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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

PHILIPPIANS
4:8

are of good report
IF THERE IS ANY VIRTURE AND IF THERE
IS ANYTHING PRAISEWORTHY –
meditate on these things.

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 Chile About Who Can Baptize

Question

Some Spanish-speaking brothers have had a controversy over this question. Some are teaching and arguing that baptism to be valid, or biblical, must only be done by a Christian? The main argument is that the N.T. never mentions non-Christians baptizing, but only Christians baptizing others. And even in the case when some person is in some well separated place, as in a desert, reference is made to the example of Philip and the Eunuch, saying that God in His providence, when a person seeks the truth, he will always help him to get in touch with a Christian.

I myself would like to try to understand this question as well as possible. Could you help? What do you think that based on some biblical principle we can understand about this question?

Answer

One of the principles by which we determine what in a passage is binding is that of spiritual significance. The gospel pertains to the spirit (John 18:36; Romans 14:17), and the things the Lord binds on us have spiritual significance. For example, it doesn't matter whether Jesus and His apostles used one cup

(container) or several in the institution of the Lord's Supper, because the container has no spiritual significance. Likewise, it does not matter who baptizes someone, because the one doing the baptizing has no spiritual significance. Paul was thankful he didn't personally baptize many people in Corinth, lest any should so he baptized in his own name (1 Corinthians 1:14-17). He doesn't say who baptized the others, because it doesn't matter. The one New Testament baptism (Ephesians 4:4-6) is in the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:38), in water (Acts 8:36-38), immersion (Romans 6:3-4), of penitent believers (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38), and for (in order to) the remission of sins (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38). Catholics and Protestants believe someone must be ordained before he can baptize. Who does the baptizing does not matter.

DISCUSSION OF FIRST CORINTHIANS 11:2-16

Response to Brent Sharp's Second Article

William Stewart | Kingston, Ontario, Canada

Our brother is adamant that prior to the 20th century, nowhere in all of "Christendom" (in fact, he said "in the entire universe") was there any interpretation on Paul's instruction in 1 Corinthians 11 except that women should have long hair and be covered in worship and men should have short hair and bare heads in worship. I commend his zeal, but his claim is indefensible. He cites several 17th through 19th century commentators who agree with his position, but that is hardly proof that no one in almost two thousand years has believed something different on the topic. His claim and his evidence are disproportionate.

Understanding Paul's "no such custom" statement in verse 16 is important. Brother Sharp's explanation is the church does not have a custom of women not having their heads covered in the assembly. If the universal practice of the church is that women must wear head coverings in the assembly, would it not have been more prudent for the apostle to state such rather than use a messy double negative? We have no such custom of people not doing this. The apostle said the church does not have a custom (Greek, *sunetheia*, a habit or routine) of women wearing head coverings – it was not a universal command. In fact, despite our brother's claims, there is no commandment anywhere in the New Testament (1 Corinthians 11 included) for women to wear a head covering in the assembly. The multiple arguments Brent refers to in our text are support of the universal truth which the text is truly about – the distinct roles of men and women. 1 Corinthians 11 no more commands head coverings than 1 Corinthians 16 commands us to kiss one another, or John 13 commands us to engage in foot washings.

Brother Sharp stresses that when Paul gives instructions which are not binding, he will specifically state so, and furthermore, will distinguish his words from those given by inspiration. If our brother's observation is true, then the command to greet one another with a holy kiss is binding today (1 Corinthians 16:20; 2 Corinthians 13:12; 1 Thessalonians 5:26; Romans 16:16). In no "holy kiss" text does Paul identify the practice as his unbinding uninspired instruction. Using our brother's reasoning, he must conclude that the holy kiss was not a societal custom but a universal divine commandment. Does our brother impose the holy kiss on brethren? If not, why not?

Based on Paul's condemnation of homosexuality in Romans 1, our brother says the word "nature" refers to "God's created order," and thus surmises that it is inherently wrong for men to have long hair. I am curious, did the Gentiles by "God's created order" do the things in the Law (Romans 2:27)? Did God not spare the Jews because of their innate essence (Romans 11:21) or was it against "God's created order" to receive the Gentiles (Romans 11:24)? Are we inherently children of wrath (Ephesians 2:3)? Each of these texts uses the same Greek word for "nature." The issue is not as easy as saying the word nature refers to "God's created order." We have noted the Nazirite vow which required a man to have long hair (Numbers 6:1-5). Our brother calls this an exception. Did God violate His own "created order," commanding men to do what He had already deemed sinful? In Romans 1, the word nature certainly refers to inherent design, but such is not the case in the other texts mentioned above, nor in 1 Corinthians 11:14. Commenting on the word nature in Ephesians 2:3, C.G. Caldwell stated: "...the word nature (*phusei*) refers to one's acquired nature through habitual regular practice. For example, Paul said, 'Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him?' (1 Cor. 11:14). Such instruction is not the result of

genetics but of social acceptance and practice.”

In 1 Corinthians 11:14, Paul urged the Corinthians to consider what was the accepted practice in their culture. It was socially acceptable for women to have long hair and men to have short hair. Why? Because God had inherently and universally made it so? No, because that was their common practice. Now, does that mean any social custom is OK? No, if it violates God's law, then it is wrong, regardless how widespread a practice might be. But there is no commandment of God condemning long hair on men or short hair on women.

Our brother dismissed evidence that there is no universal or inherent link between head coverings and submission, and then mockingly asked if we could ditch the use of unleavened bread and the fruit of the vine in the Lord's Supper for the same reason. The difference is this: God commanded the use of unleavened bread and fruit of the vine for the Lord's Supper, He has not commanded women to wear head coverings in the assembly of the saints. He ignored evidence presented of men serving before the Lord with their heads covered (Exodus 28:3-4; 29:9), which he says is inherently sinful. In 1 Corinthians 11 Paul acknowledged a custom and urged the Corinthians to recognize that violating the custom would bring dishonour to them. However, he made it clear regarding the covering and uncovering of heads and the length of hair, the Lord's church has “no such custom.”

