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

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Finally, brethren

WHATEVER THINGS

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

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.

*"But what does Paul mean by election? (1 Thessalonians 1:4 - K.S.) Not that rigid, arbitrary choice of God first promulgated by Augustine, and afterward emphasized by Calvin, for such doctrine was not then known. Such an absolute, unchangeable thing as Calvinistic election could only have been fittingly made known to an apostle by direct revelation, but Paul knew the election here spoken of by mere sensuous evidence. To elect means to choose, and the choosings of God do not annul the free will or agency of man. Thus Israel is chosen (Deut. 7:6); yet afterwards cast off because of unbelief (Matt. 8:11,12). Election is not made absolute by God; on the contrary, the choosing of God requires that we ourselves make our calling and election sure (2 Pet. 1:10); it does not make our salvation sure, for as supplemental to it we ourselves must still work out our own salvation with fear and trembling (Rom. 9:11). We may make shipwreck of the faith to which we have been called or chosen (1 Tim. 1:20), and Paul's exhortations suggest that some of these elect in Thessalonica were in danger of doing this - 1 Thess. 4:1-8" (J.W. McGarvey and Philip Y. Pendleton, **Thessalonians, Corinthians, Galatians, and Romans**. 5).*

Question from Nigeria about Deacons

Please help me and explain these questions:

Question One

Which one is the correct formality for choosing deacons or bishops?

Is it according to 1 Timothy 6:1-5 or according to Acts 14:23. Are they not the same formality?

Are the deacons ordained in Acts 6:1-5 emergency deacons! Are they not deacons of the church?

The 12 apostles that ordained them, are they not the elders of the church?

Please explain more on this because some of the preachers here argue that the one in Acts 6:1-5 is not the correct formality and they quote 1 Timothy 14:23 as the correct formality. That is where the argument lies.

Please also send ur reply to someone I know you know, xxxxxxx. He is among the preachers that disagree

with me on this.

I am fearful that what Paul wrote in Acts 20:29-30 has stated happening in Churches of Christ especially in ABA area.

Question Two

Doesn't a deacon has the right to leave his former church and go to preach and establish another church like Stephen did to Samaria?

First Question

I believe you meant to reference 1 Timothy chapter three rather than chapter six. 1 Timothy 3:1-13 gives qualifications for elders and deacons, but it does not mention how they are to be selected or appointed. Acts 14:23 and Titus 1:5 reveal that elders are appointed by an evangelist.

The word translated "appoint" (**New King James Version, New American Standard Bible, English Standard Version**) or "ordain" (**King James Version**) is the Greek word "*kathistemi*," which means "*to place, set... constitute, appoint*" (William Mounce, **Mounce's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words**. 1177).

Selection and appointment are not the same thing. For example, under the U.S. Constitution, the electoral college, elected by citizens in the various states, elects or chooses the President, and the Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court appoints him to the office.

This is parallel to selecting and appointing men to serve as officers in the local church. One passage tells us how church officers are selected, and another informs us elders are appointed.

The only passage that reveals how officers in the congregation are selected is Acts 6:1-3. The apostles directed "the multitude of the disciples" (Acts 6:2) in Jerusalem, "Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business" (Acts 6:3). The phrase "seek out" is translated "select" in the **NASB** and "pick out" in the **ESV**.

The word "deacon" (Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:8,10,12,13) is a transliteration of the Greek word "*diakonos*" meaning "*one who renders service to another; an attendant, servant*" (Mounce. 1350). The men selected by the church in Jerusalem were to execute the "daily distribution" (Acts 6:1). "Distribution" is from the Greek word "*diakonia*," meaning "*servicing, service*" (Mounce. 1350). They were to "serve" ("*diakoneo*"), the verb form of "*diakonos*" (verse 2). It seems apparent to me these men were the first deacons, they were selected by the entire congregation, and appointed by the apostles, who were overseeing the congregation in Jerusalem before any elders had been selected and appointed. (The first mention of elders in the church is Acts 11:30).

I conclude that all the members of the congregation select their officers (elders and deacon). An evangelist appoints elders, and elders appoint deacons.

Second Question

Yes, I believe Acts 6:1-6; 8:5-13, 40 authorize a deacon to leave the congregation where he is a deacon and establish other congregations. He then ceases being a deacon and becomes an evangelist (Acts 21:8).

Jesus Was Forsaken - Some Objections Considered

Pat Donahue | Harvest, Alabama, USA

Let's consider some objections to the obvious meaning of Matthew 27:46 that Jesus was forsaken by the Father.

Jesus Was Not Forsaken But Only Fulfilling Psalms 22:1?

Recently some brethren have been saying Jesus wasn't really forsaken on the cross, but was only calling attention to the fact that he was fulfilling Psalms 22. But if Jesus was fulfilling "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?," wouldn't that mean he was forsaken? Since when does an event in the New Testament become untrue just because it was foretold in the Old?

Did God Allow David To Write His Own Thoughts In Psalms 22:1-2?

