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

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

Question from Arkansas about Church Social Meals

Question

I'm currently engaged in a discussion with an institutional brother who keeps going to 1 Corinthians 5:11 to justify his position. His argument if I am reading it correctly says, social meals are allowed since it states that we aren't to fellowship with those who have fallen away.. then he concludes it must mean we are allowed to have fellowship meals with the faithful brethren. He claims 1 Cor. 5:11 is in the worship setting.

I'd like to hear your thoughts on this. I have reviewed your Institutional Issues document and 1 Cor. 5:11 is mentioned one time and it states that we are not to eat socially with one who has been withdrawn from. How do we know it's not in the worship setting in 1 Corinthians 5:11?

Answer

Thanks for the good question. The brother with whom you are discussing the Bible makes an unwarranted leap in logic. He argues since we are forbidden to have fellowship with unrepentant sinners in the church, and we are not to eat with them, then the eating is fellowship. He then takes another step, also unwarranted, and argues that this "fellowship" is a church social meal. Both conclusions are unproven assumptions. We are allowed to eat with sinners in the world (1 Corinthians 5:10). If this eating is fellowship, then we may have fellowship with sinners in the world, although Paul clearly forbade this to the Corinthians (cf. 2 Corinthians 6:14-17). The local church is not involved in verses 9-11. There's no scriptural or logical reason to equate the eating of this passage with a church social meal. His argument is baseless.

How Much Should We Give to the Church?

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

Most denominations teach their members that they are obligated to tithe to the Lord. The noun "tithe" means "tenth," thus, the requirement is that people give a tenth of their income to their church.

Moses in the Law commanded Israel to give a tithe of all the produce of the land (Leviticus 27:30-33; Deuteronomy 14:22). The tithe was to be given to the Levites, those of the tribe of Levi who ministered to the Lord as helpers to the priests (Numbers 18:21-24). The Levites then were to give the priests a tithe of the tithe (Numbers 18:25-26). The tithe was to be taken to the house of the Lord where the priests and Levites served (Deuteronomy 12:5-6; 14:22-26). Every third year Israelites were to give an additional tithe to be shared with Levites, strangers, fatherless, and widows (Deuteronomy 14:27-29; 26:12-15). The tithe, as part of the Law of Moses, was done away when Christ died (Colossians 2:14-17; Hebrews 7:5).

Nowhere does the Lord in the New Testament command Christians to tithe. Rather, Christians are to give to the local church each first day of the week (1 Corinthians 16:1-2). We are to contribute of our own free will (2 Corinthians 8:3-5), as we have been prospered (2 Corinthians 8:12), bountifully (2 Corinthians 9:5-6), as we have purposed (2 Corinthians 9:7), and cheerfully (2 Corinthians 9:7; cf. 8:1-2). "For if there is first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what one has, and not according to what he does not have" (2 Corinthians 8:12).

Scientific Conjecture

... the Mississippi between Cairo and New Orleans was twelve hundred and fifteen miles long one hundred and seventy-six years ago. It was eleven hundred and eighty after the cutoff of 1722. It was one thousand and forty after the American Bend cutoff. It has lost sixty-seven miles since. Consequently its length is only nine hundred and seventy-three miles at present.

Now, if I wanted to be one of those ponderous scientific people, and "let on" to prove what had occurred in the remote past by what had occurred in a given time in the recent past, or what will occur in the far future by what has occurred in late years, what an opportunity is here! Geology never had such a chance, nor such exact data to argue from! Nor "development of species," either! Glacial epochs are great things but they are vague - vague. Please observe:

In the space of one hundred and seventy-six years the Lower Mississippi has shortened itself two hundred and forty-two miles. That is an average of a trifle over one mile and a third per year. Therefore, any calm person, who is not blind or idiotic, can see that in the Old Oölitic Silurian Period, just a million years ago next November, the Lower Mississippi River was upwards of one million three hundred thousand miles long, and stuck out over the Gulf of Mexico like a fishing rod. And by the same token any person can see that seven hundred and forty-two years from now the Lower Mississippi will be only a mile and three quarters long, and Cairo and New Orleans will have joined their streets together, and be plodding comfortably along under a single mayor and a board of aldermen. There is something fascinating about science. One gets such wholesale returns of conjecture out of such a trifling investment of fact (Mark Twain, **Life on the Mississippi**. 122-3).