Allow me to close with this observation: even if 1 Corinthians 11 were a command for women to wear head coverings, it would not be fulfilled in the assembly of the saints. The women in the context are praying and prophesying (verse 5). In 1 Corinthians 14:34, the apostle said women were to keep silent in the churches, that is, they were not permitted to pray or prophecy in the assembly. Logic dictates Paul's instruction in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 cannot be about the assembly of the saints.

Cited

Caldwell, C.G. “Colly,” **Ephesians, Truth Commentary Series**, p. 73.

DISCUSSION OF FIRST CORINTHIANS 11:2-16

Response to William Stewart's Second Article

Brent Sharp | Shannon Hills, Arkansas, USA

In his second article Brother Stewart spends his first three paragraphs discussing the holy kiss and foot washing, emphasizes that both those were customs of a certain time and place, and apparently draws the conclusion this proves Paul's instructions in I Corinthians 11:2-16 are likewise only local customs limited to Corinth in the first century. Our brother's logic is, however, quite unsound in this matter.

First of all, Paul is speaking by inspiration, with apostolic authority, giving a series of direct commands as to the conduct of the members of the church. It is not my responsibility to prove that these commands are not just a local custom; if a brother is going to reject these commands for such a reason it is his responsibility to prove beyond any shadow of a doubt that such is the case. Would Brother Stewart apply the same reasoning to Paul's commands concerning the Lord's Supper and social meals immediately following? If someone else did so, how could he object? Would Brother Stewart apply the same reasoning to Paul's exhortation to the Corinthians to sing? How can he object to those who introduce instruments using the same line of reasoning? Would Brother Stewart apply the same reasoning to Paul's prohibition of women teachers? Already many, including brethren, assert this, too, is just a “local custom” of time and place Paul is referring to in I Corinthians 14. How can Brother Stewart correct them?

Brother Stewart is likewise concerned about my “broad statement” concerning the wearing of the head covering by women for 18 centuries. I would like to remind Brother Stewart that sources such as StudyLight.org and esword are readily available. Early church historians, including Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Hippolytus of Rome, Origen of Alexander and John Chrysostom, among myriad others, spoke definitively on the issue. I listed numerous historians and word scholars previously on the matter; I could

continue on more or less indefinitely were we not constrained by the number of words to be published in these articles. Once again, prior to the 19th century there was no disagreement, and not until the 20th did the practice of ignoring Paul's instructions in this passage gain a majority practice in the West.

I did indeed refer to Brother Willis' commentary on this passage, and especially for the reason that although he shares Brother Stewart's position, he concedes in his writings on this passage that it was indeed the universal practice of the first century church for women to be covered and men uncovered. Brother Stewart also seems quite concerned that this is the only instance we have recorded in the New Testament of this command, which I concede. And what of it? God gave a direct command through His apostle and had it recorded for us in this book. How many times must He do so before the command is valid? I maintain that number is one. If God's giving the command one time is not enough for Brother Stewart than perhaps he could enlighten us as to how many times a command must be given to be valid, and by what hermeneutic he has arrived at such a conclusion. I suppose that could prove an interesting topic for a follow on debate.

Now Brother Stewart is grammatically perplexed by his misperceived double negative. "We have no such custom" means we (the apostles and all other congregations) have no (do not have what you do) such custom (a custom of allowing bareheaded women or covered men in the church). If our brother is still concerned about a possible "double negative" I encourage him to familiarize himself with the wonderful "neither-nor" construction; as in we neither teach that women may be uncovered nor do we allow men to wear hats.

Now Brother Stewart is disappointed in my time spent on verses 2-15. This is easy to explain; those verses are clear instructions and should be followed in all times and places throughout the world. I'm sure Brother Stewart understands that this passage requires men to abstain from wearing a head covering in church and to have short hair, and for women to do the opposite. If we agree on that then there is no reason to spend time on it other than to evade the true point of disagreement, which is whether this is just a matter of local custom. It is not.

Brother Stewart also dismisses the idea that the abolition of the women's head covering in the West, specifically the United States, was in any way connected to the rise of feminism. On this he should have done more reading before speaking on the matter. The Brother Johnson he quotes did indeed say that this was a matter of custom, but then went on to say women in the U.S. ought to wear a covering because that was still the custom; Brother Johnson wrote this in the latter half of the 19th century. The next great opponent of the head covering, McGarvey, conceded that it was indeed a universal command, but that we have now outgrown it; a position which he also applied to Paul's teaching on women in I Corinthians 14, in which he argued women of exceptional ability should now be able to take leading teaching roles in the church. Additionally, C.R. Nichol, in his book "God's Woman" openly rejected the Biblical pattern for male headship in the home as well as the church, and in so doing went out of his way to attack the head covering as sinful in and of itself.

Brother Stewart has spoken much of the principal of headship in I Corinthians 11, but the fact of the matter is that in most Western countries, including the U.S., that principal has been abandoned, including in most public worship. At the same time this abandonment took place, so to, for the first time in history, was Paul's instruction from this passage abandoned. Judge for yourselves indeed.

Did God Forsake Jesus on the Cross?

