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

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Finally, brethren

WHATEVER THINGS

are true
are noble
are just
are pure
are lovely

PHILIPPIANS 4:8

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

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

Questions from Nigeria about Infants Sinning

Question

Please I humbly wish that you listen to this short preaching (if you have time) and I'll love to know what you think about it. Do you agree with the brothers that some babies can sin (even while in the womb) and go to hell if they die? I need your thoughts using scriptures after watching the video. Thanks.

Answer

Jeremiah 19:1-6

The inhabitants of Judah sacrificed their sons and daughters to Baal (Jeremiah 7:30-32; 32:35; cf. Psalm 106:36-38). The children they sacrificed were "innocents." (Jeremiah 2:34; 19:1-6; Psalm 106:38). Therefore, little children, whose nature is inherited, are innocent.

Matthew 18:1-4; 19:13-15; Mark 10:13-15; Luke 18:15-17

To enter the kingdom of heaven, one must be converted (turn) and become like a little child. Either little children are innocent or one must become totally depraved to enter the kingdom.

1 Corinthians 14:20

We are to be like little children in evil (1 Corinthians 14:20; New American Standard Bible). Arndt and Gingrich thus define "evil": "badness, faultiness. 1. in the moral sense-a. Depravity, wickedness, vice gener. Opposed to virtue.... be a child as far as wickedness is concerned i.e., have as little wickedness as a child 1 cor 14:20..." (A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament. 397; cf. Acts 8:22; James 1:21).

Little children, whose nature is inherited, are either innocent of wickedness (depravity), or Christians are to be wicked, depraved.

Follow Up Question

Yes I agree with you and that is my understanding too.

Actually, I was discussing with someone on this issue and I was directed to that video. In fact, I had hinted that I see no difference between what they teach and the Total Depravity doctrine of Calvinism but they said they are not teaching that babies are born sinners (they cited Ecclesiastes 7:29 to show that man is made upright) but what they teach is that the moment a child is formed, even from the womb, such a child is capable of committing sin (in the heart or by actions) and since God knows the heart of everyone, any baby that sins will go to hell. The following passages were cited and questions asked by them:

Genesis 25:21-26 (Esau and Jacob): The claim is made that these two babies struggled (or wrestle) in the womb (vs. 22) and such is sin . They also claimed Jacob's hands took hold of Esau's heels (vs. 26). They used this to show that babies know what they are doing and can sin.

Another text they used is I Samuel 15:3 and they asked: Why did God order to kill the Amalek children if they were righteous and what was the purpose of killing them? Will those children go to heaven after they were killed by the Israelites? The answer given by them was that God already knew the children's hearts and that was why He commanded the children to be killed.

They also used II Kings 8:12.

I am finding it hard to agree with such submission and so I ask, what rebuttal can we offer to these arguments scripturally? How can we show that these passages as used by them, have been misapplied?

I know that you are a very busy person and may not have time to delve into this. But if you understand their argument, I humbly request that you address the Bible passages that have been used to defend this view that babies can sin (Note: the people teaching this are members of the church of Christ).

Answer

Thanks for following up.

Their arguments do not even address the arguments I made from Scripture, much less answer them.

Actually Ecclesiastes 7:29 teaches the opposite of their position. God puts our spirits within us (Ecclesiastes 12:7; Hebrews 12:9). As he made us, we are "upright" (Ecclesiastes 7:29). Yes, men seek "out many schemes" (Ecclesiastes 7:29), but Solomon didn't say they did such while still in the womb or as infants. This contention is based on assumption.

Jacob as a mature man wrestled with God, and God blessed him (Genesis 32:24-30). Thus, even for a mature man, wrestling is not necessarily sin.

On Amalek, children often suffer the consequences of their parents' sins (cf. Exodus 34:6-7), but the principle of Ezekiel 18:20 remains true, children do not inherit the guilt of their parents' sins. Children of an alcoholic will suffer terribly, but that doesn't make them drunkards.

Second Kings 18:12 neither states nor implies that children sin.

Their arguments are without biblical basis. Little children are innocent.

The God Who Holds Your Breath in His Hand

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

As I write this the day is September 11, 2021. Twenty years ago today was arguably the worst day in the history of the United States of America. Almost 3000 peaceable American citizens died in an unprovoked terrorist attack. As others who lived through that day, I remember vividly where I was and what I was doing when I first heard the unspeakably horrible news. When TV programs show the images again I do not watch. I have not forgotten, nor do I want to forget. I simply cannot stand to relive that awful day. I think it gives me a glimpse into why WWII veterans would almost always refuse to tell their stories until advanced old age caused them to realize their excruciating memories would die with them.