"Be Reconciled To God"

Jim Mickells | Lewisburg, Tennessee, USA

"Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Corinthians 5:18-21).

In this text we can see the words “reconciled,” “reconciling” and “reconciliation” used five times. They come from two different Greek words, “katallage” (noun) and “katallasso” (verb), which we find used ten times in the New Testament. Both of these words can simply be defined as “the restoration of the favor of God to sinners.”

Obviously, there is a need to be reconciled to God because of the problem of sin. This is an issue which involves all those who are accountable to our Heavenly Father (Romans 3:10,23). Sin separates us from God and there is the need of reconciliation (Isaiah 59:1-2). Yet this can only be accomplished by the One who knew no sin but was made to be sin for us (verse 21). The prophet Isaiah said, “But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed” (53:5). All praise and thanks be to God the Father and to our Lord Jesus Christ for such a truly amazing sacrifice offered so we can be reconciled, not imputing our sins but forgiving them (Psalm 32:1-2).

Paul, along with the other apostles and prophets, was given the ministry of reconciliation (verse 18). They were ambassadors for Christ (verse 20). They had a work to do, preaching of the gospel; and a Lord to represent, they spoke His word. The field of their labor was in “all the world” (Mark 16:15) and to “make disciples of all the nations” (Matthew 28:19). The Spirit of God was given to guide them “into all truth” (John 16:13) and to bring to their “remembrance all things” which Jesus had said to them (John 14:26). This great man of God said:

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

The great scheme of redemption, or how God would reconcile man unto Himself, has been revealed. It has been written, and I might add translated into our language, so that when we spend time in reading, studying and meditating upon it we can know and understand what the Lord has said to us.

The apostle said, “and has committed to us the word of reconciliation” (verse 19). When they revealed this word by the inspiration of the Spirit (2 Timothy 3:16-17), if man would believe and obey it their souls could be saved by the grace of God (James 1:21-25). Salvation is not obtained by the direct operation of the Spirit upon the hearts of men. It is not made available by some voice which one may claim to have heard. Neither is it because of some feeling one may experience at a particular moment of time. It comes as the results of the preaching and the teaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Notice what Paul said to those at Corinth:

“Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you--unless you believed in vain” (1 Corinthians 15:1-2).

It is through faith we have access to God’s grace (Romans 5:1-2). And faith comes by the hearing of the word of God (Romans 10:17).

So, “we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God” (verse 20). If you have not been reconciled to Him, you need to take advantage of the opportunity afforded you. Do you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God (John 8:24)? Are you willing to repent of your sins (Luke 13:3,5)? Will you confess that Jesus is Lord (Matthew 10:32-33; Romans 10:10)? And will you be baptized in water for the remission of your sins (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38)? If you will be obedient to the gospel of Jesus Christ, His grace and mercy will be given to you. It could be you have done these things but have fallen away. Why not repent, confess your sins and pray and ask for forgiveness and once again be reconciled to your

Father (Acts 8:22). It is our hope and prayer that all “might become the righteousness of God in Him” (verse 21).

The Baptist Church and the Bible (4)

Jefferson David Tant | Roswell, Georgia, USA

Church Officers

Baptist Manual, page 147 -

“In the New Testament, the words bishop, presbyter, elder are used to designate church officers. They all, however, designate the same office, and therefore officially mean the same thing; indeed, they are not unfrequently applied to the same individual. The bishop—called also presbyter, or elder—was the pastor, or overseer of the spiritual flock...”

The Bible – The Baptist Manual is quite correct in stating that the terms mentioned all describe the same office. They just describe different functions or aspects of their work as leaders of the church. In Baptist churches, it is common, especially in smaller churches, to have one man serve as the church’s pastor, and he need not be married, for an unmarried man may also serve in this capacity.

Now let us note what the Bible says about the qualifications for this office. Paul wrote to Titus and gave him instructions about appointing men to serve the church.

“To Titus, my true child in a common faith: Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior. For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you, namely, if any man is above reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion” (Titus 1:4-6).

