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Finally, brethren

WHATEVER THINGS

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

PHILIPPIANS
4:8

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

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.

"He is the eternal Truth, and the divine Life itself, personally joined with our nature; he is our Lord and our God; yet at the same time flesh of our flesh and bone of our bone. In him is solved the problem of religion, the reconciliation and fellowship of man with God..." ((Philip Schaff, **History of the Christian Church**. 1:100).

"There is no conflict between the historical Jesus of Nazareth and the ideal Christ of faith. The full understanding of his truly human life, by its very perfection and elevation above all other men before and after him, will necessarily lead to an admission of his own testimony concerning his divinity" (Ibid. 101).

Saved in One Day

Mike Thomas | Bowling Greek, Kentucky, USA

She wasn't used to him coming home in the middle of the night. He had been on the late shift for years, and not once did he ever leave his post to come home with an announcement. Her mind was racing with all sorts of potential problems.

"Honey, wake up, I have something to tell you" he said as he entered the room.

"What's wrong, did you lose your job? Is someone hurt? What's going on?"

"No, it's nothing like that," he assured her. "I have something very important to share with you that I learned from these two extraordinary men I met tonight. They're in the living room right now because I wanted you to hear what they have to say. Will you get up, please? This is so important."

“Okay, dear, I’ll do so right away. Just let me get some decent clothes on.”

Such was likely the beginning moments of the conversion of the Philippian jailer and his household. Earlier that night, “at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them” (Acts 16:25). This led to the jailer reaching out to them after a terrifying earthquake. The man “called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas” and asked, ‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’” (verses 30-31). From that moment, they taught the jailer a message about Jesus that was so convincing he also wanted “all who were in his house” to hear it (verse 32). The jailer then took Paul and Silas “the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized” (verse 33). It seems reasonable to me that the man who left to go to work that night came home a remarkably different man because of the hope found in the gospel. It was a life-changing message that all of his household would learn and obey in the course of one night. Amazing!

Do we realize the power of God’s word and its ability to transform people instantaneously? Sometimes we may think it takes multiple studies to show someone the plan of salvation. We see from the jailer and his family that (for some) it can be done in a brief period of time. Salvation is not a matter of complete enlightenment on all there is to learn in God’s word. It is the product of realizing the simplicity of the gospel and a willingness to believe and obey it. Just like Philip told the man who learned the gospel during a chariot ride and wanted to obey it:

“If you believe with all your heart, you may. And he answered and said, ‘I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.’ So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him” (Acts 8:37-38).

This all happened in the span of hours within one day. Not weeks, months, or years. He heard enough that day to know he was in sin and that the only remedy for it is in the One who “was led as a sheep to the slaughter” (verse 32).

I wonder, friends, if we forget the power of the gospel because of our familiarity with it. Has it become so commonplace that we do not appreciate the value of hearing God’s word for salvation (Acts 11:13-14), to have faith in Jesus as God’s Son (Romans 10:14-17)? Think of it. God loves humanity so much that He gave His only Son to pay for the spiritual debt of sin (Romans 5:6-11). Jesus not only endured that painful death and separation from His Father, in being condemned for our sin (2 Corinthians 5:21), He defeated the grave in being raised from the dead (1 Corinthians 15:1-4), which gives us assurance of life and accountability beyond the grave (Acts 17:31; 24:15). All of this demonstrates God’s wisdom, power, love, as well as His holiness. Consequently, He promises eternal life to all who believe and obey that Son (6:23; Hebrews 5:9). This requires courage and conviction from us in acknowledging Jesus as God’s Son (Romans 10:9-10), turning away from every sin we know of (Acts 3:19), and humbling ourselves enough to put on Jesus in water baptism, which sets us free from sin and places us in His spiritual body (Acts 22:16; Galatians 3:26-27). What a beautiful, beautiful plan!

Who are we to have been entrusted with such a message? Why were we so fortunate to have someone pass it down to us by taking the time to explain it to us? What will we do with that knowledge? How many people in the world have never heard it? How many have died without knowing it? How many in eternity want more than anything for us to tell their family and friends about it (Luke 16:27-28)? Will we shod our feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace and take it to them?

God intentionally designed the gospel in such a way that it is easy to understand and share (see 1 Corinthians 1:18-31). He is looking for people who are honest and humble enough to accept its simple message. “For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe” (verse 21). That uncomplicated plan is powerful enough to get a jailer to wake up his family in the middle of the night to learn and obey it; and persuasive enough to get a top government official to be baptized into Christ on the

side of the road. It remains powerful enough to transform lives today.