Sandy showed me an article today by a man I don't know, David Maxson, which caused me to reflect. He briefly wrote about Daniel 5:23. Daniel was then an old man still living in the royal court but among the Jewish captives in Babylon. Belshazzar, grandson of King Nebuchadnezzar, who had taken Daniel into captivity, ruled in Babylon. Belshazzar gave a wine party for his officials, wives, and concubines and called for the gold vessels his grandfather had taken from the Temple of the Lord in Jerusalem to toast the praises of his idol gods.

Even as they partied, the fingers of a man's hand miraculously appeared and wrote on the wall of the palace, "MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN." Belshazzar was so terrified his "knees knocked against each other." He called for all the wise men to explain the meaning of the words and promised any who would do so lavish rewards and third place in the kingdom.

None could do so, until the queen reminded him of Daniel. He hastily called for Daniel and made him the same rich promises. Daniel told him to keep his presents then interpreted the words. He rebuked the king:

"And you have lifted yourself up against the Lord of heaven. They have brought the vessels of His house before you, and you and your lords, your wives and your concubines, have drunk wine from them. And you have praised the gods of silver and gold, bronze and iron, wood and stone, which do not see or hear or know; and the God who holds your breath in His hand and owns all your ways, you have not glorified" (Daniel 5:23).

As Daniel interpreted the words, "God has numbered your kingdom, and finished it...; You have been weighed in the balances, and found wanting; ... Your kingdom has been divided, and given to the Medes and Persians" (Daniel 5:26-28). "That very night Belshazzar, king of the Chaldeans, was slain. And Darius the Mede received the kingdom" (Daniel 5:30-31).

"God ... holds your breath in His hand and owns all your ways." Thank Him for the very air you breathe. Thank him for each breath you take. Three thousand Americans went about their lives as they had been accustomed to do so the morning of September 11, 2001 but were dead before the day was over. We never know if today will be our last. Never forget.

Does "We Did Esteem Him Smitten Of God" Mean Jesus Was Not Smitten Of God?

Pat Donahue | Harvest, Alabama, USA

Isaiah 53:4b prophesies about Jesus "we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted." I have seen many Christians recently contend this verse proves Jesus was not smitten of God. For example, Gary Eubanks wrote in an 11-7-2020 email to me about the verse "It says, 'we ourselves esteemed Him ... smitten of God,' not 'He was ... smitten of God.' Thus, this (part of the) verse actually says what I am claiming: that Jesus was not actually smitten by God." Surely the unsoundness of this argument is readily apparent to all. Let's discuss ...

If I said “I esteem Ronald Reagan as a good president,” would my use of the word “esteem” mean Reagan was not a good president? Admittedly the sentence wouldn’t prove he was a good president, but it certainly wouldn’t mean he wasn’t good, would it? Thinking someone is a good president neither makes them a good president nor a bad one, right? I am confident Gary realizes this because you’ll notice he leaves out “stricken” and “afflicted” with his use of ellipses above. Meaning he realizes the same verse also says Jesus was esteemed stricken and afflicted, and Gary would certainly have to agree Jesus was actually stricken and afflicted (by the Jews through the Roman soldiers). So to avoid that difficulty with his argument, his quote leaves out the parts of the verse that would prove his point false.

Having said all that, we know for sure Jesus was smitten of God (not just that it appeared that way), as verse 10a of the same context says “Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him.” The words “smitten” and “bruised” would be synonymous here, correct? So if we allow context to rule, we know for sure what Isaiah 53:4b is saying, Jesus was bruised/smitten of God. But as we’ve discovered, some gospel preachers only let context help decide meaning when it suits their purposes.

And what does it mean “it pleased the LORD to bruise him”? Of course the Father didn’t bruise Jesus directly. It just means God allowed (with a purpose in view) the wicked to smite Jesus. Does the word “pleased” mean the Father was sitting up in heaven enjoying every minute of Jesus’ suffering? No sane father could enjoy the torture of his own son. No, Isaiah 53:10a means God was pleased with the results of Jesus’ suffering and death – the salvation of mankind. This should motivate us to trust and obey God (Mark 16:16) to take advantage of that death.