Note two significant qualifications given: (1) that he must be married, and (2) that he must have believing children. In writing to Timothy, Paul explained this qualification in I Timothy 3:4:

“He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?)”

How do we know a man can be a good guide and overseer for the church? Look at his family. He may be a good man, but if his wife is a drunkard and his children are users of pot and are sexually active, then he must not be doing a good job in shepherding his family.

Furthermore, we find no example in the Bible that allows one-man-rule. There is no place we can find reference to one pastor or elder overseeing a church. Notice what was done on one of Paul’s missionary journeys:

“After they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, ‘Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.’ When they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed” (Acts 14:21-23).

What was done? They appointed “elders (plural) in every church. Note also other references to this matter of plural elders:

“Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them to send to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas--Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren, and they sent this letter by them, ‘The apostles and the brethren who are elders, to the brethren in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia who are from the Gentiles, greetings’” (Acts 15:22-23).

“From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church.” (Acts 20:17).

The Southern Baptist Convention does not support the ordination of women, however, some churches that are members of the SBC have ordained women. And most other Baptist groups in the United States do ordain women, such as the American Baptist, North American Baptist, Cooperative Baptist, etc.

Women have a special place in God’s plan, but that plan is not as public leaders in the church. “A woman must quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet” (1 Timothy 2:11-12). There are reasons for this, but that is the subject of another discussion.

So once again we see a clear conflict between what the Bible teaches and what the Baptist Church practices.

Church Name

Baptist Manual -- It is quite obvious that several denominations carry the name “Baptist.” The very book that is referenced in this treatise is “The Standard Manual for Baptist Churches,” which is the standard for Southern Baptists. Then there are American Baptists, Calvinistic Baptists, Two-Seed-in-the-Spirit Predestinarian Baptists, Independent Baptists, African Baptists, Primitive Baptists, Progressive National Baptist, General Baptists, etc., etc., etc.

The Bible – Then when we open the Bible, God’s inspired revelation for mankind, we find no such names. There are several descriptive terms in Scripture though. Romans 16:16 refers to “churches of Christ.” First Corinthians 1:2 refers to the “church of God...at Corinth.” In Acts 20:28 Paul urges the “bishops, to feed the church of the Lord which he purchased with his own blood.”

The truth is, there is not “one name” that is given to the church we read about in the Bible. The various designations, though, refer to the one who “purchased (the church) with his own blood.” What would be wrong with just using the terms the Holy Spirit has given us in the inspired Word? Jesus told his disciples the following:

“But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come” (John 16:13).

Conclusion

Dear reader. From the statements made in the Baptist Manual, when compared with what the Bible teaches, it is apparent that the Baptist Church is not the church we can read about in the Bible—the church that was established on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2. It is a church established by man, and it teaches doctrines made by man.

The appeal is made in this treatise for all to read it and make an application to the readers’ church affiliations. Many of the points made would apply to all denominations, not only to the Baptist Church. I would urge the readers to seek out churches that are really serious about following what the Holy Spirit has revealed to us in the pages of the Bible. There are churches who state this as their aim. There are churches of Christ throughout the world that follow the principle of “Where the Bible speaks, we speak. And where the Bible is silent, we are silent.”

There is no “trademark” or “copyright” on the name “church of Christ,” so just because that is what is over the door does not mean that that church is truly following the Bible. That is why we must all be like the people of Berea. Note what was said about the people of that city.

“The brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. 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 17:10-11).

Sadly, too few people in the pews do that today. The preacher speaks well, has good words, so it must be true. But, dear reader, there are false teachers out there who disguise themselves as teachers of truth. Consider the words of the apostle Paul in Second Corinthians 11:13-15:

“For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore, it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds.”

Who are these men, and women? They are those who stand in the pulpits and preach words that sound good, and words that contain some truth. And they may be deceived themselves, but they are “false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ.

Now, there are some who have read this far. who might say, “You are being narrow-minded!” And to that charge “I plead guilty.” And the reason I am willing to plead guilty is found in Matthew 7:13-14, in the words of Jesus Christ:

“Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.”

If that’s the advice from our Savior, then it would be wise to do just what he said. Agreed?