Who knows, you may obey it as a result of reading this article...because someone loved you enough to share its simple message with you.

Jesus Was Cursed Instead Of Us

Patrick Donahue | Harvest, Alabama, USA

Galatians 3:13 reads, "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree." In many cases, when the Bible says Jesus did something "for" us, it might only mean "on our behalf," but Galatians 3:13 is talking about something more than that. In this case, Jesus did something to "take our place." Based upon our failure to keep the law, we deserve to be cursed (verse 10). But the point of Galatians 3:13 is that Jesus was cursed instead so we wouldn't have to be cursed. That's why it's called the Vicarious Atonement.

Illustration: Suppose in old Dodge City a father volunteered and was allowed to take the death penalty by hanging for his son who was guilty of murder. Wouldn't it be accurate to say – "The father hath saved his son from the curse of the law, being made a curse for his son: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree"? Wouldn't that be the father substituting for his son? Wouldn't that be the father taking the son's penalty for him?

Maurice Barnett says (in "The Substitution Theory") - In fact, Jesus was not cursed but it appeared to others that He was. What a clever way to get around any verse that contradicts what we believe - just add "appeared" to any verse that refutes our theory. Does the following "silly" ring a bell?: "The Bible says Jesus died (1 Corinthians 15:3), but the modernists are correct that means Jesus only appeared to die on the cross. Because we shouldn't believe in Jesus' death since the Calvinists believe that." In 1992 a Baptist (Fred Vacaro) said against me in public debate – "Acts 22:16 teaches it appears our sins are washed away in baptism. It can't really be so since our sins are actually washed away by Jesus' blood." See the parallels to our brother Barnett's logic?

If not for Jesus' death, we would have been cursed. In his death, Jesus was made a curse. So Jesus was cursed instead of us being cursed, correct? Conclusion from Gal 3:13: Jesus substituted for us in this regard.

The History of the Institutional Controversy (Part 7)

Jefferson David Tant | Hendersonville, Tennessee, USA

Pepperdine University, in a February 12, 2013 press release, announced scholarships for the "lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered (LGBT) community." Noelle Marion, an alumna of the school, wrote: "The allocation of this scholarship is an indication that the university acknowledges that LGBT students are worthy of positive recognition."

Further evidence of Lipscomb's drift was seen in the January-April issue of "Wineskins." Gary Holloway, a Bible teacher at DLC, wrote: "My own experience teaching in a university where 70% of the students are from a cappella Churches of Christ confirms this cultural shift away from the importance of denominational labels to a deep concern for relational and spiritual union. It is not unusual in a typical week for our students to attend a Monday night instrumental praise worship at a local Church of Christ, a Tuesday night ecumenical teaching session at First Baptist downtown, Wednesday night church at a fairly traditional Church of Christ, and Thursday night Taize worship at a Presbyterian church—all before going home on the weekend to their parents' Church of Christ where many think we are the only Christians!" Professor Holloway goes on to say that "Many of us cannot deny that there are many devout Christians who are unimmersed."

Mike Williams, a teacher of freshman Bible at DLC, delivered a sermon at Fourth Ave. Church of Christ on March 15, 2006 titled "Baptism and Christian Unity." "We need to view baptism in the context of God's story, God seeks our hearts more than right ritual..." In the sermon, he spoke of three categories—those baptized into a denomination, those sprinkled, and those who have never been "baptized" at all. He warned his listeners to "avoid the proof text approach," and to "avoid pattern theology." "We welcome all believers in Christ." Well, what about the unimmersed—

"perhaps sprinkled...If they choose not to be immersed, we welcome them on the journey as part of the family...What about those who have never been baptized?...And so, for those who have never been baptized, we welcome the opportunity to study with you about the beauty and significance of baptism, yet we will also welcome you..."

"The Great Communion" was held October 4, 2009, in an effort to promote unity between Christian Churches, Disciples of Christ and churches of Christ. This was a commemoration of Campbell's "Declaration and Address" in 1809. Moody Coliseum at A.C.U. was the site of one of these meetings. In preparation for the Lord's Supper, a choir sang with instrumental music. ACU's president, Royce Money, participated in the service. David Flee of Lipscomb University spoke at a similar service in Nashville. The closing prayer was led by Rhonda Lowry, wife of DLU's president Randy Lowry. A closing song was sung by a group from the Disciples of Christ. This French-speaking African-American group used bongo drums as accompaniment. Unsuspecting parents send their children to these schools thinking they are safer than the public universities. Perhaps their mottoes should be: "Give us your children. We will destroy their faith and show them how ignorant their parents are."