- So You Want to Be a Preacher -

Preaching Is a Life of Teaching

Jefferson David Tant | Hendersonville, Tennessee, USA

If you don’t like teaching others, then this work is not for you. Over and over again Paul instructs the young preachers Timothy and Titus to preach or teach. “Prescribe and teach these things” (1 Timothy 4:11). “And the Lord’s servant must not strive, but be gentle towards all, apt to teach, forbearing” (2 Timothy 2:24). “Preach the word; be urgent in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching” (2 Timothy 4:2). “But as for you, speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine” (Titus 2:1).

Whom shall we teach? Obviously we are to teach and encourage the saints. “Remind them of these things, and solemnly charge them in the presence of God not to wrangle about words, which is useless and leads to the ruin of the hearers” (2 Timothy 2:14). But what about those who are not saints? Some preachers seem content to “preach to the choir,” and don’t feel the need to heed the Lord’s charge to “Go out into the highways and hedges, and constrain them to come in, that my house may be filled” (Luke 14:23).

I never knew a preacher that did not wish the congregation to grow. (I take that back. A church in Jamaica had six members. The preacher said, “That’s enough.” If the church grew larger, it would be harder to control everything. Thankfully, he no longer preaches.)

How does a church grow? There are three ways to grow. (1) Members have babies and teach them to serve God. (2) Members move in from other areas. (3) Go out and win others for Christ. Now, having babies is great, but not everyone can have babies, such as older folks, singles, and those who cannot afford more. Then the matter of growing through moving is not really a growth in the kingdom. That’s just a shifting of the sheep.

The people in the prophet Haggai’s day were lamenting “Is the seed still in the barn?” (Haggai 2:19). If the people were lamenting a lack of harvest, one possible cause is that not enough seed had been sown. That may well describe the problem in many congregations that are stagnant from a lack of growth. Most church buildings are full of Bibles. In the parable of the sower, Jesus said, “The seed is the word of God” (Luke 8:11). Peter declares that we are “born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is,

through the living and enduring word of God" (1 Peter 1:23).

Preachers need to get out of the study and out in the field seeking the lost. After all, that's what it means to be a disciple of Christ. "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). If we claim to be his disciples, then we must act like disciples. A disciple follows the example of his teacher. There are people out there who will listen. I find them all the time—in banks, restaurants, service stations, neighbors, grocery stores. For example, I have little accounts in multiple banks. I go from teller to teller until I find one who will talk to me, and then I seek to establish a relationship with that person. A few have been baptized as a result. What are you doing to find prospects? If you are not willing to go out and talk to people and seek to save their souls, then you need to find another line of work.

"And He was saying to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest" (Luke 10:2).

One thing is sure. If you the preacher, who should have the time and knowledge, is not actively seeking the lost, you are not going to find many members fired up about doing it. The preacher's example is a great motivator in this area. A preacher who is stuck in his study and pulpit may be tending to the garden, but he is not "sowing the seed," which is the Word of God (Luke 8:11).

"My Heart's Desire"

Jim Mickells | Lewisburg, Tennessee, USA

"Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God" (Romans 10:1-3).

There can be no doubt about the love Paul had for his Jewish brethren. These verses clearly indicate the great desire the apostle had for Israel to be saved by the grace of God. Though he was often persecuted by them, even left for dead on occasion, yet he still tried time and again to teach them the gospel of Christ. When traveling from city to city preaching the unsearchable riches of our Lord, he often went into the Jewish synagogues first. Within the confines of these buildings, he tried his best to point the Jews to the Messiah which was spoken of in the Old Testament. Yet most refused to listen to this man of God. Not because of a lack of effort on his part nor because he didn't care for them, but because of their desire to have their own way.

We need the same yearning which Paul had, a willingness on our part to share God's message with our fellow man. It takes time and effort to go out into the fields and sow the seed of the kingdom in the hearts of men and women. We face the same situation the apostle did, not everyone will listen, and most will not accept the truth. Yet the thing lacking among so many followers of Christ it seems, is the love for the souls of our fellow man. May God help each of us to lift our eyes and see the fields that are white to harvest and may our heart's desire be to teach the gospel to the lost so they can be saved.