Dear reader, when you are searching for a church that is the church you can read about in the Bible, consider the oath that one takes when giving testimony in a court of law. “Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?” That’s good advice for those seeking a church, if they will seek for a church that “tells the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

“...All the churches of Christ greet you” (Romans 16:16).

What Does Christianity Mean To You?

Tommy Thornhill | Ozark, Arkansas, USA

Religion is the service and adoration of God or some type of God, expressed in forms of worship, the profession and/or practice of religious beliefs, the service and practice that stems from conviction. A religion can be right or wrong, sincere or insincere, true or false, full and rewarding or vain and empty, depending who or what people are worshiping. In Acts 17:22 the people were very religious, but worshiping idols. In Matthew 15:7-9 the Jewish leaders were also very religious, but had made the word of God of no effect by their traditions. In Colossians 2:20-23 Paul points out that many were following things that had the appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion.

Many religious people who think Jesus came to make people religious miss the point. Jesus did not come to make people religious. They were already religious, as the above scriptures reveal. Jesus came to expose the falseness, misconceptions, and hypocrisy of the religions then existing, and establish God’s true religion, i.e., Christianity, and in doing so gave instructions how true religion (Christianity) is to be practiced (John 4:23-24).

With the above said, **what does Christianity mean to you?** How has it changed you? The true test comes, not in profession, “having a form of godliness, but denying its power” (2 Timothy 3:5), but in practice. Has Christianity made a difference in your life, worship, and service to God. It made a difference in the blind man of (John 9:24-38). Through contact with Jesus his life was changed from sinner to believer. It changed the life of the Eunuch in Acts 8:29-39 from just being religious to becoming a true Christian. Afterward he went on his way rejoicing. In Acts 2:36-47 we read of 3000 Jews who turned from

their former religion, Judaism, to become Christians praising God and finding favor with the people.

So, what difference has it made in your life? Let's notice what it ought to do. **Christianity ought to mean purity of life.** Jesus said, "blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:7). Notice the change of the Corinthians. Before they became Christians, they were fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, homosexuals, sodomites, thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers, extortioners. But after obeying the gospel and being baptized (Acts 18:8), having been washed, sanctified and justified, they no longer practiced these things (1 Corinthians 6:9-11). When you became a Christian you went through a spiritual makeover, which gave you a new start in life as a new creation and one of God's special people (2 Corinthians 5:17; Titus 2:11-14). Having become a Christian you should no longer live like the world, but ever strive to be conformed to the image of Christ (Romans 8:39; 1 Peter 2:21-24). Has Christianity done that for you? If it has, it will be reflected in how you live day by day. The difference will be in the way you think (Philippians 4:8), in what you say (Ephesians 4:29), and what you do (Philippians 2:12-15; James 1:26-27). Has Christianity done this for you?

Christianity should give you a new sense of direction. Many live only for the present. Their lives are directed toward the things of this world. They want a good life, good health, good home and family and security. These things are good and worthwhile, but only for this world; they are not eternal. They will perish with time. Most people seeking these things give little thought for where they are headed after death. The Christian knows this life is temporary, so he looks in a different direction. He looks upward to the things that are above, the things that are eternal (Colossians 3:1-3; Philippians 3:19-21; Hebrews 11:10-16. 2 Corinthians 4:18). Which way are you looking? You can't keep looking back (Luke 9:62), for you have left this world behind (John 15:19; James 4:4; 1 John 2:15-17). Keep looking beyond and above.

Christianity should continue to challenge you. Do you remember the newness you felt when you heard the call of God to come out of the world (2 Corinthians 6:17-18)? After having been born again, you are now part of God's family ready to start your new life as one of His special people (1 Peter 2:9-10). When you did this, whether you were fully aware, you accepted the challenge to become better than the world around you (Matthew 5:20, 47). The world was no longer going to be allowed to set the standard for your life (2 Corinthians 10:12; Romans 12:1-2). Has this newness of life worn off? Sadly, this is the case with some. Some just drift along. They have forgotten to whom they belong and whom they serve (1 Corinthians 6:19-20; Romans 6:16) and why they had been saved to start with. Their original love for the Lord has grown cold and has been replaced by complacency and mediocrity (Revelation 3:16-17). They claim to be Christians, yet they give no more, attend no more, pray no more, study no more than many in the denominational world. Christianity no longer challenges them to be better than the surrounding world. Is this the case with you? If so, it is time you made some changes in your practices. Practice your religion with conviction and purpose (Philippians 3:12-14; Acts 11:23). What kind of example are you setting for other members, family, children, friends (Luke 6:46; Romans 6:16).