Trevor Campbell | Pyatt, Arkansas, USA

"My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46). This is a well known quote by Jesus while on the cross, but did God really forsake Jesus? To answer this question and to help us understand why Jesus said this, we'll need to take a look at an earlier time in which these same words were spoken;

David begins the twenty-second Psalm with those same words Jesus uttered on the cross; “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” (Psalm 22:1) David writes the Psalm from the view point of a man who feels he’s a forsaken man; surrounded by enemies and persecuted. Continuing through the Psalm the man looks to God for deliverance. He recalls the days of old saying, “Our fathers trusted in You; They trusted, and You delivered them. They cried to You, and were delivered” (verses 4-5). The man pleads for God’s help, saying, “But You, O Lord, do not be far from me; O my strength, hasten to help me! Deliver me from the sword, my precious life from the power of the dog. Save me from the lion’s mouth and from the horns of the wild oxen” (verses 19, 20, 21). Then the man sees the Lord has answered him; “You have answered me” (verse 21). He then praises God, attesting to the fact that God never forsook him, saying, “He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; nor has He hidden His face from him; but when he cried He heard him” (verse 24). Looking through the entirety of the Psalm, we see it is not about God forsaking anyone. The conclusion is just the opposite. We also notice a number of prophecies concerning Jesus, many of them in reference to His persecution and death. Compare these verses from Psalm 22 with these New Testament passages:

Psalm 22:7: “All those who see Me ridicule Me; they shoot out the lip, they shake the head.”

Mark 15:29-30: “and those who passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads and saying, Aha! You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself and come down from the cross.”

Psalm 22:8: “He trusted in the Lord, let Him rescue Him; let Him deliver Him, since He delights in Him.”

Matt 27:43: “He trusted in God, let Him deliver Him now if He will have Him; for He said, ‘I am the Son of God..’”

Psalm 22:15: “My tongue clings to My jaws.”

John 19:28: “After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, said, ‘I thirst!’”

Psalm 22:17: “I can count all My bones. They look and stare at Me.”

Matthew 27:36: “Sitting down, they kept watch over Him there.”

Psalm 22:18: “They divide My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots.”

John 19:23-24: “Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took His garments and made four parts, to each soldier a part, and also the tunic. Now the tunic was without seam, woven from the top in one piece. They said therefore among themselves, ‘Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be.’”

Psalm 22:24: “For He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; nor has He hidden His face from Him; But when He cried to Him, He heard.”

Hebrews 5:7: “who in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear.”

Looking at these examples we see that the Psalm is filled with references to Jesus. Jesus did not utter the words, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?”, because He was forsaken, but rather He was recalling an old testament text that prophesied of His suffering. He was making it clear that He was fulfilling this passage. Jesus may have appeared to be forsaken as He was surrounded by enemies and hanging on a cross, but by recalling the twenty-second Psalm He teaches us that He was never forsaken, and that the promise made by God stood, “I will never leave you nor forsake you” (Hebrews 13:5). A promise that was made to the Israelites, and reaffirmed by the Hebrew writer for God’s people under the new covenant. Today we can be assured just as Christ was- God will never leave us nor forsake us.

Yes God Forsook Jesus On The Cross

Patrick J. Donahue | Harvest, Alabama, USA

Trevor Campbell's article "Did God Forsake Jesus on the Cross?" is very well written and done with an excellent spirit, but I take issue with some of his arguments and most importantly his conclusion, that Jesus was not really forsaken on the cross.

Trevor begins by referring to the passage Jesus quotes when He asks the Father in Matthew 27:46 "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Trevor asserts the man of Psalm 22:1 just "feels" he is forsaken, but not really forsaken. Has Trevor forgotten Psalm 22:1 is inspired of God? The Holy Spirit is the real author of the verse. Was the Holy Spirit mistaken and just thought David was forsaken? If the writer of Psalm 22:1 was inspired but wrong, then how can we trust anything in the Bible? For example, how do we know Paul's prohibition against women preachers in 1 Timothy 2:11-12 is divine truth, and not just how Paul "felt" at the time? Suppose for the sake of argument the writer was wrong in Psalm 22:1. Was Jesus also wrong when He applied these words to himself on the cross? That would certainly open up a "sticky wicket" wouldn't it?

Trevor's main proof for his contention David was not really forsaken in Psalm 22:1-2 was that David discusses his deliverance later in the chapter. But expected deliverance doesn't necessarily imply never forsaken. As a matter of fact, the pattern we see in God's word is just the opposite. Observe just how many times Old Testament passages fit the pattern of what I call "forsaken then expected deliverance." Consider Judges 6:13c-14: "now the LORD hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites. And the LORD ... said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee?" And Isaiah 54:7-8: "For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee ... but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the LORD thy Redeemer."

In Psalms please read for yourself 60:1, 9-10, 5, 12; 79:5, 8, 9-10; 13:1-6; and 44:22-26 – all describe our blueprint "forsaken then expected deliverance." And we have many other instances of David and/or the Israelites being forsaken including Psalms 89:38-46; 80:4-6; 43:1-2; 35:1,17, Jeremiah 7:29-30, etc. In view of all these other Old Testament illustrations of forsaken (and expected deliverance), I think it is safe to say the only reason some claim the writer of Psalm 22:1 was not forsaken is because Jesus quoted it and applied it to himself. And for some reason that scares them.

Trevor then cites six verses in Psalm 22 (7, 8, 15, 17, 18, 24) that were fulfilled by Christ, but this list proves just the opposite of what Trevor claims. For example does Matthew 27:39ff indicate people really did "shoot out the lip" (Psalm 22:7) or David/Jesus just "felt" they did? Does Matthew 27:39 show people really did "shake the head" (Psalm 22:7) or David/Jesus just "felt" they did? Does Matthew 27:43 mean people really did say, "He trusted on the Lord that he would deliver him: let him deliver him" or David/Jesus just "felt" they said that? Does John 19:28-30 demonstrate Jesus really did "thirst" (Psalm 22:8) or was Jesus mistaken about that? Doesn't Matthew 27:35 prove the soldiers really did "part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture" (Psalms 22:18)? Now if Jesus fulfilling these Psalm 22 other events means they really happened, in every case, wouldn't that indicate Jesus fulfilling Psalm 22:1 means what is prophesied really did happen, and not that Jesus just "appeared to be forsaken" as Trevor contends?

