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Editor, Keith Sharp

Designer, William Stewart



- 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 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.

Question from Kenya about Righteousness

Question

I need to learn something in detailed note. Why did Jesus have to compare His disciples with Mose's disciples? MTT 5:27

Can one possess righteousness that exceeds others on our own? Or this righteousness is coming through the help of Christ in us?

Answer

I think you meant to reference Matthew 5:20: "For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven."

Matthew chapters five through seven record "The Sermon on the Mount," the Master's explanation of the righteousness of the kingdom of heaven. The theme of the sermon is stated in Matthew 5:17-20. Verse twenty introduces the rest of chapter five, which contrasts the righteousness taught by the scribes and Pharisees to that which the Lord demands of kingdom citizens (Christians).

We usually think of the righteousness we have in Christ from the standpoint of quality. We are forgiven rather than without sin (1 John 1:8-10). That is true, but the Master doesn't make that point in the Sermon on the Mount. Rather, our righteousness must be higher in both quantity and quality. The scribes and the Pharisees loosed the law of God to keep their traditions and were thus hypocrites (Matthew 15:1-9). Where

they did follow divine law, and they sometimes did (Matthew 23:2-4), they taught the law of Moses (Ibid), which was looser in its demands than the law of Christ, since the Jews in Moses' day were not ready to receive the kind of righteousness God wants (Matthew 19:3-9).

Our righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees in both quantity and quality. We follow the perfect law of liberty (James 1:25, 2:12), the law of Christ (Galatians 6:2), we are forgiven rather than claiming sinlessness (1 John 1:8-10), and we sincerely obey the Lord rather than being hypocrites (Matthew 6:2, 5, 16).

If Isaiah 53:6c Is True Then Universalism Is True?

Pat Donahue | Harvest, Alabama, USA

I've seen the following argument made in several quarters in the last ten years or so - if everybody's sins were laid upon Jesus, then everybody is going to be saved (universalism). What are people thinking? What do they mean IF everybody's sins were laid upon Jesus?; isn't that what Isaiah 53:6c says – "the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all"?

Actually Universalism's argument is "Jesus died for all, therefore all will be saved." The "substitution" concept is not usually mentioned in their argument. So if the Substitution concept makes Universalism true, then the fact Jesus died for all would also make Universalism true. If not, why not?

Notice Jesus "purged" (past tense) everybody's sins on the cross (Hebrews 1:3). If everybody's sins were purged at the cross, how could anybody be held accountable for those purged sins? Wouldn't that mean everybody is going to be saved (universalism)? If you can understand why that argument is unsound, then why would you make the exact same argument against Jesus dying in our place (John 11:48-52)?

So it appears many are making an argument they don't really even believe. But I am not accusing anybody of dishonesty. No, I don't think brethren realize they are doing such. But this does show how desperate some are to come up with something, anything to get around the plain meaning of the substitution Bible proof texts.

By the way, my same argument can be made from I Timothy 2:6 – if Jesus "gave himself a ransom for all," does that mean all are going to be saved? Why not if all were ransomed? "Universal Provision, Individual Application" (Kevin Kay) is the answer to both false concepts – Universalism, and our brethren's parallel argument against Jesus' vicarious atonement.

Fellowship

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

The New Testament uses the word "fellowship" to describe communion with God in Christ (1 John 1:3, 7), communion with saints in Christ (1 John 1:3), communion with the body and blood of Christ in the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 10:16), sharing in suffering for Christ (2 Corinthians 1:6-7), partnership in the work and worship of the Lord in His church (Acts 2:42; 2 Corinthians 8:23), partnership in financing the Lord's work (Acts 2:42; 1 Timothy 6:18), partnership in the gospel by support of a preacher (Philippians 1:5; 4:15), and distributing to the necessity of the saints (Romans 12:13; 2 Corinthians 8:4; 9:13). Where do the Scriptures use this word to describe or denote a social meal? Are some so carnally minded their mouths water when they think of fellowship in Christ? (cf. Romans 14:17; 8:6; Philippians 3:17-21; Colossians 3:1-4). We must use Bible words in scriptural ways (1 Peter 4:11). Social meals are no more fellowship than sprinkling is baptism. Such "language of Ashdod" (Nehemiah 13:23-24) indicates unscriptural, denominational attitudes. To pervert a scriptural word to an unscriptural use to justify one's practice is to teach and practice error.

- So You Want to Be a Preacher -

Preachers Sometimes Get Fired

Jefferson David Tant | Hendersonville, Tennessee, USA

Many years ago I was the recipient of the proverbial "pink slip." During my five years and two months with a congregation, we had built a new meeting place, a new preacher's home, had increased in membership from 48 to 150, and that year had baptized 22 souls. Then out of the blue, without warning, I was told my services would no longer be required at the end of a few weeks. I was given no reason, except that the elders (appointed a few months previously) felt there was a need for a change. Upon hearing about the matter, my father said, "Every preacher needs to be fired at least once." (Comforting words!)

After the congregation was told what was taking place, several were quite upset, and wanted to pull out and start a new group somewhere nearby. In a meeting with men of the congregation, I said something to the effect that I had labored over five years to build that church up, and I would have no part in any divisive effort. That was the end of any efforts to divide the church.