Christianity should mean victory over this evil world. Christianity is the only religion that promises a triumphant victory over the world (1 John 5:4; 1 Corinthians 15:55-57). Christianity is a paradox. One gains victory over the world, not by force but by surrender of self to Christ (Matthew 16:25). One learns to live by dying (Romans 6:6-7; Galatians 2:20). With Christ we can defeat any foe (Romans 8:31-37). Paul did not fear the world, he had Christ to help him (Acts 21:13; 2 Timothy 4:7-8). Does Christianity mean these things to you. If not, why not?

If Christianity does not mean these things to you then you need to make some changes. You need to readjust your life and make sure Christ is really your Lord. If He is not your Lord He will not be your Savior (Luke 6:46; Romans 6:16).

Other People's Mail

William J. Stewart | Odessa, Ontario, Canada

Have you ever received someone else's mail? There have been times when we've received envelopes addressed to the former occupant of our house. Of course, the accepted practice is to write "Return to Sender" or "Not at this address" on the envelope and sent it back through the postal system. Hopefully, through time, the stray items no longer show up in the mailbox.

I want us to consider the idea of reading other people's mail. "What!!!???", you might exclaim. Allow me to explain. Years ago, I was fortunate to hear an excellent lesson on being "Led By The Spirit," taught by brother Marty Pickup Jr. at the Florida College lectures. Throughout the lecture, brother Pickup reminded us that when we open the Scriptures we are "reading other people's mail." The thought has stuck with me, and I believe expresses an essential approach to correctly study and understand the Bible.

To illustrate, consider the address which appears in some of the New Testament books:

- "To all who are in Rome..." (Romans 1:7)
- "To the church of God which is at Corinth..." (1 Corinthians 1:2)
- "...to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons..." (Philippians 1:1)
- "...to Timothy, a true son in the faith..." (1 Timothy 1:2)
- "...to Titus, a true son in our common faith..." (Titus 1:4)
- "...to the pilgrims of the dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia..." (1 Peter 1:1)
- "...to the elect lady and her children..." (2 John 1:1)
- "...to the beloved Gaius..." (3 John 1:1)

Do you see that none of these were written to you or me? When we read the Bible, we are reading someone else's mail. And God intended it to be so. He chose to reveal His will through these letters written by inspired men to both assemblies and individuals. There is no apostle or inspired writer to pen a letter to the church which meets in the city where I worship, nor does there need to be. In the record which has been preserved from the first century, we find "...all things that pertain to life and godliness..." (2 Peter 1:3). In the letters which are compiled in our Bibles, we find things "...profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness..." (2 Timothy 3:16). These letters can profit God's people today, just as those to whom they were addressed benefited.

Why is it important to acknowledge these documents were originally someone else's mail? In reading and developing an understanding of what is written, it is vital that we consider the historical context. Who was the instruction given to? What did this or that phrase mean to the original recipients? What were the circumstances that surrounded them and how did that affect what was written to them? Are we in the same circumstance as the primary reader or hearer?

Consider a few simple illustrations of this from Paul's first letter to the church at Corinth. In 4:17, 19, Paul wrote, "...I have sent Timothy to you..." and "...I will come to you shortly..." Friend, do not expect Timothy to be stopping by soon, nor will the apostle Paul darken our door. They are not coming to us. This was to and for the original recipients, the Corinthian church. That was a simple, perhaps even silly example, but it demonstrates the point - we need to consider the historical context and condition of the primary audience when reading the Bible.

In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul gave varied instructions about marriage. Of the one who has a virgin daughter, he said, "...he who gives her in marriage does well, but he who does not give her in marriage does better" (v 38). Of the widows, he stated, "...she is happier if she remains as she is, according to my judgment - and I think I also have the Spirit of God" (v 40). So, it is best for Christians to remain virgins and widows, and not to marry? Earlier in the same context, Paul indicated why he said such things. It is not that he was opposed to marriage, nor that he thought it was unwise for Christians to marry, but he stated, "...I suppose therefore that this is good because of the present distress - that it is good for a man to remain as he is..." (v 26). If married, remain married; if single, remain single. This was not instruction for all time and all

circumstances but given due to the calamity and tribulation which was upon God's people at that time.