When Jesus asks the Father "Why Hast Thou Forsaken Me?" in Matthew 27:46, that is equivalent to saying "You have forsaken me. Why?" Was Jesus' assertion wrong? If yes, what else was He wrong about? If Jack asks a friend John "why did you forsake me?" – doesn't that mean one of two things?: Jack is wrong, or Jack was forsaken? Which was it for Jesus – was Jesus wrong in Matthew 27:46, or was he forsaken?

I find a total of 31 examples of Jesus asking why someone did something in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and everybody would agree "what Jesus is asking why about" actually happened in all 31 cases ... except in this one instance! For example, when Jesus asked the rich young ruler in Matthew 19:17, "Why callest thou me good?," doesn't that mean the ruler called Jesus good? When Jesus asked his disciples in Luke 22:46, "Why sleep ye?," isn't that because they were sleeping? And when Jesus asked the officer in

John 18:23 “why smitest thou me?,” was Jesus actually struck, or was He only noting the Christ was to be “smitten” (Isaiah 53:4)? Why is Matthew 27:46 any different than every single one of these 31 other similarly worded cases? When Jesus asks God, “why hast thou forsaken me?,” why does that not mean the Father forsook Jesus?

Finally, of course Hebrews 13:5 is true God “will never leave ... nor forsake” the faithful (Psalm 31:23), but to array this verse against the clear teaching of Matthew 27:46 is to ignore the central fact of the crucifixion we all agree on – what happened to Jesus on the cross is not for anything he had done, but because of what we have done (Isaiah 53:5-6).

In short we should accept that Jesus was forsaken by the Father on the cross because Matthew 27:46 says he was. What do we have to gain by struggling so hard to work against that plainly revealed fact?

The History of the Institutional Controversy (Pt 6)

Jefferson David Tant | Hendersonville, Tennessee, USA

Separation, Growth and Development

Despite the predictions of "doom and gloom," "anti-ism" has not perished from the earth. Bill Humble presented a more objective view:

“The most serious issues that churches of Christ have faced in this century is church cooperation and ‘institutionalism.’ Led by Roy Cogdill, Yater Tant and the Gospel Guardian, a substantial number of churches have come to oppose such co-operative programs of evangelism as the Herald of Truth and the homes for orphans and aged, as they are presently organized. During the past 15 years many debates have been held, churches have divided, and fellowship has broken. This is the most serious division, numbers-wise, that churches of Christ have suffered. Whether that division is final, or whether it can be healed, is yet to be determined” (Story of the Restoration. 74, 1968).

Writing now from the perspective of more than five decades later, it is obvious that the wound is so serious that no healing will take place.

Counting numbers is something fraught with difficulties. Since we have no central organization to which statistics are reported, any number total can be regarded as less than absolute. However, brother Mac Lynn has done a commendable job for some years in collecting and compiling data on churches of Christ. Of nearly 12,000 churches of Christ in the USA, he has estimated that the non-institutional churches compose nearly 21% of the total of the combined groups.

With respect to foreign evangelism, contrary to charges that we do not believe in foreign evangelism, we have been active in sending Americans into other nations with the gospel, and are supporting countless natives in many nations. We just do not believe there is scriptural precedent for creating a human organization or a super-eldership in a “sponsoring church” to carry out the Great Commission. And while institutional churches have built schools, hospitals and other such organizations, we have concentrated on building congregations.

With respect to the emotional issues of caring for orphans, some of the most egregious charges against us were that we were “orphan-haters,” since we did not believe in churches building and supporting orphan asylums. These charges were purely an emotional ploy, designed to cause prejudice and cause people not to consider the Scriptural basis of our concerns.

But the figures tell another story. Several years ago Eugene Britnell surveyed 60 preachers who were opposed to the church support of benevolence institutions, and they accumulated a list of 450 orphans and widows being cared for by individual Christians. Cecil Willis pointed out that 17 children had been adopted or cared for by the faculty of Florida College, which at that time had 25 families. Eight families represented

by the editorial staff of the "Gospel Guardian" provided homes for at least ten children not their natural offspring. If those figures are representative, that means that nearly 19,000 such children are being cared for among families in the non-institutional churches. That is far in excess of the institutions built and maintained by the institutional churches. Members of the modest-sized congregation where I labored in Roswell, Georgia have adopted at least 14 children, and have had a part in placing at least 80 children in other adoptive homes.

But we had a "reputation" to uphold. It was reported that some women approached the late Robert Jackson, an "anti" preacher in Nashville, and chided him for his "hatred" of orphans. He then told them if orphan children came to his door wanting help, he would "pinch their little heads off." (Of course, he was using irony. As of August 14, 358 children have been adopted by Christians through "Sacred Selections," which refuses church money. - KS)

"God Is Not Mocked"

Jim Mickells | Lewisburg, Tennessee, USA

"Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life" (Galatians 6:7-8).

There are some great lessons taught in these two verses by the apostle Paul. Lessons all need to heed if they are going to enjoy everlasting life. Far too many think they can just live as they please and all is well between them and God. When in reality nothing could be farther from the truth.