Some say David was not really forsaken in Psalms 22:1; he only "felt" that way. This dangerous view that God allowed David to write his own (incorrect) thoughts in Psalms 22:1-2 raises the question: Did God also allow Moses to write his own pre-scientific thoughts in Genesis 1-3, and so really the creation story is just a myth as the modernists propose? Can someone list for us all the other things the Holy Spirit authored that are wrong? Is God's revelation subject to the uninspired whims of His human mouthpieces? To the contrary, Mark 12:36 says "For David himself said by the Holy Ghost."

Psalms 22:1 Is A Question, Therefore Not A Statement Of Fact?

Some reason Psalms 22:1a is in the form of a question, therefore does not necessarily state truth. But verse 2 is a statement of fact and elaborates upon how David was forsaken: "O my God, I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not." I wonder also, since the following verses in Psalms are in question form, does that mean they don't state truth either? ...

- 2:1 "Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing?" (46:6 confirms "the heathen raged")
- 4:2 "O ye sons of men, how long will ye turn my glory into shame? how long will ye love vanity, and seek after falsehood?" (NKJV)

"Shouted" Means Jesus Was Only Speaking For The Benefit Of Onlookers?

Back to Jesus, some say the fact He shouted in Matthew 27:46 indicates Jesus was not really forsaken but was quoting Psalms 22:1 loudly only for the benefit of his onlookers. I would counter, does the fact that Jesus also cried with a "loud voice" "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit" (Luke 23:46, ASV) mean: (1) what he said there wasn't true either?, and that (2) Jesus was only speaking for the benefit of his onlookers? What about Elizabeth in Luke 1:42 and the unclean spirit in Mark 5:7, does the fact that they used a "loud voice" indicate they were only speaking for the benefit of onlookers and didn't mean what they said? Jesus cried with a loud voice again in Matthew 27:50 without saying any words evidently. Who was He doing that for? A lot of times, when people are in excruciating pain, they speak or cry out with a loud voice. I know I do. We probably shouldn't read any more into it than that.

They Thought He Was Calling For Elias

If Jesus was not really conversing with the Father, but only calling the onlookers' attention to Psalms 22, then it seems strange he didn't even bother to make himself clear enough to keep His audience from thinking he was calling for Elias (verse 47). The fact is, all we can definitely establish is Jesus was praying to the Father. What effect he was trying to have on onlookers below is just speculation. We shouldn't build a doctrine based upon trying to read Jesus' mind. I would ask: Why didn't just Jesus say, "It may look like to you that I am forsaken by God, but I'm not forsaken any more than David was in Psalms 22" ... if that is what He meant?

Other Fulfillments Of Psalms 22

And if Jesus was just alluding to Psalms 22:1, but not really fulfilling it, that wouldn't be consistent with the rest of Psalms 22:

22:6 "I am a ... reproach of men" - didn't Jesus fulfill that?

22:7 "shoot out the lip" - people really did shoot out the lip in Matthew 27:39ff

22:7 "shake the head" - isn't "wagging their heads" in Matthew 27:39 its fulfillment?

22:8 "He trusted on the Lord that he would deliver him: let him deliver him" - that was really said in Matthew 27:43

22:15 "thirst" Does the fact Jesus said "I thirst" in John 19:28 in order to fulfill Psalms 22:15 mean He really wasn't thirsty?, that Jesus' statement was untrue? (Psalms 69:21)

22:16 "they pierced my hands" - fulfilled in Christ - John 20:25

22:18 "They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture"- fulfilled in Matthew 27:35

In all these Psalms 22 cases, the Old Testament passage quoted was actually fulfilled (which is how prophecy works, duh). Why should Jesus' quote of Psalms 22:1 be any different?

The Father Would Not Leave Jesus Alone

It is argued since John 16:32 teaches the Father would not leave Jesus alone, therefore Jesus was not forsaken on the cross. This is the same argument Baptists make in public debate with me when they array Matt 28:20b ("I am with you always, even unto the end of the world") against passages that clearly teach "Once Saved Always Saved" is false. They say if Jesus is to always be with us, that's the same as saying he will never (under any circumstance) break fellowship with us. To the contrary, let me demonstrate that being "with" someone is not necessarily the same as having spiritual fellowship with them ...

If two verses look like they contradict, our procedure has never been to array one passage against another, to say one of the verses is wrong (which is what is being said about Matthew 27:46 in effect). Instead we find a way both verses can be correct. To that end, notice John 16:32 ("Behold ... ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me.") shows Jesus was left alone by his disciples in that they "scattered," but not that they broke spiritual fellowship from Jesus, right? So we're talking about two different things here. There's a difference in being "with" someone (moral support) and spiritual fellowship. Illustrations:

- I grew up a Baptist, and after obeying the gospel I never could persuade my Dad to become a true Christian. At no time did I have spiritual fellowship with my Dad, but I was always "there for him" and he was certainly always there for me. We never left each other "alone."
- Suppose against God's wishes a woman marries a non-Christian. She cannot have spiritual fellowship with him, but does that mean she has to leave him utterly "alone"?, she can't ever "be there for him"?, she can't provide "moral support" for him, like in his job and etc.?