I have seen many liberal trends through the years in the bulletins and journals I get from institutional churches. Bar-B-Q dinners and clowns with a charge for admission. Maurice Barnett wrote that the Grove Avenue church in San Antonio

"advertised in their bulletin that the church had engaged two professional bowlers to give, over several weeks, bowling lessons to the young people in the congregation. It was billed as a great opportunity for 'fellowship' for the young people. They capped that by saying 'This program cannot but help produce an intense interest in Bible study.' Christmas pageants with instrumental music. Million-dollar gymnasiums and coffee shop facilities. Fashion shows in church buildings with an admission fee charged (Manhattan Church of Christ--\$15 admission). Pulpit exchanges with denominational preachers. Women taking leading roles in worship assemblies. A survey was cited by the "Christian Chronicle" showing that 90% of the young people in institutional churches see nothing wrong with instrumental music in worship. Thus, in the next generation, when the old folks die off, its use will not even be questioned and the pianos will be moved in without controversy."

The White Station church in Memphis has opened a coffee shop, which is to be used for social activities, birthday parties, card games, etc. Some churches are hosting "Christian Rock Bands" and charging for admission. Others build family life centers, with basketball, shuffleboard and yoga facilities. The claim is, "If you don't provide this, the young people won't come. So, "If you can't lick 'em, join 'em." A church in Birmingham has a dance teacher on staff to teach dance to kids and adults.

Golf, anyone? The Hillcrest Church of Christ in Decatur, Georgia, hosted its "First Annual Golf Tournament" (8/6/10). Participation was \$100. Perhaps their contributions were too low to fund all the projects of the church, so why not a big fundraiser?

It is happening in more and more churches throughout the land. "On Saturday, Feb. 10, 2007, the Richland Hills church of Christ will begin holding a weekly Saturday evening worship service that will include the use of musical instruments in worship, and an observance of the Lord's Supper. Jon Jones (the former pulpit minister and one of the elders) said that the elders 'fully and completely' endorsed the decision. At an adult Bible study he said, 'There is unity in our eldership, and we are so thankful for that.'" This church has 24

“ministers,” and five of them are women.

On the TV program, “In Search of the Lord’s Way,” Mack Lyon spoke of the problem of women in leadership roles in churches. Many voiced strong protest to his words. One woman wrote, “God help us. This message is from Churches of Christ.” She was upset that the TV audience might think this represented the church at large. She went on to say, “I couldn’t disagree more with his message. And yet people in Abilene hear that it’s from Churches of Christ. Pretty soon, they’ll all be dead, including Mack Lyon, and the prob-lem of traditional coC’ers will snuff itself out.”

"What Good Thing Shall I Do That I May Have Eternal Life?"

Jim Mickells | Lewisburg, Tennessee, USA

"Now behold, one came and said to Him, 'Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?' So He said to him, 'Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments.' He said to Him, 'Which ones?' Jesus said, "'You shall not murder,' 'You shall not commit adultery,' 'You shall not steal' 'You shall not bear false witness,' 'Honor your father and your mother,' and, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" The young man said to Him, 'All these things I have kept from my youth. What do I still lack?' Jesus said to him, 'If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.' But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions" (Matthew 19:16-22).

Could you think of any greater question one could ask the Lord than this, about having eternal life? I do not believe this rich young ruler is any different than the vast majority of the people in the world today. Generally speaking, most everyone you talk with is interested in going to heaven when their life comes to an end. Yet many have the same problem which this individual whom Jesus was teaching had. Notice a few things with me from this story.

I have often wondered if this young man thought there was only “one good thing” he needed to do to have everlasting life? Many today it seems hold to such thinking. I spoke to an individual just recently. When I asked him how one is saved according to the Bible, basically he held this view. He said that God was sovereign and if one was to be saved eternally, it was simply because the Lord chose him. He didn’t even believe there was one thing an individual had to do. It was one thing Jehovah did. Yet there are others who contend you are saved at the point of faith. If that is the case there is only one thing which you need to do, just have faith in the Lord. Is that what Jesus told this young man? No! Faith is necessary but it is not the only thing needed.