We are warned not to be deceived. I dare say that all of us at one time have been the victims of some sort of deception. Whether buying a house, a car, or even the character of some individual. The warning sounded in this verse is spiritual in nature, of either sowing to the flesh or to the Spirit, thinking one can mock Jehovah. There are religious teachers who will say you can practice sin and God's grace will either cover or overlook such iniquities. John said, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1). It is not a question of what some man may teach, but what does the word of God say? Likewise, the Bible says we can deceive ourselves (1 Corinthians 3:18; 1 John 1:8). Do some think they can conceal their sins from the Lord? Or maybe they think they are the exception to God's law? Do not be deceived!

The word "mocked" is defined as "properly, to turn up the nose or sneer at; to mock, deride: passive, does not suffer himself to be mocked" (Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament). Wuests says, "The thought which Paul wishes to press home to the Galatians is that it is vain to think that one can outwit God by reaping a harvest different from that which a person has sown" (Wuest's Word Studies from the Greek New Testament). Obviously, there were individuals when Paul wrote who thought they could outwit God just like there are people today who no doubt has the exact same views. The Bible is filled with examples of people who tried to sneer at the commands of the Lord but suffered when violating His will. King Saul is a great example of one who turned his nose up at the command of God, yet he suffered the consequences of his failure (1 Samuel 15). Notice what he said, "I have performed the commandment of the Lord" (verse 13); "I have obeyed the voice of the Lord" (verse 20). He was told to completely destroy the Amalekites (verse 3), and yet he spared the best (verse 9). He was rejected by Jehovah from being king because of what he had sown (verse 26).

If one sows to his flesh, then of the flesh he will reap corruption. No matter what someone else may say or what an individual may think or feel, the results will be disastrous. Paul by inspiration revealed to us what sowing to the flesh involved. "Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the

kingdom of God" (Galatians 5:19-21). Those who practice such sins and are unwilling to repent and turn from them, will lose their most valuable possession, their soul. The word "corruption" which is used in this text is defined as, "in the Christian sense, the loss of salvation, eternal misery" (Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament).

Instead of sowing to the flesh, the child of God must sow to the Spirit. This involves the choice of conduct which one makes in life. Paul said, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law" (Galatians 5:22-23). It is only when one will follow the instruction of the Spirit, obey the Father's will, that he will reap the benefits of such a life. Eternal life is only promised to those who are godly (Titus 1:1-2). God made this promise, He cannot lie and so we are assured when life is over heaven will be awaiting us (Hebrews 6:18).

Just remember you cannot sow corn and reap beans. Neither can you sow to the flesh and reap everlasting life. God will not allow such to happen. Do you want everlasting life? Sow to the Spirit. The Lord cannot and will not be mocked regardless of who is trying to turn their noses up to Him. There are no exceptions.

Some Sin Is Okay

Mike Thomas | Bowling Green, Kentucky, USA

When Jesus' disciples plucked and ate raw grain on the Sabbath, His enemies accused Him of permitting His followers to violate the Law (See Matthew 12:1-2). Jesus responded with, "Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him: how he entered the house of God and ate the showbread which was not lawful for him to eat" (verses 3-4). Some will see Jesus' answer as a justification of "sin" if the situation demands it; that He was permitting His disciples to violate the Law by comparing it to when David violated the Law when he was hungry (1 Samuel 21:1-6). Consequently, some will use this text to defend the doctrine that God's Word may be compromised if the situation demands it. Thus, a Christian may remain in an adulterous marriage to keep his family together, or engage in social drinking to keep a job, or cohabit with a beau for the financial benefits. How do we respond to this ideology? We can know without any reservation that Jesus did NOT justify sin in Matthew 12 because:

1. He said David violated the Law when he ate the showbread (it what was "not lawful for him to eat," verse 4). This was not parallel to what His disciples did because they did not violate the Sabbath by plucking and eating raw grain. The Law forbade gainful labor as well as kindling a fire on the seventh day (see Exodus 35:2-4). His disciples did neither. They were not harvesting the fields by plucking a few heads of grain nor were they roasting anything on a fire. They simply rubbed grain together and ate it. No reasonable person would consider that employable activity or making an increase. So, Jesus' reference to David was not to liken their actions to sin, but to expose the Pharisees' inconsistencies in judgment. They did not condemn David for doing what was "unlawful" (see Leviticus 24:9), to satisfy his hunger, but were not willing to make the same exception for Jesus' disciples when they supposedly violated the Law to satisfy their hunger. To make exceptions for anyone who violated the Law was ungodly. To not extend it to Jesus' disciples (because of prejudice and envy) was hypocritical.

2. Jesus said the priests could work on the Sabbath. "Or have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless? Yet I say to you that in this place there is One greater than the temple" (verses 5-6). When God forbade labor on the Sabbath, He did not place that restriction on the priests in performing their duties for God, as in changing the showbread (Leviticus 24:8) or in offering sacrifices (Numbers 28:9-10). These were as much of a job for them as working in the fields or selling in the marketplace were for the typical Jew. Jesus' point was "there is One greater than the temple" in your presence who is doing a much greater work for God. Shouldn't He and His servants be excused from the restrictions of the Sabbath, to perform their God-given duties, if indeed they performed work in plucking grain to eat? Obviously, this allowance was not necessary because His disciples were "guiltless" in violating the no-work policy (Matthew 12:7), but even if they had, would it not be a loving thing to do in comparing their work to the priests (who "profane the Sabbath," verse 5) in meeting their

obligations to God (verse 11)?

3. Jesus said He is the Lord of the Sabbath (verse 8). He did not say that so He could rewrite the rules as He went along, as some might suggest. Instead, He was making the point that if anyone understood the God-given regulations for working on the Sabbath it was Jesus; He instituted it! Consequently, had His disciples erred in plucking grain He would have rebuked them because He came to fulfill the Law, not destroy it (Matthew 5:17). He plainly said, "For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven" (verses 18-19). That is not the philosophy of someone who made exceptions to the rules when it was convenient.