How tragic it was because they had a zeal for God but not according to knowledge. Zeal is a wonderful attribute each Christian should possess. When Paul wrote to Titus, he said, "who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works" (Titus 2:14). This same apostle commends the church at Corinth for their zeal and how their enthusiasm stirred others to act as well. "For I know your willingness, about which I boast of you to the Macedonians, that Achaia was ready a year ago; and your zeal has stirred up the majority" (2 Corinthians 9:2).

Yet zeal must be connected with knowledge if it is to produce the desired results. Knowing God's will is essential if one is to be saved. Jesus said:

“No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, ‘And they shall all be taught by God.’ Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me”
(John 6:44-45).

The problem with the Jews in Romans 10 was they were ignorant of God's way of making man righteous. Through their ignorance (not knowing), they sought to establish their own system of righteousness and they failed to submit to God (Romans 10:3). God has a plan; it has been revealed in the Scriptures and man must obey it if he is to be saved. No amount of zeal will replace knowing and doing the Lord's will (Matthew 7:21-27).

Many in the religious realm today have a burning zeal for the Lord, yet they lack the knowledge of God's will just like these Jews did. Those of us who are Christians know what the Scriptures teach, but do we have the desire and zeal that is necessary to bring the lost to Christ? God expects us to possess both knowledge, and zeal. One without the other is not pleasing to our Heavenly Father.

May we busy ourselves with the work God has given us to do. “And He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:15-16). Someone loved us enough to share the good news of what Christ did for us on the cross so we could be redeemed. Why not pay such an effort forward so others can have the same opportunity for redemption?

The Rise of Catholicism

Julius C. Nwankwo | Aba, Abia State, Nigeria

The history of God's people in the Old Testament is a history of faithfulness, apostasy, and restoration. This is also true of the church. Next to a study of the Bible, church history is the most valuable study for a Christian. In this study, we are going to consider the origin of the oldest of the denominations in the world – the Roman Catholic Church.

Before we go into the study proper let us tell a brief history of the church of the Bible – the one true church. The church was promised and built by Jesus Christ (Matthew 16:18). He is the foundation and chief cornerstone of the church (1 Corinthians 3:11; Ephesians 2:19-22), and He shed His blood to purchase it (Ephesians 5:25; Acts 20:28). It was established on the first Pentecost day following Christ's resurrection, AD 33 (Acts 2).

The church of Christ has a specific organization with Jesus Christ as the Head (Ephesians 1:22-23; Colossians 1:18; Matthew 28:18). The New Testament is the authority and the constitution of the church (Mark 16:15; Galatians 1:6-9; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; Revelation 22:18-19). Each congregation is autonomous with elders to oversee her work (Acts 14:23; Philippians 1:1; 1 Peter 5:1-2). These elders are called bishops, overseers, pastors, and shepherds (Acts 20:17, 28, Titus 1:5, 7; Ephesians 4:11; 1 Peter 5:1-4). These elders have to meet some specific scriptural qualifications before they are appointed (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). Deacons are to serve under the elders (Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 8:13).

There are also evangelists, ministers of the gospel of Christ, who are the preachers of the word in the churches (Acts 21:8; Ephesians 4:11; 2 Timothy 4:1-5). The New Testament church has a specific pattern of worship which is in spirit and in truth (John 4:23, 24). They met on the first day of the week to observe the following as items of spiritual and scriptural worship; they observed the Lord's Supper to remember Christ as He commanded (Matthew 26:26-28; Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 11:23-34; Acts 2:42); they worshiped in prayer (Acts 2:42; 1 Timothy 2:1-8); they sang praises to God in worship (Ephesians 5:18-19; Colossians 3:16-17); They also edified themselves by the preaching of the word of God (Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 20:7; 2 Timothy 4:2-4); and they gave as God had prospered them (1 Corinthians 16:1-2; 2 Corinthians 8-9).

The church has a three-fold work to do – the preaching and teaching of the word of God; (Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:46, 47; 2 Timothy 2:2; Colossians 1:23). They are to edify themselves (Matthew 28:20; Acts 20:7; Ephesians 4:12; Romans 1:15; Hebrews 5:12-14; 2 Peter 3:18). They are also to help the needy among them (Acts 11:27-30; 2 Corinthians 8-9). The New Testament church was one and united (Ephesians 4:4-6; Colossians 1:18). The division was strongly condemned in the church (1 Corinthians 1:10-13; Romans 16:17, 18).