If one can see either of the above two illustrations, then he is admitting not leaving Jesus alone does not contradict the idea of the Father having to break fellowship with Jesus because of our sin.

How Could God Forsake Someone Who Had Done Everything Asked Of Him?

One preacher wrote "Now if the Father did actually forsake Jesus on the cross, then this means that it is possible for God to forsake one who has done everything asked of him." But that human rationale ignores one of the ABCs about the cross that we all agree on: what happened at the cross was not done because of something Jesus did, but because of what we did (our transgressions). Alas, the Father couldn't rescue Jesus from the cross as that would spoil God's whole eternal plan of salvation!

You Mean Jesus Didn't Know Why He Was Forsaken?

Still some argue Matthew 27:46 can't be taken at face value because if Jesus was forsaken, He would have known why such was the case and therefore wouldn't be asking why. But apply that same logic to Matthew 36:39. There Jesus knew the plan but still said "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt." You mean Jesus didn't know he had come to this earth to die? Consider as an illustration that God asked Adam two questions in Genesis 3:11: "Who told thee that thou wast naked?" And "Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?" Does this mean God didn't know the answer to those two questions? More to the point: Does this prove Adam had not eaten of the fruit? Then how does Jesus asking why He was forsaken prove He wasn't forsaken? Jesus asks questions dozens of times in the gospels, and doubtless He already knew the answer every time. He was omniscient, remember? So the fact Jesus was asking a question proves nothing. I've been a jogger for years and many times I've said to myself "why am I doing this?" not because I didn't know why, or even because I would choose differently, but out of pain. I like the way J.T. Smith explained it in the April 2011 issue of "Gospel Truths": "Was it because the flesh was in such misery

that He cried out from the torment of His situation?"

A Quibble That Backfired

When we get rid of all the quibbles, we are left with the following regarding "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?": either Jesus was lying, Jesus was mistaken, or Jesus was forsaken. We all know the third option has to be the correct one. One brother recently admitted my logic here would be sound except for the fact Jesus was quoting the Old Testament. I don't know why that should make a difference, but even if it did, it only proves further Jesus was forsaken. Because Psalms 22:1 is not a quote of a previous text, therefore according to my brother's own reasoning, David was forsaken. And we all agree if David was forsaken so was Jesus, since Jesus was quoting Psalms 22:1 in regard to himself. Conclusion: Jesus was not mistaken; He was forsaken.

The Pillars of the Temple

Jefferson David Tant | Hendersonville, Tennessee, USA

In giving Solomon instructions for building the temple, God gave a somewhat unusual command concerning two pillars at the entrance. "And he set up the pillars at the porch of the temple: and he set up the right pillar, and called the name thereof Jachin; and he set up the left pillar, and called the name thereof Boaz" (1 Kings 7:21).

There were no names given to any other of the numerous pillars that were a part of the temple. So what was the significance of these two that set them apart from all the other pillars? Why were they given names?

Although we have no explanation for this, we can glean something from the Hebrew meanings of their names. From the detailed instructions given for the temple, it does not appear that these pillars supported the roof. In other words, they were apparently freestanding at the entrance. **The Pulpit Commentary** suggests that "the balance of evidence appears to favour the view that Jachin and Boaz were monuments erected in the porch, to dignify the sanctuary, and to symbolize the power and eternity of the Being to whom it was dedicated" (**I Book of Kings**. 181).

Jachin means "He shall establish" and Boaz means "In it is strength." Would not the names of these pillars, which one had to pass in order to enter into the temple, serve as a visible reminder to all those who entered, that this magnificent edifice was ordained and built by their God, whose strong arm would shield and protect them?

Also noteworthy is David's charge to Solomon. David wanted to build the temple, but God did not permit it. David did make preparation by gathering the material. Then before his death, David gave Solomon the plans.

"Then David gave to his son Solomon the plan of the porch of the temple, its buildings, its storehouses, its upper rooms, its inner rooms and the room for the mercy seat; and the plan of all that he had in mind..." (1 Chronicles 28:11-12)

What do you think would have happened if Solomon had not built according to "the plan," the blueprint? Certainly God would not have been pleased.

Is there an application for us? Isn't the church God's temple today? Paul declared that we are God's temple, not a physical building, but a spiritual building.

"For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building. According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it. For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 3:9-11).

Then Paul continues to admonish:

“Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are” (verses 16-17).

No one ever builds without a plan or blueprint. When Christ said he would build his church (Matthew 16:18), let us not foolishly suppose that he didn't have a pattern or blueprint in mind for that spiritual building.

Some today have the idea that we are free to conduct ourselves with respect to the church in whatever ways seem good to us. They don't like rules or restraints. They want freedom. The idea that we have to follow a “pattern” is not to their liking.

Is God less concerned about such than when he instructed Moses about building the tabernacle? “Moses was warned by God when he was about to erect the tabernacle; for, “See,” He says, “that you make all things according to the pattern which was shown you on the mountain” (Hebrews 8:5).