To accuse Jesus of teaching situational ethics in referring to David is to have Him undermine His own work to save man from sin. He did not violate God's will to satisfy His own hunger when He was tempted (cf. Matthew 4:2-4), so why would He condone that behavior in His disciples? He came to save people from sin (1 Timothy 1:15), not teach men to practice it if the pressure is too great. True servants of Christ will crucify sin (Romans 6:1-14) and suffer for what is right, regardless of the consequences. "For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully. For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God" (1 Peter 2:19-20). Peter would have never penned that message had Jesus taught him a different message in the grain fields on the Sabbath.

God Talks To Me (2 of 3)

William J. Stewart | Kingston, Ontario, Canada

We continue to look at the claim made by some that God speaks directly to them. Today, we want to consider some texts about the Holy Spirit, and the emphasis on the written word in the Bible.

John 14:26 - *But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.*

To many, this text is evidence that God speaks to them. Jesus said it would be so! Consider a few questions to help us understand the text.

Who was Jesus speaking to?

Some will boldly say He was talking to them. Let me state this as clearly as I can - Jesus could not have been talking to you because you were not there. He was addressing the apostles.

What was promised here?

Let's start with the latter portion of the text first. Jesus told the apostles the Holy Spirit would help them remember all that Jesus had said to them. Friend, you cannot remember something that you hadn't heard in the first place. This is not about you or me. It is about the apostles.

If the latter clause is about the apostles, then so is the former. The promise that the Holy Spirit would "teach you all things" was made to the apostles and no one else.

If the Holy Spirit is teaching people all things today, then what purpose does the Bible serve? If knowledge is imparted to believers by direct revelation of the Spirit, then a written record is pointless. Below we'll notice the emphasis placed on the written record.

John 15:26-27 - *But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with Me from the beginning.*

Again, many will claim this text is for themselves. The Lord said that He was sending the Spirit to me!!! Did He? I have another question to help us set this text into its proper context.

Were you with Jesus from the beginning?

Jesus plainly revealed that those He spoke to had been with Him from the beginning. The beginning of what? Creation? No. The beginning of His ministry. Were you there? Did you walk the dirt roads of Galilee with Jesus of Nazareth? Did you enter the gates of Jerusalem with the Son of God? The apostles did. That is who He was addressing.

Later, when it came time for another to be selected as an apostle, to fill the position vacated by Judas, Peter said:

...of these men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection (Acts 1:21-22).

Of the 120 disciples who were with the apostles, it seems only a few met this qualification, Matthias and Joseph Barsabas. You and I do not meet the stipulation necessary to be an apostle of Christ, nor do we meet Jesus' description of those whom He said the Spirit would testify to. As we shall see in a few moments, the Spirit testified to a select few, who became witnesses for Christ, and wrote down the message for us.

John 16:12-13 - *I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth, for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.*

Bear with just a few more questions.

Who was Jesus speaking to?

This is the same context as the previous texts we have looked at. We were not in Jesus' presence hearing His teachings. It was the apostles who were not able to bear the "many things" He wanted to share with them at that time.

Do you know all the truth?

Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would guide them into all truth. Can you quote the entire Bible? Do you understand every text in the Bible? Have you ever changed your belief on a Bible topic? If you answer these questions honestly, then you will come to the conclusion that you are not being led into all truth by the Holy Spirit. That promise was made to the apostles.

If the "guide you into all truth" clause was exclusive to the apostles, then so was the "things to come" clause. There is a long list of folks in our modern-day who have claimed to know details about end-time events, even to the point of declaring a date for the return of Christ. One by one, they have made their claims, attributed it to God, and then failed.

Emphasis On The Written Word

There are other Holy Spirit texts that have been misused, but these will suffice. Let's turn our attention to the emphasis in the Bible on the written word.

Please take the time to read 2 Timothy 3:16-17. Though Paul himself received directly revelation, he didn't tell his readers they would receive the same or that it was even necessary for them. He exalted the written word. When we read the Bible, we are reading *theospneustos* - God's breath. Further, he states we can be complete (whole, mature) and are able to do everything God expects of us based upon what is recorded in the Bible. It is our source of doctrine, it is able to bring to light our sins, and will direct us in the way we

should go. He doesn't say a thing about direct revelation, dreams or visions.

Again, Paul acknowledged to the Ephesians that he had received revelation from God, but told them "when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ" (Ephesians 3:3-4). He doesn't say the Ephesians would receive divine revelation. In order for them to understand what Paul understood, they were given a written record. When they read it, they could understand it. The same is true for us.

Peter wanted to make sure the Christians had a continual reminder of the truth (2 Peter 1:12-15, 19-21; 3:1-2). If every Christian received direct revelation from God, it wouldn't be necessary. The Bible makes no such promise, and so Peter emphasized the written word.

Finally, Jude spoke very plainly about revelation from God (Jude 1:3). It would not be an ongoing process, but a one-time for all time thing.

What Was the Purpose of Miracles | Part 1

Julius C. Nwankwo | Ahiaba, Nigeria

Among many denominational churches today, the claim is made that miraculous powers - such as healing the sick, opening the eyes of the blind, speaking in tongues, and other manifestations of the Holy Spirit--continue with God's people today. Each denomination insists that it receives this power directly from God and bases its claim for genuineness upon examples and cases of miracles which, it is contended, still occur and serve to confirm their assertion. But each religious group preaches a different doctrine which conflicts with that taught by another group that makes the same claim to work miracles. They are in strong opposition to and in irreconcilable disagreement with one another, and, yet, each claims to work miracles by God's power and that such manifestations are irrefutable proof of their true and divine character. Surely, it can be seen that God does not confirm with signs the preaching of one sect, while, at the same time, he is confirming with the same miracles the opposite and contradictory doctrines proclaimed by another sect. This would make God inconsistent and the author of confusion (1Corinthians 14:33). We know that He is not.