This young man did a lot of good things. (1) He came to the right person – Jesus. (2) Asked the right question – what shall I do to have eternal life? (3) Seems to have the right attitude – came running and knelt before the Lord (Mark 10:17). (4) Had respect or reverence for Christ – called Him Good Teacher (which Jesus explained meant that He was God). (5) Was a particularly good moral person – not a murderer, adulterer, thief, liar, honored his parents. (6) He had done this from an early age. Yet despite all this Jesus told him he still lacked one thing.

What did the Lord tell this young man to do? Go and sell what you have and give it to the poor. Why? Because he cared more about his possessions than he did God who gave them. They became his god! He went away sorrowful, unwilling to sell those possessions, and to take up the cross and following Jesus. Is there something in your life which you would need to get rid of to be a follower of Christ? It may not be material possessions, though I do believe this is a problem many have in our great nation. It could be any number of sins or sinful relationships which someone is involved in. We must deny self, take up the cross

daily, bearing any shame and reproach faced as a Christian, and be willing to make any sacrifice for our Lord.

Are you interested in eternal life? If there are one or more things you need to do to be saved would you humbly submit to them? If you believe that Jesus is the Christ (Acts 16:30-31), have you repented of your sins (Acts 2:38), confessed with your mouth that Jesus is Lord (Romans 10:9-10), and been baptized in water for remission of sins (Acts 8:36; 22:16)? Would you do this to be saved by the grace of God, or are you like this rich young ruler, willing to go away still in your sins? You may be a good mother or father, a good provider for your family, a good neighbor in your community, and even an excellent citizen in the nation where you live. But have you submitted to the commands of the Lord to become His follower? All need forgiveness which is offered through the blood of Christ regardless of how good they might be (Ephesians 1:7).

In Mark's account, it says that Jesus loved him (Mark 10:21). He wanted to save him no doubt, but this young man was unwilling. The Lord loves and wants to save all from eternal damnation, yet are you willing (John 3:16-17)? He will redeem people from their sins but only when they comply with His terms, not their own.

Is Gambling A Sin?

William Stewart | Odessa, Ontario, Canada

It is a common thing to see advertising for a variety of gambling options on TV, on billboards, and online. They have been some exceptionally witty and amusing ads put together to entice people to take a chance on the lottery. Scratch tickets and dropping numbered balls are not for everyone, so maybe a game of bingo might appeal. There are even church groups that conduct bingos. The bright lights and piercing chimes of a casino catch the fancy of some. There have even been government-operated casinos popping up throughout Ontario with a host of games to entertain. Not interested in the lottery, bingo, or casino games? You can legally bet on the outcome of sporting events through the gaming commissions that regulate lotteries and casinos. No bookie required. If you want to gamble, but don't want to leave the house, you can do so! You can participate in all the above via the internet.

To say that people are obsessed with gambling is an understatement. In the 2018-19 annual report from OLG (Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corporation), we're told "...*OLG and its Land-based Gaming Service Providers contributed more than \$5.0 billion in economic activity in the Province of Ontario.*"¹ Just under half of that amount (\$2.47 billion) are profits which the government then directs to various provincial programs. The government has found a "fun way" to tax those who are willing to participate. The OLG devotes a fraction of their proceeds to "Responsible Gambling" programs and counseling services to help people who are betting away their life savings and pay cheques. How evil is that?! If our government were genuinely concerned about these folks, it would outlaw gambling. The problem is there's too much money to be made in gambling to stop it.

Forget about the potential of winning, the likelihood of loss, the government programs funded, etc.. There is a more basic question which the Christian should be concerned about. Is gambling sinful? Sadly, some do not exercise self-control when gambling, and as a result, hurt themselves and their family. Without a doubt, this lack of self-control is sinful. Paul acknowledged we are able to do all kinds of things but cautioned that we should "not be brought under the power" of anything (1 Corinthians 6:12). It doesn't matter what it is, if we are under the control of something (a bottle, nicotine, drugs, food, etc.), it is sinful. The same is true of gambling. For some folks, gambling is sinful on the basis that they will become or already are addicted to it. But one might reason, "I'll be able to control myself," or "I know my limits," but why would you want to give an open door to temptation?

Many will justify gambling because it is associated with charity. Not too far from us, you can find the 1,000 Island Charity Casino. Well, that's good, isn't it? You can support charity and have fun at the same time. If

I were to stand at the front door of the casino and ask folks why they are there, I doubt I would hear anyone say they came to make a charitable donation. That is what the loser says the next day if someone at work asks how it went. No one buys a Lotto649 ticket to give to charity. Those who make such a claim not only have an issue with gambling but also with lying. People don't go to bingo, the casino, or a lottery kiosk to make charitable donations.