Consider Hebrews 9:1: “Now even the first covenant had regulations of divine worship and the earthly sanctuary.” Now, consider the implications of that statement. I tell my 16-year-old daughter, “Look, even your 10-year-old sister knows how to make up her bed and keep her room clean.” The very strong implication is that the older daughter should know how to do it even better than her younger sister.

So, what is the author of Hebrews telling us? If “even the first covenant had regulations of divine worship...,” then the inescapable implication is that the second covenant also has rules of divine worship. Some don't like “necessary implications,” but that verse has one, even if they don't like it.

Brethren, let us take heed how we build. “But each man must be careful how he builds on it” (1 Corinthians 3:10). As those pillars symbolized the power and eternity of the Being to whom the temple was dedicated, let us respect those principles with regard to the church which was built by Christ. We have no right to change the blueprints. Let the temple's pillars remind us of the divine builder of the spiritual temple.

The Little Word "Not"

Jim Mickells | Lewisburg, Tennessee, USA

In last month's issue of MOTT I wrote an article entitled "Distractions." In the second paragraph, when pointing out the distractions faced by Christians, I mentioned the “noise” of the world and used Romans 12:2 to illustrate this. The only problem was I left off the word “not.” I said be conformed to the world instead of “And do not be conformed to this world.” First of all, let me apologize for misquoting the Scripture. Certainly, I had no intention of leaving off this word, which totally changed the meaning of what Paul was teaching. Yet it makes me wonder how many times people deliberately leave off or out words in a text or just ignore them all together.

I ran across a blog page where this blogger said, “Baptism does not Save. Baptism is not a requirement of salvation.” This is amazing in light of what Peter says, “There is also an antitype which now saves us-- baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 3:21). The apostle by inspiration plainly says that baptism does indeed save us. I read thirty different translations of this one verse, and they all basically say the same thing, baptism saves. This blogger is totally ignoring what Peter plainly taught.

I have a NIV study Bible, when looking at the footnote on 1 Peter 3:21, it refers you to the note on Mark 16:16. That note says, “16:16 In no way does this verse establish baptism as a condition necessary for salvation.” Yet notice that Scripture, “He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:16). The word “and” between believes and is baptized is a coordinating conjunction which tells us that both are necessary to be saved. Certainly, if one does not

believe, then there would be no need to be baptized. If they were immersed in water, while not believing in the Lord, they would simply be getting wet. The individual(s) who wrote these footnotes in this Bible rejects what Jesus and Peter said. Amazing!

Not only are belief and baptism necessary, but repentance, confession of one's faith in Jesus, and faithful living is required as well (Luke 13:3, 5; Matthew 10:32-33; Revelation 2:10, etc.). Does one's obedience to the gospel message nullify the grace and mercy of God? Does such eliminate what Jesus did for us on the cross when He died for our sins? Not at all! If one is ever saved it will be because of the grace and mercy shown to him by the Father. Grace in giving us what we do not deserve (salvation) and mercy in withholding what we do deserve (condemnation). Paul said it was by our faith we can have access to the grace of God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 5:1-2). Obedience to the will of God does not mean one merits or earns salvation as some teach. It is simply doing what the Lord requires so they can benefit from God's grace and the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. The Lord promises to save the obedient not those living in rebellion to Him (Hebrews 5:8-9; Matthew 7:21).

An individual recently said on Facebook that the blood of Christ washes away sin, not the waters of baptism. He quoted Revelation 1:5, which says, "and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood." What he said was partially true. Without the blood of Christ there would be no remission of sin (Hebrews 9). What he did not consider was how this blood is applied to the sinner so their sins can be washed away. The application of the blood is when we are buried in the waters of baptism, baptized into His death where His blood was shed and there, we receive its benefits. When we read Romans 6:3-6, Paul says before baptism there is the old man of sin and after one is baptized into His death, he then arises a new creature in Christ to walk in newness of life. Before baptism dead in sin – after baptism no longer a slave to sin, the body of sin has been done away with. Notice Acts 22:16, what Ananias told Saul to do to wash away his sins, arise and be baptized. Not only can one neglect or add a word to a text to change its meaning, but they can also ignore what other verses clearly teach.

The seriousness of adding to or taking from the Scriptures is abundantly clear. Please read Deuteronomy 4:2; Revelation 22:18-19; Galatians 1:6-9; and Matthew 15:1-9. May we never leave anything out of a verse, add anything to a verse, neglect what other verses plainly teach, nor twist or distort any part of the Bible to fit what we want it to say. Lord help us to be a people who love the truth (Psalm 119:103-105; 2 Thessalonians 2:10).

Snake Handler Dies of Snake Bite

Mike Thomas | Bowling Greek, Kentucky, USA

In 2012, Pentecostal pastor Mark Wolford, 44, was telling everyone on Facebook about a Revival he would be hosting in West Virginia that included handling snakes. "I am looking for a great time this Sunday," Wolford wrote. "It is going to be a homecoming like the old days. Good 'ole raised in the holler or mountain ridge running, Holy Ghost-filled speaking-in-tongues sign believers."