Who Had Power to Work Miracles?

Jesus. During the Lord's ministry upon the earth, He performed many miracles. ". . . For this Man works many signs" (John 11:47). "This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee" (John 2:11). He opened the eyes of the blind (Matthew 9:27-30), unstopped the ears of the deaf and loosed the tongue of the mute (Mark 7:32-35), caused the lame man to leap as a hart (Isaiah 35:6), and raised the dead (Matthew 11:5; John 11:43, 44). While He had compassion on men who were diseased and unfortunate, His primary reason for performing these miracles was to prove that He was indeed the Christ, the Son of God. "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).

The Apostles. The Lord promised His apostles the power to work miracles. "And as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons . . ." (Matthew 10:7-8). He assured them of additional power. "Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high" (Luke 24:49). "And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, 'which,' He said, 'you have heard from Me . . . But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses unto Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth'" (Acts 1:4-8). On the first Pentecost after the resurrection of Christ from the dead, the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles and gave them this power to work miracles and speak in languages which they had not learned (Acts 2: 1-11). One has but to read with some observation the Acts of the Apostles to learn that these men selected by Jesus to be His witnesses,

His personal representatives, received power to work many and various miracles. Paul said to the Corinthians, “Truly the signs of an apostle were accomplished among you...” (2 Corinthians 12:12). “And through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were done among the people...” (Acts 5:12).

Those on whom the apostles laid their hands. Certain ones in the church of the first century received miraculous gifts by the “laying on of the apostles’ hands.” Seven godly men, of honest report, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, were selected by the church and appointed by the apostles to do a special work in the church at Jerusalem--to distribute food to some widows who had been overlooked. These men were “... set before the apostles: and when they prayed, they laid their hands on them” (Acts 6:1-6). One of these men, Philip, later worked miracles as he preached the gospel in the city of Samaria (Acts 8:6). “And the people with one accord gave heed unto the things which Philip spoke, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did.” But Philip did not have the power to impart these miraculous gifts to others (Acts 8:16). This belonged exclusively to the apostles. Not until Peter and John, apostles of the Lord Jesus Christ, came to Samaria did any of the Christians there receive miraculous gifts, or the power to work miracles. “Then laid they [Peter and John] their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. And when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles’ hands the Holy Spirit was given...” (Acts 8:17-18).

In many places in the New Testament we are reminded that the transmission of this miraculous power to others belonged solely to the apostles. When Paul came to Ephesus, he found there certain ones who had been baptized unto John’s baptism. He taught them the truth about Jesus and the Holy Spirit, and they were immediately baptized into Christ. “... And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues [languages] and prophesied” (Acts 19:1-6). To the church in Rome, he wrote these words, “For I long to see you, that I [an apostle] may impart unto you some spiritual gift...” (Romans 1:11). “Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands” (2 Timothy 1:6).

Not all Christians in the early church received the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit. Paul discussed this very lesson with the Corinthian church. “Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?” (1 Corinthians 12:29-30). The obvious answer is, that all in the church did not exercise these miraculous gifts, only those on whom the apostles laid their hands.

Should I Be a Christian?

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

Introduction

By faith, Moses when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward (Hebrews 11:24-26).

Moses was faced with the alternatives of suffering “affliction with the people of God” or enjoying “the passing pleasures of sin” (Hebrews 11:25) When he made his choice, he was a mature man, forty years old, having attained the utmost in formal education possible in his age (Hebrews 11:24).

And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds. Now when he was forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren, the children of Israel (Acts 7:22-23).

He accounted “the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward” (Hebrews 11:26).

We face a parallel choice - not to leave Egypt or remain there, but to follow God’s way or remain in sin. “For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness

and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age” (Titus 2:11-12). Just as Moses, we should be mature enough to weigh the alternatives and act accordingly. The question is, should I be a Christian?

Reasons For

The apostle Paul summarized the rewards of being a Christian by proclaiming, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ” (Ephesians 1:3).

“Blessings” are things that are for our good or benefit. “Spiritual” refers to the spirit of man, that part of man which, being in God’s image, does not die. Thus, “spiritual blessings” benefit our spirits and therefore, are not just for this life, but even for eternity.

Any mature person is willing to resist present pleasures in order to secure future happiness. Thus, these blessings are far more important to receive than all the material riches and pleasures the world can offer, for they involve the soul’s eternal destiny.

For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works (Matthew 16:26-27).

What are these blessings which can only be found in Christ? In Christ we are “justified.” “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1). That is, we are made right in point of law and therefore do not have to suffer the penalty for sin, spiritual death.

Also, in Him we have “peace with God” (Romans 5:1), meaning we enjoy a harmony and fellowship with our Maker.

Christians also rejoice in freedom from the guilt of sin.

“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 6:17-18).

Having been born again, we are actually sons of God. “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God” (Romans 8:14). Think of it! Our Father is the Possessor of the universe!

In Christ we are “sanctified”, in other words, set apart from sin and to God, so that He will accept our service unto Him. “But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Corinthians 6:11).

Christians are “reconciled” to God, thus., although we had been separated from Him by our sins, He has forgiven us, and we are His friends again.

“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” (2 Corinthians 5:18).

Those who are in Christ are “redeemed.” “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace” (Ephesians 1:7). Christ paid the ransom price to buy us from slavery to Satan when He shed His blood, and as Christians we receive the benefits of that blood.