Folks gamble, be it a slot machine, bingo, the racetrack, whatever it is, to obtain an exponential increase on their money. Now, that, in and of itself, is not sinful. An investor will buy stocks or commodities anticipating an increase in value. Some of these markets are very risky. If one enters these volatile markets, it is necessary to do adequate analysis beforehand. To just jump into the market without proper investigation is not vastly different from buying a ticket for this weekend's Super Max draw. One is not a good steward of the blessings of God if he is willing to exchange it for a chance to win based on the roll of a dice or drop of a ball. Recall how upset the master was with the servant who buried the money placed in his hand (Matthew 25:24-30). This man, though identified as lazy and wicked, was more responsible than one who will lose money on a game of chance.

No one entering the arena of gambling does so with a desire for someone else to win his money. A desire to win is inherent in gambling. The gambler doesn't want another to walk away with his money; he wants to walk away with the other person's money. Can we reconcile that with the Christian character? Paul said that we should look out for the interests of others and not be selfish (Philippians 2:3-4). Can it be said of the one who exclaims, "BINGO!" that his concern is for others and not himself? If the slot machine pours out a bunch of coins into your bucket, realize that you just pocketed the losses of 100s of people who sat there before you. Would you exploit others to your own benefit? It is despicable to do so. We have laws against such in the business world - but in the gambling world, it is acceptable for the winner to profit, not from the failure of one or two, but the masses.

The gambler hopes for everyone else to fail. How do we reconcile that with the Bible? Paul said that he did not seek his own profit, "but the profit of many" (1 Corinthians 10:33). Can we gather up our winnings from the table and in the next breath, with a good conscience invite those who will go home empty-handed to church?

"I like games," one might say. Do you like the games more than the souls of men? Do you like the games more than your own soul? There is nothing wrong with the games - it's the wager, the bet. You can play poker or bingo or blackjack for fun and for free. Leave the money out of it. Don't gamble.

1 about.olg.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/OLG-Annual-Report-2018-19_EN.pdf

Changing Oversight

Timothy Massawe | Moshi, Tanzania

A friend of mine and brother in Christ sent me the following announcement and requested me to write a Biblical review on it.

"On Wednesday, July 1, 2020 an important announcement was made with regard to the changing of oversight of lords work in East Africa from Bear Valley Eldership to the elders at Hoover Church in Alabama. Annexed is a copy of the front page of the announcement.

"An important announcement regarding Tanzania Missions:

"The elders of the Bear Valley church of Christ and the administration of the Bear Valley Bible Institute are excited to announce a transition of Tanzania Missions (formerly known as TZ2000) and the Andrew Connally School of Preaching to the oversight of the elders of the Hoover church of Christ near Birmingham, Alabama.

"The Bear Valley Bible Institute will continue to operate the school of preaching per the request of the elders of the Hoover congregation. We are excited to team up with our brethren at Hoover to maximize the good work being done in Arusha and throughout East Africa.

*“Beginning August 1, all support should be sent and made payable to:
Hoover church of Christ
3248 Lorna Road
Hoover, AL 35216””*

East Africa represent 5 countries, Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Burundi and Rwanda. Tanzania’s population in 2020 is 59.73 million; Kenya’s is 53,771,296; Uganda’s is 45,741,007; Rwanda’s is 12.95 million, and Burundi’s 11,998,016.

I am not questioning the Hoovers financial strength to evangelize the outlined population; I am not even trying to say nothing good has been done by the brethren, but I am deeply concerned about that transition, and the following issues call for biblical attention.

The first issue; Whether we have the authority from God. “And whatever you do, in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him” (Colossians 3:17). Is it true that the changing of oversight was done in the name of the Lord? I read the announcement which contains about two pages and yet not even a single verse from the Bible was mentioned support that transition.

The second issue; Whether the oversight of elders goes beyond the local congregation they serve. One of the good examples we read concerning the limitation of an oversight of the elders is in Acts 14:23. Paul and Barnabas preached and established churches in different cities; they appointed elders in every congregation (Acts 14:26-27). The church at Antioch did not oversee the local churches started by Paul and Barnabas in spite of the fact that it (Antioch) was responsible for sending out the preachers who established these churches.