Thirty minutes into the event, he was bit by a timber rattlesnake and passed away that evening at a hospital. The irony is Wolford saw his own father die from handling poisonous snakes at a religious service years earlier. He told the Washington Post magazine in 2011 that he was carrying on the tradition of his ancestors by engaging in snake handling. "Anybody can do it that believes it," Wolford said.

"Jesus said, 'These signs shall follow them which believe.' This is a sign to show people that God has the power. I know it's real; it is the power of God. If I didn't do it, if I'd never gotten back involved, it'd be the same as denying the power and saying it was not real."

(Source: ABC News, May 13, 2012)

Maybe I misread what Jesus said about poisonous snakes. I thought He said the miraculous sign would be disciples who were bit would NOT die from it. That would be the miracle, right? To have poison course

through your veins and not suffer its lethal effects would be, you know, supernatural! This in turn would serve as a sign that God was with that person and confirm they had His authority to reveal His inspired word. But to die from rattlesnakes and toxic chemicals is nothing special or mesmerizing. If anything, it proves a person was not guided by the Holy Spirit as claimed.

Specifically, here is what Jesus said in Mark 16 regarding these matters:

"15 And He said to them, 'Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. 16 He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned. 17 And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; 18 they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.'"

The reason given for those miraculous abilities was to prove a person was inspired of God. Thus verse 20 says, "And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs." However, since all truth has been given and the Bible is now complete (2 Peter 1:3), we have no need for miraculous guidance. Those days have ended as foretold (1 Corinthians 13:8-10). Now, anyone who handles deadly snakes or drinks poison, especially while claiming to be guided by the Holy Spirit, is taking their life in their own hands. God's promise that "it will by no means hurt them" is no longer in effect and was intended only for the brief period of time to reveal and confirm His word. The fact that "saints" now suffer harm from such feats is sufficient evidence of that era having ended.

For those who claim to have miraculous abilities, please go to the nearest hospital and do some good. Your services are needed. Mark Wolford certainly could have used you in 2012, as well as the many other snake handlers who have died in worship since then. So please, just get to the nearest hospital and start healing people. If the Spirit is leading you (as you claim) and giving you those special powers, then put them to good use. Many troubled souls are waiting.

In reality, though, you know you will never go to the hospital to do that because you know you are just as helpless and powerless like the rest of us. Poison will kill you; snakes are a threat; and no one will be cured through you because you do not have miraculous gifts. Furthermore, your appeal to the Bible to prove your position is contradicting. If that book is authoritative and reliable enough to learn the idea of handling snakes, like you were told about Mark 16:18, why is it not authoritative enough for all that you do in religion? Why appeal to it at all if God is still working through you to give further revelation? Wouldn't your abilities be evidence enough of your inspiration? In other words, if the Bible is complete, why do you still need spiritual gifts? And if you still have gifts, why appeal to the Bible?

Alas, good friends, open your eyes and realize the danger of trusting in feelings and human wisdom. It might seem like a good idea to play with rattlesnakes in worship, but you do so at your own risk because God never told you to do it. If anything, Jesus said, "You shall not tempt the Lord your God" (Matthew 4:7). And naivety and emotionalism are definitely putting Him to the test! Instead, read what else is included in Mark 16, especially in verse 16, and listen to God's instructions on how to be saved from sin. Then compare it to other parts of the New Testament that say the same thing (Acts 2:38; 22:16). Read it. Believe it. Obey it. That is the only way God is going to speak to you in revealing His will.

Jesus Is Not Just About Love

DO YOU REALLY KNOW JESUS?

William Stewart | Odessa, Ontario, Canada

In 1980, The Commodores released their 11th album, "Heroes." The final track was a song written by Lionel Richie entitled, "Jesus Is Love." Some warned Richie that the song would ruin his career. Anyone familiar with 1980s pop music know how his career turned out.

The sentiment "Jesus is love" is certainly not limited to nor does it originate with a 1980s pop song. The love of Christ permeates Christian theology. Jesus Christ is the central figure to our faith; and His love for you and me is indisputable. Though no Bible verse says, "Jesus is love," there are verses which specifically say, "God is love" (1 John 4:8, 16), and the Bible identifies Jesus as God (John 1:1, 14; 20:20). His sacrifice at Calvary was motivated by the love of God (John 3:16; Romans 5:8).

As a child, I grew up singing "Jesus Loves Me" (the hymn, not The Commodores song) and "Jesus Loves The Little Children." As an adult, I've enjoyed singing "Faithful Love," "God Is Love," "Sweet Adoration," and many more songs about Jesus' love. Jesus Christ taught us to love God, to love our neighbour, to love one another. He not only taught about love, He exemplified it.

However, with the way some speak about Jesus and love, you'd think it was the only topic He ever discussed. It was not. And even when He did speak about love, what He said may be a surprise to some. Consider a few examples:

...love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil.
(Luke 6:35)

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 10:37)

If you love Me, keep My commandments. (John 14:15)

When Jesus speaks of love, it is often in connection with our responsibilities to Him and His word.

Jesus spoke about several topics during His earthly ministry. His first recorded sermon calls upon the hearers to be aware of their sin, to turn away from self and selfishness, to be willing to suffer persecution for the cause of Christ. He talked about hypocrisy, forgiveness, obedience, anxiety, prayer, commitment, deceivers, and obedience among other things (Matthew 5-7).