However, the scripture foretold a departure from the faith. Jesus warned of false prophets (Matthew 7:15). The apostle Paul warned that the falling away would be from the leadership of the church (Acts 20:28-32; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-10; 1 Timothy 4:1-3). All these happened as it was said by the apostle Paul.

By the second century, the “presiding” elder became the “bishop” from there the “bishop” of a large, influential church began to rule over other churches in the area. By the 4th century “patriarchs” ruled in Rome, Constantinople, Antioch, Alexandria, and Jerusalem. In 606 AD, Boniface III of Rome took the title “Universal Bishop of the church” and became the first Pope.

With the emergence of the pope, a separate priesthood patterned after the Jewish and pagan system was developed, where only the priests could preach, give the Lord’s Supper, baptize, marry, and bury. Celibacy was enforced by Pope Gregory VIII in 1075 AD. Councils were held as early as the second century to settle disputes and the first creed was produced by the Council of Nicea in 325 AD.

The doctrine of original sin began in the second century but was made popular by Augustine. From original sin to infant baptism; in 251 AD, Novatian, a sick man was “soaked” in bed for baptism. In 1311 the council Ravenna made sprinkling and pouring equally valid as immersion.

Pope Vitalian in 660AD is reputed to be the first to introduce instrumental music in the Christian worship and it was rejected by the church and as late as 1250 AD, it was still not accepted in the Catholic Church. In the 4th century, a special class of singers became common in the church.

“Closed” communion began to be practiced in the second century and Communion “in one kind” began in the 12th century. Transubstantiation was adopted by the 4th Lateran Council in 1215 AD.

Veneration of Mary (Mary mother of God) came to be used after the Council of Ephesus in 431 AD. The doctrine of the “Immaculate conception” became official in 1854 AD. It is believed by Catholics that the merits of the dead saints could be applied to the living, and this gave rise to the sale of indulgences.

Many Jewish and pagan festivals were “Christianized.” The council of Nicea determined the date of Easter in AD 325. Another false teaching they believe is that the Catholic Church is the one and only true apostolic church. Pope Boniface VIII, in the bull “Unam Sanctum” issued in 1302, stated that outside the Catholic Church, “there is neither salvation nor remission of sins.” He further said, “...it is altogether necessary to salvation for every human creature to be subject to the Roman Pontiff” (**Eternal Kingdom**, 196). They teach that there are seven sacraments (i.e., rites by which grace is conferred), although the word “sacrament” is not found in the Bible; Baptism, Penance, Confirmation, Holy Eucharist, Extreme Unction, Holy Orders, Matrimony. They teach that tradition and the decrees of popes and church councils are equal in authority with the Bible; “Like two sacred rivers flowing from paradise, the Bible and divine tradition contain the word of God....of the two, tradition is to us more clear and safe” (**Catholic Belief**, J. Faa Di Bruno. 33).

They believe and teach that Peter was the first Pope and had the power to forgive or retain sins as have all succeeding popes and that the church was founded upon Peter, based on their misunderstanding of the statement of Jesus in Matthew 16:13-19. They practice “Mariolatry,” the worship of Mary. They believe and teach that Mary is the “mother of God and the spouse of the Holy Spirit” (See Matthew 1:19, 24). They also

teach that Mary is a mediatrix between God and man (See 1 Timothy 2:5). They teach that Mary was born without original sin (the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception); the Bible knows nothing of either doctrine (Romans 3:23; 1 John 3:4; Ezekiel 18:20). They teach that Mary ascended bodily into heaven without dying (the doctrine of the bodily assumption (See Hebrews 9:27; 1 Corinthians 15:50); they also teach that Mary was perpetually a virgin, but the Bible teaches she had other children (Matthew 1:25; 13:55-56; John 7:3-5; Galatians 1:19; Jude 1).

They practice hagiolatry (the worship of departed saints), they believe that "saints" have left extra merit in heaven, that "saints" can hear their prayers and aid them. Nowhere is such taught in the Bible, and it is contrary to the teaching that Christ is our high priest, advocate, and mediator and His blood alone can cleanse our sins (Hebrews 4:14-16; 1 Timothy 2:5; 1 John 1:5-2:2). They divide members into laymen and clergy; the Bible makes no such distinction, all Christians are priests (1 Peter 2:5,9; Revelation 1:6).