Disciples of Christ have the comfort of pouring out our hearts to God in prayer, a privilege aliens do not have. “And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him” (Colossians 3:17). “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).

Salvation is only in Christ. "Therefore I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory" (2 Timothy 2:10).

Thus, Christians enjoy the hope of "eternal life," for we are "in hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began" (Titus 1:2). This is the joyful "inheritance" of a home in Heaven.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time (1 Peter 1:3-5).

Through Him we have fellowship with God, sharing in the blessings that come from the Father through the Son and participating together in the work God has for his people to do. "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). "But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin (1 John 1:7).

In Christ Jesus we possess spiritual life. "He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life" (1 John 5:12).

How wonderfully and richly has God blessed us in His Son!

Reasons Against

Although the rewards of being a Christian are grand, many people give various reasons for remaining in the world. These reasons may be real, or they may simply be excuses, but, since we are examining all the facts, both "pro" and "con," honesty demands we look at them. What reasons do people give for not being Christians?

My Loved Ones

Many people do not want to become Christians because their loved ones are members of some human denomination. They reason, "If I leave my parents' church, I'll be saying they're going to Hell."

Actually, your obedience to the gospel will have no direct effect upon your family for either good or evil, for each of us must bear his own guilt or innocence.

The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself (Ezekiel 18:20).

However, your obedience could indirectly lead to their salvation, if they also were to respond to the gospel as the result of your good influence.

But it is true that becoming a Christian could lead to family trouble. Your family may strongly oppose you for following Christ. But the Lord will not take second place to our families.

Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to 'Set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law'; and 'a man's enemies will be those of his own household.' He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me (Matthew 10:34-37).

You must decide which means the most to you, your family or the Lord. For the sake of your soul, I hope

you choose Christ.

Sinful Lives

Others object, "I'm having too much fun with the sin of the world to be a Christian." As long as you are determined to sin, don't pretend to be a Christian. We have enough hypocrites in the church. But, remember, the road of sin is not the way of happiness, either in this life or in eternity. Even here and now, "the way of the unfaithful is hard" (Proverbs 13:15). In eternity, we will reap what we sow.

Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.

For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life (Galatians 6:7-8).

Furthermore, we must be always ready, for no one knows when the Lord shall return (Matthew 24:44).

Surely a mature person will choose the eternal joy of Christ over the brief pleasures of sin.

Good Morals

Some claim they don't need to be a Christian, for, they brag, "I am a good moral person." Cornelius, the centurion, was a very good person.

There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment, a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always.... And they said, 'Cornelius the centurion, a just man, one who fears God and has a good reputation among all the nation of the Jews, was divinely instructed by a holy angel to summon you to his house, and to hear words from you' (Acts 10:1-2, 22).

But he still needed salvation in Christ.

And he told us how he had seen an angel standing in his house, who said to him, 'Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon whose surname is Peter, who will tell you words by which you and all your household will be saved' (Acts 11:13-14).

That's because he, as well as you and I, sinned. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

The only way to escape the penalty of eternal death is through Christ. "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23). You will not earn your way to Heaven by good morals.

Sacrifices

Some fear the sacrifices they will have to make. It is true that Christ demands our all. "Then Jesus said to His disciples, 'If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me'" (Matthew 16:24).

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God (Romans 12:1-2).

He won't take second place in your life. "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Matthew 6:33).

If you give your life to Him, the sinful world will hate you and persecute you. The Master warned His disciples:

If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you (John 15:18-19).

The apostle Paul revealed, "Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution" (2 Timothy 3:12).

If you make this commitment to give yourself to the Lord, His people will help you as a spiritual family, you will receive all the blessings in Christ, and in eternity you will receive eternal life.

So Jesus answered and said, 'Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel's, who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time--houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions--and in the age to come, eternal life (Mark 10:29-30).

Is not self-sacrifice with persecution for the short time we live here a small price to pay for eternal life in heaven?

Can't Live the Life

Some say, "I just can't live the life of a Christian." If one were to say, "I will not live the life Christ demands," he might be speaking the truth. But don't say, "I cannot." God will not allow us to be faced with a temptation greater than we can bear.

No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it (1 Corinthians 10:13).

You can live the life of a Christian, if eternal life is important enough to you.

Want to Be Lost

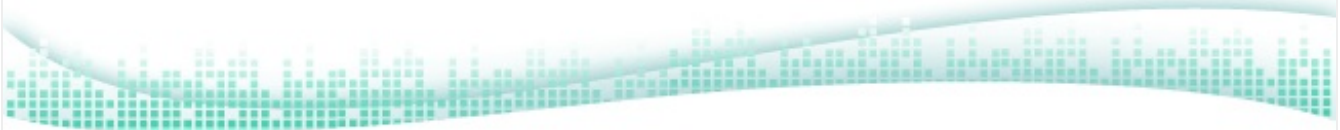
But there is one objection to being a Christian I cannot meet. If you can honestly say, "I don't want to go to heaven when I die. I want to spend eternity in the terror of hell rather than in the happiness of heaven," I will simply be forced to give in, "Go ahead; stay out of Christ, and your wish will be fulfilled."

Conclusion

If you will become a Christian, you will receive marvelous blessings now, along with persecutions, "and in the age to come, eternal life" (Mark 10:28-30). Remember, by following this course you will have done what any mature person would do, made provision for the future. If you gained the entirety of this world's wealth but lost your soul, what would you have gained (Matthew 16:26-27)?

The facts are in. The decision is yours. Christ or the world. Eternity depends on your choice. Christians longingly plead. The angels in Heaven are watching, hoping. The Spirit invites. The Son has prepared the way. The Father waits with open arms. Will you, with the wisdom of maturity, choose life, or will you foolishly and childishly, cling to death?

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



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