As we look through the gospels, the most common topics Jesus spoke about during His earthly ministry were:

- the kingdom of God
- His own disciples' lack of faith
- the wickedness of scribes and Pharisees
- the mission to preach the gospel
- the persecutions His disciples would face
- the cost of discipleship
- the necessity of His death at Calvary
- the final judgment
- the condemnation of the wicked in hell
- God's law on moral issues (divorce, self-control, helping the needy, idolatry, etc.).

The one dimensional Jesus many claim to serve is not the Jesus of the Bible. The Jesus of the Bible spoke more about obedience than love. The Jesus of the Bible spoke more about hell than heaven.

A lot of Jesus' teachings were in parables. As we look through the parables, He addressed various topics. Do any of the parables speak about love? Absolutely. Is love the primary topic of any of the parables? No.

Notice a wide selection of the parables:

- The sower (different hearts and responses to the gospel)

- The mustard seed (growth of faith)
- Leaven, dragnet, pearl of great price (value of the gospel)
- The lost sheep, coin, and prodigal son (joy of conversion)
- Unmerciful servant (extending mercy)
- Ten virgins (making preparation for judgment)
- Talents (need for us to use our abilities in service to God)
- Good Samaritan (serving those who are in need)
- Rich Fool (the folly of serving riches)

We could keep going, but suffice it to say, the Lord focused on a lot more than love. We do the Lord, ourselves, and those whom we are trying to affect with the gospel a disservice if we overemphasize love. Don't misunderstand, I am not saying Jesus didn't talk about it or that we shouldn't either - He did and we should. But, He taught about so much more than love. We need to teach all things Jesus taught (Matthew 28:20); we must declare the whole message of God.

For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God. (Acts 20:27)

Raising Godly Children (2)

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4. Be a Faithful Steward.

Do you own your child? Depending on where you live, your government or culture may say yes. In contrast, we who are loyal to the kingdom of God believe "The earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness, The world and those who dwell therein" (Psalm 24:1).

"And the Lord said, 'Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his master will make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of food in due season?' Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes" (John 12:42-43).

Just as a manager or steward doesn't own what they are put in charge of, we don't own our children. Our children belong to God and we are entrusted with their care for a period of time. And we will be held accountable for the care we give them.

5. Do Not Provoke Your Children.

One of the few verses to directly address parents is Ephesians 6:4. And it reads, "And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord." We are given similar instructions in Colossians. "Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged" (Colossians 3:21). This doesn't mean you have to avoid making our kids mad at all costs. Kids get angry. What makes your child angry in the moment might be what's best for him. For example, last night my daughter became very upset after I told her to get up and pack her books she left unpacked and went to bed. She got over it. I think what these Bible verses are telling us is not to provoke our children in a way that results in angry, discouraged, or solemn people.

It does not mean that we should not discipline them either. We should include discipline; God wants us to discipline them. We would hope that our child would act good enough not to need physical discipline, but more often than not we see them do those things that are not expected of them. We discipline them if we love them. "He who spares his rod hates his son, But he who loves him disciplines him promptly" (Proverbs 13:24). "Do not withhold correction from a child, For if you beat him with a rod, he will not die. You shall beat him with a rod, And deliver his soul from hell." (Proverbs 23:13-14). We might fear hurting our children or their emotions with the rod, but they will not be damaged by it.

We should teach them to be hard working.

*"He who has a slack hand becomes poor,
But the hand of the diligent makes rich.
He who gathers in summer is a wise son;*

He who sleeps in harvest is a son who causes shame.” (Proverbs 10:4,5).

Training must include areas of responsibility and diligence.

Proper discipline is always motivated by love for the child. Love always keeps the well-being of the child and his future maturity in mind. The parent genuinely cares for the child and so consistently corrects him. We might think our feelings show us a better way, but they betray us. If our feelings tell us to overlook his bad behavior, or make excuses for his undisciplined condition then does that not reveal a desire to preserve the parents own comfort? If the parent is unwilling to confront the sin in his child, perhaps it is because the parent cares more about himself than the child.

At times we will need to strike our child hard, but we need not fear. It will not hurt him for long. In fact, it will bring long-term help to the child. Of course, we do not need to bruise or tear the child’s skin. A rod (a small fresh branch) enables us to bring a brief stinging pain without any damage. If you need any confidence, just take a good look at those children who are not disciplined. They are proud, unruly, and mouthy, out of control, and hurt others. The advantages of discipline are many and far reaching. A parent can wonderfully affect a child’s life. Afterwards the parent will reap the beautiful reward of well-trained child and the relationship that it brings.

A father’s instruction forms a hedge of protection around the child that will bring long lasting help. The father’s wisdom is passed on to the child to become his wisdom. He does not need to experiment with things to test out their value.