In the New Testament, we don’t find the term Mother church or sponsoring congregation. All churches are equal before the lord including the giant churches we see today. The elders of the New Testament were not continental elders or state governors, they were to exercise their authority within a local congregation.

Their oversight was limited to the congregation they served as elders. Paul, addressing the Ephesian elders, charged them to “take heed to yourselves and to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers ...” (Acts 20:28). That is how it should be today.

Like wise, Peter said, “the elders which are among you I exhort ... Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof ...” (1 Peter 5:1-3). That alone shows the limit and extent of the authority of the elders.

It is shocking to hear that there is a congregation which agreed to oversee the work of congregations in East Africa. There are some congregations in East Africa that now have elders. Will they also be under the oversight of the Hoover eldership? If one church can oversee the work of God in 5 countries in Africa that have congregations and elders, why do you think it is unbiblical to have that church oversee the work of God in the whole world? I am sure Pope Francis will love those who subscribe to this idea since it supports his position in Vatican.

Third Issue: Whether the oversight of Elders is transferable. The oversight of elders is a divine duty (1 Peter 5:1-3; Acts 20:28). This duty can not be transferred from one church to another. If there is a biblical justification to transfer an oversight from one congregation to another, then there must be a justification to delegate the authority of a local congregation to appoint those elders.

I have written several articles to urge brethren to stand with the teachings we received from the apostles. I stand to be corrected if what I said does not align well with the teachings of Apostles. I am glad there are some elders who have observed that error, and they have taken a stand for TRUTH. I am not asking brethren to do too much; I am only begging them to follow the New Testament Pattern, and I am confident

that will make our Lord Jesus happy in heaven.

Matthew 24 | Part 1

Patrick Andrews | Conway, Arkansas, USA

"And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and his disciples came to him for to shew him the buildings of the temple. And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down. And as he sat upon the Mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying; tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming <parousia>, and of the end of the world <aion>?" (Matthew 24:1 -3)

The misunderstanding of these three verses, along with this entire chapter has caused a lot of people to go astray. Their failure to rightly divide the truth (2 Timothy 2:15) has led them down the paths to Premillennialism, and Preterism, to just name a few. This departure from truth has forced them to constantly be adapting their false doctrines to fit arguments they can't answer and to redefine words to make them fit into their new paradigm.

Another tactic they are forced to use is to dogmatically impose a particular definition of a word or words to bolster their false doctrine. Many words have more than one definition. An honest person will use the context of the sentence or the subject to determine which definition is correct. An honest person will also be aware that scripture cannot be broken (John 10:35); in other words, one scripture is not going to contradict another scripture.

When one hammers a preferred definition of a word into a text of scripture and then declares that it is the only one, solely because it fits their false doctrine best, it results in their wresting, twisting, and maligning the Word of God to their own destruction (2 Peter 3:16).

One group that is guilty of this misuse of the scriptures refers to themselves as "Preterist." They are also known as "Realized Eschatologists." They believe in what is commonly known as the "70 A.D. doctrine." They believe that Jesus has already returned, that the resurrection is past, and that there will be no future Day of Judgment. They believe that all prophecy was fulfilled in 70 A.D. when Jerusalem was destroyed.

Please note Matthew 24:1-3 above. I have highlighted two Greek words that have more than one meaning to illustrate how these false teachers are guilty of twisting the scriptures to suit their views. The two words in English are "Coming" and "World". In Greek, they are "Parousia" and "Aion."

I have provided their definitions below and as you can see, both words have more than one meaning and can refer to more than one event in time.

*"52. parousia <parousia>, par-oo-see'-ah
from the present participle of 3918; a being near, i.e. advent (often, return;
specially, of Christ to punish Jerusalem, or finally the wicked); (by implication)
physically, aspect:--coming, presence."*

*"65. aiwn <aion>, ahee-ohn'
from the same as 104; properly, an age; by extension, perpetuity (also past);
by implication, the world; specially (Jewish) a Messianic period (present or
future):--age, course, eternal, (for) ever(-more), (n-)ever, (beginning of the ,
while the) world (began, without end)."*

From these two words in this verse and taking note of the various definitions, you could claim that Matthew 24: 1-3 is teaching a number of different things; such as:

1. That Jesus would be coming back soon to only destroy Jerusalem in judgment, and that would be the end of only the Jewish age.
(a) This view contradicts I Thessalonians 4:13-18, so this view cannot be the correct one.
2. That when Jesus does appear, Jerusalem will have already been destroyed, maybe millennia ago, and that is when He will punish the wicked and that will be the end of the Jewish age.
(a) This view contradicts Colossians 2:14 and Romans 7:1-4, so this view cannot be the correct one.
3. That when Christ returns to punish Jerusalem with destruction the world will end.
(a) This view contradicts 2 Peter 3:8-12, so this can't be right.
4. That when Jesus does return, He will only destroy Jerusalem and the Jewish age, but will not punish the wicked.
(a) This view contradicts 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9, so this view cannot be correct.
5. That when Jesus does return He will destroy Jerusalem and the wicked and that will be the end of the world.
(a) This view contradicts Acts 1:9-11, so this view can't be right.
6. That when Jesus does return, only Jerusalem will be judged and destroyed. The world and the wicked will escape judgment and destruction and will continue on forever.
(a) This view contradicts 2 Corinthians 5:10, so this view can't be right.
7. That when Jesus does appear, Jerusalem will have already been destroyed, along with the Jewish age. This coming will result in the end of the world and the end of time when the wicked will be judged.
(a) This view doesn't contradict other scriptures; in fact, it harmonizes with all the passages listed above, as well as others that speak of the end of the world and judgment.

There are three different questions asked of Jesus in these few verses. Whether or not the disciples understood how they were interrelated with one another or not doesn't change the facts of Jesus' answers.

The destruction of Jerusalem was one of the topics that were being discussed. The "Parousia" of Christ was another and the end of the world, at least in the way the disciples asked their questions, was a third topic. However, from the way in which Jesus answered the questions and the fact that the last two questions are inseparable, I think we can conclude that the disciples might have asked three questions, but Jesus answered only two by combining His "Parousia" and the end of the "Aion" as one and the same event.

Next month, God willing, we will spend some more time on these three verses.

Raising Money for the Lord's Work:

How and by Whom? (Part 2)

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Scriptural Perspective

The church is God's agency on this earth through and by which the Lord wants His job done. In the New Testament, the church is the only authorized body by God to carry on the work that God has seen fit to assign to her. (Please see Ephesians 1:20-23; Colossians 1:18; Ephesians 4:4; 16; 1 Corinthians 12:20). The church operating in the congregational capacity carries on the work that God intends to be done; besides that, there is no other.

The following scriptural examples are germane: When the Jerusalem church had need, it was the members of the Jerusalem church that contributed to provide that need (Acts 2:45; 4:32-37). They never formed a separate body (e.g. COC JERUSALEM FARMERS or COC JERUSALEM LAND OWNERS) to take up this work, either partly or fully and we never find another body taking this up.

When famine eroded the whole world around AD 45, during the reign of Claudius Caesar, it was the church

in Antioch that made contributions from her members to solve the need of the brethren in Judea (Acts 11:27-30). Note that this situation was a benevolent act to meet a non-created need and it was done by the church, the Divine body, not a human body, separate and apart from the church.

Paul made it very clear in Ephesians 4:16, and Colossians 2:19 that the church is to grow and carry out her work by herself.

*“From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted **by that which every joint supplieth**, according to the effectual working **in the measure of every part**, maketh increase of the body **unto the edifying of itself in love**”*
(emphasis L.E)

The above scripture clearly shows that the church is to **“edify itself.”** Church edification is **not** to be done by another body, separate and apart from the church. But the church is to edify herself by what every joint (her members) supplies. Church building is an avenue for edification and since it is the Divine will for the church to edify herself, the church should raise money for it by her members and not through any human body or organization. This is a direct statement in the Holy Writ, impressing upon us that the church is to do her work by herself. To do or teach otherwise is to disregard God’s Word.

When there was a problem, non-created need, which was beyond the church in Jerusalem, Paul solicited support from different churches and support was sent to Jerusalem church from different churches (Romans 15:25-27; I Corinthians; 16:1-4). Note that a human body did not take over the work, nor is there any hint or slightest indication of a joint effort of two separate bodies to meet this need.

During Paul’s missionary journeys, he collected funds from churches (not from human bodies, separate and apart from the church) to preach. He mentioned this in 2 Corinthians 11:8 and Philippians 1:5; 4:10-20. Someone tries to use this example to imply that since churches sent support to Paul, it means that he pooled funds from different churches to preach. This is not true for each church sent directly to him, and he used it for his personal needs (2 Corinthians 11:9; Philippians 4:18).