They teach the doctrine of Purgatory; that Catholics who are not good enough to go to heaven at death go to a temporary place to be purged of their sins. This doctrine is nowhere taught in the word of God. Catholics say that indulgences can be bought to bring an early release of souls from purgatory. The Bible teaches that there is no second chance; one's destiny is sealed at death (Hebrews 9:27; Luke 16:19-31).

They teach that the bread and fruit of the vine become the actual body and blood of Jesus in the Mass; transubstantiation. When Jesus said, "This is my body...This is my blood," He was using a metaphor, He was in his body with His blood flowing in His veins when He instituted the supper, therefore, the Lord's supper is a memorial, not a sacrifice (1 Corinthians 11:24).

They do not teach the plan of salvation as taught in the Bible, instead, they believe in original sin (See Deuteronomy 24:16; Ezekiel 18:20; 1 John 3:4; James 4:17). And they "baptize" infants (See Romans 10:17; John 8:24; Matthew 10:32; Luke 13:3,5; Mark 16:16; Acts 8:12). They commonly sprinkle for baptism against clear passages like Romans 6:4; Colossians 2:12; Acts 8:36-39; etc.

Conclusion

There are other false teachings by this religious organization that space will not allow us to include in this write-up, but with the above facts about the Catholics we can see that they started too late to be the true church as they claim and their doctrine is too far removed from the Bible to give anybody salvation (2 John 9-11; Galatians 1:6-9; Revelation 22:18-19).

The Deity of Jesus Christ

DO YOU REALLY KNOW JESUS?

William Stewart | Odessa, Ontario, Canada

While in conversation with Jesus, the Jews asked Him, "Who are You?" (John 8:25), and again, "Whom do You make Yourself out to be?" (John 8:53). In the context, He identified Himself as "the Son of Man" (John 8:28; cf. Daniel 7:13), the "Son" of God (John 8:36, 54), and the "I AM" (John 8:24, 28, 58). He was as clear as could be about His identity; He claimed to be deity - God. And, His questioners understood Him, for "...they took up stones to throw at Him..." (John 8:59). On a subsequent occasion, He asked them why they sought to stone Him (John 10:31-32). Their response, "...because You, being a Man, make Yourself God" (John 10:33).

The rejection of the deity of Christ is not exclusive to the Jews in the first century. Jews and Muslims today also reject the notion that Jesus is God. But, it may surprise some, there are religious groups who claim to believe the New Testament but reject what Jesus said and the Bible writers wrote about His identity. The best known are the Jehovah's Witnesses, but they are not alone. Christadelphians, along with adherents of Christian Science and traditional Armstrongism, and perhaps other lesser known groups reject the deity of Christ.

Before we look at a selection of verses about the deity of Christ, notice the importance Jesus placed on us believing that He is God:

Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am *He*, you will die in your sins. (John 8:24)

Believing in Jesus is essential for salvation. What must we believe about Him? To grasp His claim in John 8:24, we must ignore the word *He*. You read that right - I am telling you to ignore a word. Why?

When you see a word in *italics* in your Bible, that means it's added by translators. In most cases, these additions help to clarify the text, but not in John 8:24. Jesus identified Himself as I AM. He is not a lesser god, an angel, or a mere man; He is Jehovah, the One who appeared to Moses in the burning bush! If we do not believe that He is Jehovah, we remain dead in our sins.

There are many texts in the Bible that speak to the deity of Christ. Consider:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (John 1:1)

The Word is identified as a person involved in the creation (John 1:2-4). He became flesh and dwelt among us, and received witness from John the Baptist (John 1:14-15). Jesus is the Word who became flesh, identified in John 1:1 as God.

And Thomas answered and said to Him, 'My Lord and my God.' (John 20:28)

Thomas declared the Lord to be God. If he was mistaken, surely Jesus would have corrected him. He did not. He commended his faith, and more so, the faith of those who have not seen, and yet believe (John 20:29).

For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. (Colossians 2:9)

Let's dissect the text, noting what each part of it means:

- In Him (in Jesus)
- dwells (is present)
- all the fullness (the whole completeness)
- of the Godhead (of the state of being God)
- bodily (in fleshly form).

It could not be more plainly stated - Jesus is God.

But to the Son He says, 'Your throne, O God, is forever and ever... (Hebrews 1:8)

This is from Psalm 45, a messianic psalm. The speaker, God the Father, identifies His Son (Jesus) as God.