6. Undivided loyalty to Jehovah (LORD).

“Jesus said to him, “you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.” (Matthew 22:37). “No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon” (Luke 16:13). Since the Lord is one, we must not divide our affections between Him and something else. If there were several gods, then our loyalty would be divided. Since He is one, all of our devotion, inspiration, and strength must be used to do all that He says. His words take a priority in our lives. God is asking, even demanding, that we take all of our work, family, and personal plans and re-work them so that He becomes the center of our lives. A doctor, for example, should give up his occupation if he is required to do abortions. He should not murder. The commitment to life requires him to help not hurt people.

Jesus told us that we could only love Him or wealth (mammon) (Matthew 6:24). If a family worships money, then their decisions will be made with those prior commitments in mind. In the end, we will only prioritize one God. We need to commit to serving the LORD Jehovah as a family. This decision sets our family apart from others. This is important to communicate to our children.

Matthew 24 (Part 7)

Patrick Andrews | Conway, Arkansas, USA

It took about forty years before the prophecy concerning the destruction of Jerusalem came to pass. Jesus gave His followers various signs; each indicating that the destruction of Jerusalem was drawing closer and closer. There were many signs given that Christians were warned to heed. If they paid attention and took the signs and the warnings seriously, they would escape the coming destruction.

It’s taken me about seven months to explain all the signs and all the different time periods that Jesus forewarned in His first answer to the first question His apostles asked him in Matthew 24:3. We now move on to the second question that was asked of Him in the same verse. That question was, “...what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?”

This question is answered beginning in Matthew 24:36 and culminates in Matthew 25:46. More on this later, but for now let us continue on with how Jesus answers the question referred to above.

There is an evident shift in thought beginning in Matthew 24:36. Jesus begins this verse with the adversative conjunction, “**but**”. “**But**” of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, “but” my Father only.”

The conjunction, “But”, does not link Matthew 24:4-35 with the verses immediately following it, instead it shows that what Jesus is about to say, has nothing to do with what He has previously said. Instead, He is contrasting the two answers that He gives, to the two questions that were asked back in Matthew 24:3. There is a marked difference.

There are so many false doctrines in the world today because so many people have not recognized the shift of thought to a different topic, as well as, the differences in words and phrases that Jesus uses to answer the second question found in Matthew 24:3.

One of these differences would be the lack of signs that would herald the coming of the Lord and the end of the world. Plenty of signs were given to forewarn the coming destruction of Jerusalem, but there would be no signs given before the coming destruction of the world. There would be plenty of signs given in answer to their first question, “but” there would be no signs given as to the coming of the Lord and the destruction of the world.

Other passages support the fact that when the Lord does return, it will be sudden and unexpected. See 2 Peter 3:8-12; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-10; and 1 Corinthians 15:51-58. All these verses and many more are teaching us that when the Lord does return, it will be in the blink of an eye. There will be no millennial reign. There will be no second chances to start serving God. Salvation and destruction will come suddenly, in one day and in one hour (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18), and might I say, in the blink of an eye.

Another difference in these two topics is the contrast between the phrases, “those days” (Matthew 24:19, 22, and 29), and “that day and hour” (Matthew 24:36; 25:13). There would be many days, about forty years worth, that would lead up to the destruction of Jerusalem, “but” the destruction of the world and the coming of Jesus will occur in one day, one hour and in the blink of an eye. See also John 5:28-29.

Another difference in the two topics would concern knowledge. Jesus gave very explicit signs to His disciples to show just how close the destruction of Jerusalem was getting. These signs were given so they would be able to know. The knowledge was available to all those who were warned. Most would take no heed to the knowledge that was available. However; a few would take that same knowledge and flee the coming destruction. The point is that there was knowledge available; information that could be known that could save them from physical death.

“**But**” when it comes to His *<Parousia>* and the end of the world, there will be no knowledge. This knowledge was unavailable to all men, all angels, and even the Lord Himself (Mark 13:32; Acts 1:7). Jesus declared that only the Father knew when that day and hour would come. There will be no signs; there will be no imminent warnings. The day of the Lord will come in the blink of an eye. There will no longer be an opportunity to prepare. When that hour strikes, it’s all over.

Yet another difference between the two topics is the warnings that are given. In answer to the first question, Jesus prophesied that there would be plenty of time to “prepare” for the coming destruction of Jerusalem. “**But**”, beginning in Matthew 24:36 and ending in Matthew 25:46, the warning is no longer “**prepare**”, but “**you better already be prepared**” (25:1-12).

Another difference was in the two different things they should be looking for. As the judgment on Jerusalem was coming to fruition, they were to look for certain events that would culminate in that city being razed to the ground. “**But**”, in answer to the second question, the warning was to not only be prepared, but to also be on “**watch**” (24:42-44).

Those who stay prepared and watchful would be always ready for the “**sudden coming of the Lord**”, as opposed to numerous days and years that led up to the destruction of Jerusalem. The destruction that took place in Jerusalem took about four years to accomplish. “**But**”, the coming destruction of the world along with the coming of the Lord will be in the blink of an eye.

When the Lord returns, there will be a sudden separation. Two people could be in the very same place but they will instantaneously and eternally be separated (24:39-41). This is illustrated in chapter 25, in the parable of the wise and foolish virgins, the wise and faithful servants being separated from the foolish and slothful servants, and finally in the separation of the sheep from the goats.