And even if it is granted (for the sake of argument) that Paul pooled funds together (of course, he never did), the so-called pooled funds were not from human bodies, -separate and apart from the church.

In 1 Corinthians 16:1-4, the collection which was used to do God’s work (benevolence) was contributed by saints (members of the Corinthian church) and for the saints (members of the Jerusalem church). He said “...let everyone of you lay by in store...” (verse 2). He was referring to every member of the Corinthian church (1 Corinthians 1:2), and the same command he gave to other churches in the region of Galatia (verse 1). There is not the slightest indication that a human body took up this work and began to solicit for help to accomplish it; nor is there any hint that a human body separate and apart from the churches should make contributions toward it. There is no command in the New Testament where a congregation ever raised funds to do her work from others who are not members of the congregation. Besides, no apostle solicited funds from or requested fund from any human organization for a congregation’s work. Any Christian who advocates such today is going beyond the doctrine of Christ.

The Authority of the Scriptures

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Through the years Bible believers have tended to treat the Bible as a book of curiosities. One “scholar” wrote a series of books on “All the ... in the Bible” - all the trees, all the animals, all the birds, etc. Some have committed many of the genealogies of the Bible to memory. I’m with the apostle Paul - “But avoid foolish disputes, genealogies, contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and useless” (Titus 3:9; cf. 1 Timothy 1:4). The key here is “useless.” The Bible is preeminently useful, its practical guidance shows us the way to heaven. What should the Bible mean to us?

Word of God

The value of the Scriptures begins with the fact they are from God, the Creator of the universe, not from man. "...No prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:19-21). Those who contend the Bible just contains the opinions and prejudices of ancient men are dead wrong, spiritually dead. The prophets characteristically introduced their messages with "Thus says the Lord" (354 occurrences in Isaiah - Malachi). Not only did the Old Testament writers speak for the Lord, the New Testament authors did as well. The divine will "has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets" (Ephesians 3:1-7). We should welcome "it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe" (1 Thessalonians 2:13).

Authoritative

Since the Scriptures are from God, they are authoritative. The Master declared of the Mosaic Law:

"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" (Matthew 5:19).

He emphasized, "the Scripture (Old Testament - KS) cannot be broken" (John 10:35), i.e. set aside as untrue. Of the New Testament, Paul taught we must "not go beyond what is written" (1 Corinthians 4:6, **English Standard Version**).

Complete

The Scriptures are complete; they contain all the will of God for us. The Holy Spirit led the apostles into "all the truth" (John 16:13). There was none left for Muhammad (Muslims) or Joseph Smith (Mormons) to reveal. The curse of God rests upon any, even an angel from heaven, who would add to it (Galatians 1:6-9). Both Muhammad and Joseph Smith claimed their "revelations" came from an angel.

Sufficient

Thus the Scriptures, the inspired, "God-breathed," Word of God, the Bible, are sufficient to meet all our spiritual needs.

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

Everything we need to know, believe, and do in order to be all the Lord would have us to be and do to go to heaven in the hereafter is found in Scripture.

Unchanging

All things merely human change with the changing times. Until 2020 the Roman Catholic Church plainly condemned homosexuality. Now the Pope has decided it's OK for practicing homosexuals to live together in a civil union.

But, the divine Scriptures have not changed since they were completed in the first century.

"All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and its flower falls away, but the word of the lord endures forever.' Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you" (1 Peter 1:24-25).

Our Responsibility

Thus we are obligated to believe all Scripture, both the Old Testament (Acts 24:14) and the New (1 Thessalonians 2:13). We also must follow it both in what we teach (1 Peter 4:11) and practice (Matthew 28:20; 2 John 9).

Basis of Judgment

The Word of Christ, found in the Scriptures, is the divine standard by which we shall be judged on the last,

great day (John 12:48).

Conclusion

As John Clifford so beautifully penned in his poem, "The Hammer and The Anvil":

*Last eve I passed a blacksmith's door
And heard the anvil ring the vesper chime,
When, looking in, I saw upon the floor
Old hammers worn with beating years of time.
'How many anvils have you had,' said I
'To wear and batter all these hammers so?'
'Just one,' said he, then said with twinkling eye
'The anvil wears the hammers out you know.'
And so, I thought, the anvil of God's word
For ages skeptics blows have beat upon;
Yet, though the noise of falling blows was heard,
The anvil is unharmed—the hammers gone!*

Will you not make the Scriptures your rule of life and guide to Heaven?



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