In chapter 14, Paul wrote, "Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy" (v 1). He proceeded to give instruction for the use of spiritual gifts in the assembly. "If anyone speaks in a tongue, let there be two or at the most three, each in turn, and let one interpret ... Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge" (v 27, 29). So, we should have prophets and tongue speakers in our assemblies? Not according to 13:10, for "...when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away." The Corinthians were in a time when God's revelation had not yet been complete. The perfect will of God is now here; we have the complete revelation, and no longer use the partial revelation through tongues and prophecy.

It is "...living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword..." (Hebrews 4:12) and is the message "...given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness..." (2 Timothy 3:16). But we are reading other people's mail, and must take this into account as we learn to "...rightly divide the word of truth..." (2 Timothy 2:12) and "...understand what the will of the Lord is" (Ephesians 5:17).

Place statements in their historical context; understand phrases and words as they would be understood in the time the text was written, and determine whether our circumstances are on par with those whom the text was written to. Doing this, we will better comprehend the holy book, and faithfully obey God's will for us.

Contentions

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

Many years ago members of a congregation where I had held a gospel meeting had such wrangling arguments in Bible class that the congregation divided and virtually broke apart. This is an example of "contentions" (Galatians 5:20), one of the works of the flesh that will keep those who are guilty of it out of heaven (Galatians 5:19-21).

The American Standard Version, the **New American Standard Bible**, and the **English Standard Version** translate this word as "strife." The **King James Version** renders it as "variance." Thayer defines it as "contention, strife, wrangling" (254), Arndt & Gingrich as "strife, discord, contention" (309), Mounce as "altercation, strife,... contentious disposition" (1157). The word follows "hatred" in the apostle's lists of the works of the flesh, and contention is a manifestation of hatred.

Because the word is twice translated "debates" in the **King James Version** of the New Testament (Romans 1:29; 2 Corinthians 12:20), some brethren think a formal discussion of religious differences is sinful. Of course, our **King James Version** English Bible dates to 1611, and two words have essentially swapped meanings in the intervening centuries. Now "debate" means "to discuss or examine a question by considering or stating different arguments" (Webster. 1: 582), whereas "dispute" means "a wrangling altercation" (Ibid. 1:582). "A wrangling altercation" is a good description of the word "contentions," a work of the flesh Paul condemned (Galatians 5:20).

But Jesus (Matthew 22:15-46), Steven (Acts 6:9-10), Paul, Barnabas, and the other apostles (Acts 15:1-2, 5-7; 17:16-17) all engaged in examining "a question by considering or stating different arguments." Jude commands:

Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints (Jude verse 3).

We must engage in reasonable discussions of the faith. We must not participate in a wrangling altercation.

Claudius Lysias, the Roman commander in Jerusalem, brought Paul before the Jewish council to find what charge they had against him.

*But when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, 'Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee; concerning the hope and resurrection of the dead I am being judged!' And when he had said this, a **dissension** arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees; and **the assembly was divided**. For Sadducees say that there is no resurrection--and no angel or spirit; but the Pharisees confess both. Then **there arose a loud outcry**. And the scribes of the Pharisees' **party arose and protested**, saying, 'We find no evil in this man; but if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him, let us not fight against God.' Now when there arose **a great dissension**, the commander, fearing lest Paul **might be pulled to pieces by them**, commanded the soldiers to go down and take him by force from among them, and bring him into the barracks (Acts 23:6-10).*

The council was guilty of "contention, strife, wrangling." It was a manifestation of the enmity the Pharisees and Sadducees had for each other.

We should discuss differences we might have in a loving, reasonable manner. Never engage in contentions, wrangling, quarrels. They are a work of the flesh, a manifestation of hatred, and will cause us to be condemned.

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The Church Jesus Built

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Introduction

When people ask me what I am religiously, I usually reply, "I'm just a Christian; I'm not a member of any denomination." Some think I mean I am not a member of any church. But I am a member of the church Jesus built.