And without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up in glory." (1 Timothy 3:16)

As we've noted in a few texts already, the Lord Jesus came in the flesh. Paul plainly states that "God was manifested in the flesh." That is, He who was divine in His nature took on the form of humanity (see Philippians 2:6-7).

There are other texts that speak about the deity of Christ, but for the honest seeker of God's word, these will suffice.

Modest Dress

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"Therefore I desire that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting; in like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, but, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works" (1 Timothy 2:8-10).

Introduction

All right thinking people understand we have a serious problem in our permissive society with indecent dress. All mature Christians realize this problem has invaded the church of the Lord. God has a standard for our dress that is not dictated by Paris, New York, or Hollywood and does not change with current styles. What is the divine rule for proper clothing?

Modest

Paul instructs, "in like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel." The primary meaning of the term "modest" is "orderly, well-arranged" (Vine. 3:79). Vine gives a secondary meaning of the term "modest" as "decent," and Thayer notes that in 1 Timothy 2:9 it denotes "decently" (356). The apostle describes modest apparel in the remainder of the passage, and his description is of decent dress, not simply neat clothing.

But what is "decent" dress? Rather than giving a detailed description of such clothing, the inspired writer reveals four criteria of proper dress, each of which pertains to the heart, i.e., to attitudes. To do otherwise would be to limit the application of this portion of the universal gospel to societies in which clothing was identical or essentially parallel to that worn in the first century Roman Empire. But, since Paul addresses himself to attitudes, it is apparent the application is universal.

Thus, the kind of clothing we wear is important because it reflects our hearts. It is also important in that it affects the salvation of others.

With Propriety

Modest dress is "with propriety." The **American Standard Version** correctly renders this "shamefastness." Both Vine (4:17) and Thayer (14) define it as "a sense of shame." Trench explains it to be that sense of shame "which shrinks from overpassing the limits of womanly reserve and modesty, as well as from the dishonour which would justly attach thereto" (71-72). A woman who dresses "with propriety" is directed by a sense of shame rooted "fast" in her character that prevents her from dressing shamefully.

What, then, is "shameful" dress? Nakedness! (Revelation 3:18) But, who would go naked, other than nudists? Let's see.

When Adam and Eve ate of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, "they knew that they were naked" (Genesis 3:7). They "sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings" (Ibid). This term "coverings" means a "girdle, loin-covering" (Gesenius. 292). They had on something like a modern, man's swim suit. When God came walking in the garden, Adam hid, for he was afraid, since he "was naked" (Genesis 3:10). While scantily clothed, the man was still naked, both in his own eyes and in God's (Genesis 3:11). God "clothed them" by giving them "tunics of skin" (Genesis 3:21). Such garments are "generally with sleeves, to the knees, but seldom to the ancles (sic)" (Wilson. 81). While scantily clothed, the first pair was still naked. That was shameful, immodest. God clothed both the man and the woman with garments that covered them. They were no longer naked. Thus, the Lord revealed a divine standard for decent dress.

This conclusion is confirmed by another Old Testament passage. In a prophecy of Babylon's destruction,

Isaiah pictures the ancient city as a “virgin daughter” who would be forced to “Uncover the thigh.” Thus, he warns, “Your nakedness shall be uncovered, Yes, your shame shall be seen” (Isaiah 47:1-3).

As my friend David Tant put it:

“The knee has long seemed to be a sensible “drawing line” for women’s garments. Everybody has a knee, and knows where it is. And if God thought that was a proper length, that’s good enough for me. And I hope it’s good enough for our sisters, as well. How do our ladies’ skirts measure up?”

But “lewdness” (Galatians 5:19), one of the “works of the flesh” which will bar one from heaven (verses 19-21), is “unbridled lust, excess ... outrageousness, shamelessness” (Thayer. 79). This principle applies to men as well as to women. Thus, for a man to dress shamelessly is licentious and sinful. Godly men will not display their scantily clothed bodies before the public either. Men, put on your shirts!

Moderation

The second term descriptive of modest dress is “moderation.” Trench explains the term as “that habitual inner self-government, with its constant rein on all the passions and desires” (70, 72). Arndt and Gingrich define the word, “**good judgment, moderation, self control....** Esp. as a feminine virtue **decency, chastity**” (810). Vine simply renders it “sound judgment” (4:44).

The apostle instructs the aged women to teach the younger “to be discreet” (Titus 2:5). This is from the same root as the word “moderation” in First Timothy 2:9. Girls and young women, if you want to exhibit sound judgment and decency in your dress, consult with godly, older women in the church. Older women, teach the younger, by both example and word, what such dress is.

