes anything that takes the place of God in our hearts as idolatry. Covetousness, the greedy desire for material, things is idolatry (Colossians 3:5-6). We can make an idol of pleasure (2 Timothy 3:4), and many Americans do, living for the enjoyment of the moment. Many make an idol of human wisdom (Romans 1:22-23), and many others put their families ahead of the Lord, and thus turn them into an idol (Matthew 10:34-37).

“Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen” (1 John 5:21).

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