There are a lot of folks who believe that the entirety of Matthew 24 is talking about the destruction of Jerusalem, when, in fact, in Matthew 24:36 through Matthew 25:1-46, Jesus is prophesying about His second coming and the end of the world. Matthew 24 does not end until the last verse of chapter 25.

Lord willing, next month, we will begin looking at some of the topics that I mentioned earlier that deserve a lot of explanation. The first of which is, “**The Abomination of Desolation**” mentioned in Daniel chapters 9 and 12 and Matthew 24:15.

What Is A Christian?

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

"Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul. And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. and the disciples were first called Christians at Antioch."
(Acts 11:25-26)

*"Then Agrippa said to Paul, "You almost persuade me to become a Christian" (Acts 26:28)
"Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name" (1 Peter 4:16, **ESV**)*

Our nation is often called a "Christian" nation, even though actual Christians comprise only a tiny minority of its population. In fact, the term "Christian" is so loosely used in common speech, I actually heard of a so-called "Christian basketball team," called the "Holy Bouncers." The New Testament usage of the word is far more restricted. Since we are to "speak as the oracles of God" (1 Peter 4:11), we should find how the New Testament uses the term "Christian." What is a Christian?

First, we need to know what is not a Christian. Contrary to popular opinion, not all good, morally pure people are Christians. One would be hard pressed to find a man of higher morals than Cornelius the centurion (Acts 10:1-2, 22). But Peter had to tell him how to be saved (Acts 11:13-14), implying he needed salvation and was, thus, not a Christian. Furthermore, not all religious people are Christians. Cornelius was certainly religious (Acts 10:1-2, 22), but he was not a Christian. Not even the godly characters of the Old Testament were Christians, because "the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (Acts 11:26). Nor are the members of the various denominations Christians. Their membership in these divisive bodies violates the Lord's prayer for unity (John 17:20-21) and is specifically condemned as a work of the flesh in Galatians 5:19-21 ("Dissensions" means "divisions," and "heresies" means "sects").

What, then, is a Christian? The New Testament word "Christian" means "a follower of Christ." It is a noun, not an adjective, the name applied to certain individuals, not a description of anything and everything that has religious or moral connections. A Christian is a "disciple" (learner, follower) of Christ (Acts 11:26). Disciples are also called "saints" (Acts 9:1, 13), meaning one "separated from sin and consecrated to God." Since Saul's persecution of the disciples is also termed doing evil to "the church" (Acts 8:3), Christians are members of the Lord's church (1 Corinthians 12:27), the body of Christ (Ephesians 1:22-23). "Christian" is the proper name for members of the church of Christ; "disciple" describes their relationship to the Master;

and “saint” relates them to sin and to God.

Thus, a Christian bears certain spiritual relationships that other people do not. To the body of Christ, he is a “member,” i.e., a part of the body (1 Corinthians 12:12,27). Since Christ has only one body (1 Corinthians 12:20), this is a distinguished privilege. To the family of God, he is a child (Ephesians 3:14-15; Galatians 3:26). Since God has no children outside His family, this is a great honor. In relationship to the kingdom of God, the Christian is a citizen (Ephesians 2:19; Colossians 1:13). There are only two kingdoms in the spiritual realm, one of Satan and one of God, and all are citizens of one or the other. The Christian is also a living stone in God’s temple (Ephesians 2:19-22; 1 Peter 2:5). This is the only realm where God will accept our worship and service.

Christians are not to be called by human religious names. The name “Christian” is of divine origin, being used for the first time ever in Antioch (Acts 11:26). The word for being called by a name in New Testament Greek is usually “*kaleo*” (139 such New Testament uses) or “*lego*” (36 such occurrences). But here the word is the much less used verb “*chrematizo*.” The primary meaning of this word is “*of God impart a revelation or injunction or warning (of oracles...*” (Arndt & Gingrich. 893). The only other time in the New Testament it is used of calling people by a name, it obviously means because God has so designated them (Romans 7:3), and the remaining occurrences refer to divine revelations (Luke 2:26; Acts 10:22; Hebrews 8:5; 11:7; 12:25). The term “Christian” glorifies God (1 Peter 4:16) and honors the name of Christ, in whose name alone salvation can be found (Acts 4:9-12). Thus, Paul forbids us to wear sectarian names, as they demonstrate sectarian loyalty (1 Corinthians 1:10-13).

If you are not a Christian, you can become one simply by being saved by the Gospel (Romans 1:16). If you will hear the word of God (Romans 10:17), believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God (Romans 5:1-2), repent of your sins (Romans 2:5), confess your faith that Jesus Christ is the Son of God (Romans 10:8-10), and be baptized into Christ (Romans 6:3-4), you will become a Christian.

A Christian is simply a disciple of Christ. If you are a Christian, strive always to live worthily of that noble name (Ephesians 4:1). If you are not a Christian, you need to become one, for only in Christ is salvation to be found (2 Timothy 2:10). Are you a Christian?

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