When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, 'Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?' So they said, 'Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.' He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Simon Peter answered and said, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' Jesus answered and said to him, 'Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it' (Matthew 16:13-18).

Well, isn't that the denomination I belong to? What is the church Jesus built?

Denominationalism

The word "denomination" is not found in the Bible. However, the New Testament mentions denominations a number of times under a different name. The Jews in the days of the Lord and His apostles were divided into "sects." "Then the high priest rose up, and all those who were with him (which is the sect of the Sadducees), and they were filled with indignation" (Acts 5:17). "But some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up, saying, 'It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses'" (Acts 15:5). A "sect" is "a division or group based upon different doctrinal opinions and/or loyalties" (Louw & Nida. **Lexical Semantics of the Greek New Testament**. 11.50).

The sects of the Jews wore party names as a show of sectarian loyalty. As Paul addressed the Jewish council, “a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees; and the assembly was divided. For Sadducees say that there is no resurrection--and no angel or spirit; but the Pharisees confess both” (Acts 23:7-8).

Both the Pharisees and Sadducees bound doctrines unknown to the Scriptures as tests of membership in their sects. Christ rebuked the Pharisees, “Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition? (Matthew 15:3). The Sadducees denied spirit beings and the resurrection (Acts 23:8).

They even considered Christians a sect of Judaism. Thus Tertullus called the apostle Paul, “a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes” (Acts 24:5). The Jews in Jerusalem said of the church, “concerning this sect, we know that it is spoken against everywhere” (Acts 28:22). The Jews derisively called Christians “Nazarenes” (Acts 24:5). Paul implied Christians were not a sect. He informed Felix, the Roman governor, “But this I confess to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect, so I worship the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets” (Acts 24:14).

The same Greek word rendered “sect” is also translated “factions.” “For there must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you” (1 Corinthians 11:19).

The word primarily means

a choosing, choice...; then, that which is chosen, and hence, an opinion, especially a self-willed opinion, which is substituted for submission to the power of truth, and leads to division and the formation of sects.... (W.E. Vine, **An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words**. 2:217).

Everyone has opinions, things he thinks are true but cannot prove by the Bible. If he treats his opinions as if they were divine revelation, by teaching them as divine truth and/or insisting that others follow them, he becomes divisive and must be rejected. “Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition” (Titus 3:10).

Creeds

The various denominations have creeds developed by uninspired men. A “creed” is

“a brief authoritative doctrinal formula ... intended to define what is held by a Christian congregation, synod, or church to be true and essential and exclude what is held to be false belief.” (Webster. **Third New International Dictionary**, unabridged. 533).

Thus, denominations follow the doctrines of men, human opinions, rather than the Word of God. We must neither add to nor subtract from the Bible as the authoritative guide for God’s people.

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).

The only creed we may accept is the Bible.

The Bible only and only the Bible produces Christians only and only Christians. Both in the natural and spiritual realms, each seed produces after its own kind.

Then God said, ‘Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb that yields seed, and the fruit tree that yields fruit according to its kind, whose seed is in itself, on the earth’; and it was so. And the earth brought forth grass, the herb that yields seed according to its kind, and the tree that yields fruit, whose seed is in itself according to its kind. And God saw that it was good (Genesis 1:11-12).

The gospel is the spiritual seed sown in human hearts.

Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere

love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever (1 Peter 1:22-23).

That seed only produced Christians.

And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch (Acts 11:26).

One will simply harvest Christians, if he teaches only the word of God, the “incorruptible” seed. The seed of the kingdom will no more produce the various denominations than seed corn will produce soy beans. The church Jesus built has no human creed.

Sectarianism

Furthermore, we must not be guilty of sectarian loyalty as reflected by party names.

Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you. Now I say this, that each of you says, 'I am of Paul,' or 'I am of Apollos,' or 'I am of Cephas,' or 'I am of Christ.' Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? (1 Corinthians 1:10-13).

As individuals, we may be called “believers.” “And believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women” (Acts 5:14). We may be called “disciples.” “Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest” (Acts 9:1). We could be called “saints.” “Then Ananias answered, ‘Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem’” (Acts 9:13). We may be called “Christians.” “And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch” (Acts 11:25-26). We could simply be called “members” “Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually” (1 Corinthians 12:27).