Not With Braided Hair or Gold or Pearls or Costly Clothing

The third description of proper dress is negative: “not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing.” Does the inspired apostle forbid women to wear braids in their hair, jewelry, or costly clothing? The “virtuous wife” (Proverbs 31:10) dressed in “fine linen and purple” (Proverbs 31:22). The apostle Peter, in language parallel to Paul’s, exhorts women, “Do not let your beauty be that outward adorning of arranging the hair, of wearing gold, or of putting on fine apparel” (1 Peter 3:3). “Fine” is italicized, an addition of the translators. If we take Simon Peter literally, it is a sin for a woman to put on any clothes! Obviously Peter is using a common Jewish figure of speech, the denial of the lesser to emphasize the greater (cf. John 6:27). Women of Roman society were prone to wear elaborate and expensive hairdos, even to the point of braiding the hair with gold or silver strands or lacing it with gold, silver, or jewels; to dress in outlandish, expensive clothing in order to draw attention to themselves and to their wealth; and to wear expensive jewelry (cf. the great harlot of Revelation 17:3-5). Sounds like Hollywood, doesn’t it? The apostles simply teach women to place the emphasis where it belongs, on “the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible ornament of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God” (1 Peter 3:4).

One financially struggling young couple dear to us left a congregation partly because they felt out of place in their drab clothing compared to the expensive clothing and fancy furs sported by others. Some are so conscious of wearing the latest styles with the right labels that they spend exorbitant sums of money, money that could be better used, on unneeded clothing. This excess leads to covetousness (the greedy desire for gain), shames those who cannot afford to so dress, and advertises the vanity of those decked out in such a fashion. Don’t place the emphasis on fancy coiffures, designer labels, and costly jewelry that just manifest carnality. Spend your time (and save your money) developing godly character, true inward beauty, which is beautiful to God and godly people and which grows more lovely rather than less so with advancing age. The “hidden person of the heart” doesn’t develop wrinkles, age spots, crows feet, and saggy skin!

Proper for Women Professing Godliness

The term “godliness” in 1 Timothy 2:10 is from a term which denotes “the fear or reverence of God” (Vine.

2:162). The Scriptures mention two types of dress for women. Paul admonishes women to wear clothing "which is proper for women professing godliness." Solomon describes the "immoral woman," "the seductress," who wears "the attire of a harlot" (Proverbs 7:5,10). Mary Quant, the London fashion designer who introduced the mini-skirt, brazenly admitted, "Mini-skirts are symbolic of those girls who want to seduce a man." Interestingly, the mini-skirt was introduced in 1964, and the rate of rape rose 90 percent in America between 1963 and 1968. Do you think there might be a connection? When I was in South Africa, Brother Les Maydell pointed out to me some young women standing by the road dressed in tight fitting, revealing clothing. He said they were prostitutes. Other women were standing nearby waiting for public transportation. They were dressed very modestly in long, loose fitting clothing. At one glance a passerby could tell which were advertising their availability and which were concerned about their reputation. Women, girls, is your clothing "proper for women professing godliness" or "the attire of a harlot"? And being in sports doesn't alter the divine principle!

Allow me to suggest some questions which should help you answer.

- (1) Where does your skirt come when you sit down?
- (2) Does your clothing cause good men to be tempted to lust? (cf. Matthew 5:27-28; 18:6-7; 2 Samuel 11)
- (3) Does the way you dress hinder your influence? (Matthew 5:16)
- (4) Could you talk to someone else about immodest clothing dressed the way you are? (Romans 2:21)

Please be honest with yourself in answering these questions.

Conclusion

Christians don't have to dress as the Amish in order to please God. In fact, we are not to show off our religion in our clothing (Matthew 23:5). But, God does have a standard for our clothing. He wants us to exercise a sense of shame that shrinks from exposing our nakedness; to show sound judgment and decency; to avoid an over emphasis on the outward person shown by gaudy, expensive clothing, hairdos, and jewelry; and to dress in such a way that we exhibit godly character, not immorality. He does not want women or men to tempt the opposite sex to lust by their clothing or lack thereof.

Does your clothing reflect godly character, or does it cause others to stumble and bring shame upon the church? So dress that the reflection of godliness will draw others to Christ.

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