As a group, whether local or universal, we may be called “the church.” Saul “made havoc of the church” (Acts 8:3). We could be termed “the Way.”

Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem (Acts 9:1-2).

We might be called the church of Christ. “Greet one another with a holy kiss. The churches of Christ greet you” (Romans 16:16). Or we could be called “the church of God.” Paul wrote “to the church of God which is sat Corinth” (1 Corinthians 1:2). We might be termed “the church of the living God.”

These things I write to you, though I hope to come to you shortly; but if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Timothy 3:14-15).

Or we could be called “the general assembly and church of the firstborn” (Hebrews 12:22-23). All these names are used to include all scripturally baptized believers in their relationship to Christ and God.

If we have loyalty to a religious party, a group larger than a local church and smaller than the universal body of the saved, we are denominational. This party loyalty is reflected by party names. Sectarian names include the various denominational names (Catholic, Episcopal, Presbyterian, etc.) but also names of less formal parties (Conservative, Liberal, etc.). We can also show sectarianism by insisting on only one divinely authorized name for God’s people, whether as individuals or as a group, to the exclusion of others. Those who claimed, “I am of Christ,” were also a party (1 Corinthians 1:12).

The church the Lord built has no human creed and no sectarian name. It is neither a denomination nor is it composed of denominations.

Body of Christ

The inspired apostle Paul described the church in its relationship to Christ as “His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all” (Ephesians 1:22-23). The church of Christ is the spiritual body of Christ, and Christ is the spiritual Head of His church.

Christ is the Christian’s fullness, the One who supplies all our spiritual needs. “For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell” (Colossians 1:19).

See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority (Colossians 2:8-10, **English Standard Version**).

Even so the church is the fullness of Christ. Anyone in Christ is in His church, and anyone in His church is in Christ. All spiritual blessings are in Christ, is in His church. “And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all” (Ephesians 1:22-23). One can no more be in Christ and not be in His church than he could be in a bath tub full of water and not be in the water.

One Body

How many bodies does the Lord have? Paul affirms, “There is one body” (Ephesians 4:4). If there is one body, and the body is the church, how many churches does Jesus have?

The church is the fullness of Christ, and salvation is in Him. “Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory” (2 Timothy 2:10). Thus, all saved people are members of this church.

But, someone objects, “You believe the Church of Christ is what saves!” No, Christ is the only Savior. “Jesus said to him,” “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6).

But whom does Jesus Christ save? “For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body” (Ephesians 5:23). The Lord saves His body, the church. The church is the saved, not the savior.

Another protests, “So you believe I have to join the Church of Christ to be saved!” No, one cannot join the church Jesus built. The Lord adds the saved to the church. “And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47).

This does not mean that the church is some exclusive club that only lets select people in. We invite all to come to Christ and be saved. “And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely (Revelation 22:17, **King James Version**).

It just means the church of the New Testament is nondenominational. Denominations have man made membership requirements, and men determine who may join. But the church of God is composed of all who have accepted Christ by the obedience of faith and have been saved by the gospel. No man or group of men determine its membership. There is no official roll of members on earth. The Lord adds people to His church, the body of the saved, as He saves them, and their names are enrolled in heaven. “Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your

names are written in heaven” (Luke 10:20). “Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: ‘The Lord knows those who are His...’” (2 Timothy 2:19).

Definition of Church

The church Jesus built, then, is simply **the assembly of people called out of the world into fellowship with God**. The church is the spiritual assembly of God’s people, “the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven” (Hebrews 12:23). It is composed of those who have responded to the gospel call, for He “called you by our gospel” (2 Thessalonians 2:14). Its members have forsaken the fellowship of the world and its sin.

Therefore ‘Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you.’ ‘I will be a father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the Lord almighty’ (2 Corinthians 6:17-18).

They have been brought into fellowship with God. “That which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ (1 John 1:3).

Conclusion

I do not ask anyone to join a denomination, accept a human creed, or wear a sectarian name. I plead with people to avoid all these sinful practices. I simply implore all people to believe and obey the gospel, that the Lord might add them to His body, the church, for only in Christ, in His body, the church, is salvation found. Have you done this? If not, why not?

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