In time, I determined to move about 20 miles away and start from "scratch." This had been in the back of my mind for some time, to go where the gospel had not gone before. The elders gave their approval, and invited any members to participate in this venture. In the ensuing years I have had a good relationship with this church, and have preached there on occasion. (I learned that a certain gossipy woman in the church had persuaded the elders that they would lose many members if they didn't get rid of me. In later years she caused major problems in the church and was withdrawn from. The elders later apologized to me, as they realized they had been misled.)

All that, to say this. The Lord's work is worth far more than any man. I question the wisdom of preachers who must think they are so important and mighty that when they are asked to move, they will divide the church before humbly accepting the wishes of the congregation or the elders. Yes, I know at times a stand must be taken over some doctrinal issue, and division may result. But someone has observed that 90% of the divisions are over personality, and then some "doctrinal" matter is dug up to justify the division. I guess it helps the ego of preachers if they have a loyal band of followers who are willing to divide the church in order to follow them.

Paul rebuked the Corinthian brethren for their divisive attitudes: "for ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you jealousy and strife, are ye not carnal, and do ye not walk after the manner of men?" (1 Corinthians 3:3) Before his crucifixion, Christ prayed earnestly for his followers:

"I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me" (John 17:20-21).

When the world sees churches divided and brethren squabbling, why in the world would they want to get involved in that? Our unity should be one of the signs to the world that we belong to Christ. At least, that's what Christ prayed for.

God holds us accountable if we cause division over ego or pride, or just because we don't want to move. It's not as if there is nowhere else to preach. There are far more places to preach than there are preachers to go around. If you are fired, accept it in the spirit of Christ. If you see warning signs, why not go ahead the graciously resign and leave in peace, with brethren respecting you and bidding you Godspeed? I have also been in such a situation, and all worked out for the good, with continued invitations to preach for the church, along with lasting friendships. The kingdom will be blessed, and you may prevent souls from being lost.

Saul's Excuses For Disobedience

In 1 Samuel 15 we read of Saul being rejected by God. No longer was he to be king over Israel because he had rejected the word of the Lord (verse 26). He was instructed by Samuel to go and completely destroy the Amalekites. Instead, he brought back Agag and the best of the sheep, oxen, fatlings, lambs, etc. (verse 9). The Lord spoke to Samuel telling him what Saul had done and how He (God) had regretted making him king (verse 11). Samuel went out to meet Saul on his journey back and the king began to make excuses to this man of God for his failures.

In verse 13 Saul told Samuel he had performed the commandments of the Lord. The man of God asked why he heard the sheep bleating and the oxen lowing if he had followed the word of the Lord (verse 14). He was to utterly destroy the Amalekites and all they possessed (v. 3). The king next blamed the people, stating they brought back the best of the sheep and oxen to sacrifice to the Lord (verse 15). Samuel reminded him of his sin once again and asked why he had not obeyed God (verses 16-19). Saul again proclaimed he was innocent, saying he had obeyed (verse 20). Then just as before he said the people took of the plunder so they could offer sacrifice (verse 21). Even after admitting he had sinned, he still tried to excuse his iniquity on the basis he feared the people (verse 24).

No matter how many excuses the king offered, God accepted none of them. I suppose Saul thought if he told Samuel he was bringing back this plunder to sacrifice to God this would make his failure okay. Notice the question asked:

“So Samuel said: ‘Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, As in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, And to heed than the fat of rams’ (verse 22).

God has always demanded obedience from His followers. Nothing short of that will suffice. The consequences of this man’s sin was rejection from being king (verse 26). The record says Samuel went no more to see Saul until the day of his death (verse 35). Their relationship had also been severed because of sin. The prophet then anointed David to replace Saul as king over Israel in 1 Samuel 16.

Notice with me a few things I think we all can learn from this story. Not only can we benefit from good examples, but there are also valuable lessons taught from the faults of others as well. Paul used Israel’s failure to teach the Corinthians, and us as well, how they were not to live (1 Corinthians 10:1-11).

We Must Totally Comply With God’s Will.

Saul did part of what he was told to do. He did go up and fight against the Amalekites, killing all but Agag. They only spared the best of the animals, destroying everything despised and worthless (verses 7-9). This did not meet the terms set forth in God commandment though. He was told to utterly destroy all they had and not to spare them (verse 3). If the Lord tells us to believe and be baptized (which He did), He expects us to do both (Mark 16:15-16). When we are told to worship in spirit and truth (John 4:23-24), both are necessary. When instructed not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together as a body of the Lord’s people, we had better take this command seriously (Hebrews 10:25). We cannot pick what part of His will we want to obey and neglect the other. It is a serious matter when we fail to comply with all His teaching.

God Will Not Accept Excuses.

Did the Lord overlook Saul’s sin when he offered all those excuses? No, not at all! Neither will He accept ours when we fail to obey Him. I have heard some really poor excuses for people’s failures since I have been preaching. One man tried to justify living in adultery by saying God surely wanted him to be happy. Jehovah wants our happiness, but not by living in sin! One lady was forsaking the assembly of the saints to stay home with her dog that had been hit by a car. I asked her what was more important serving God or her dog? I think you know the answer I received. These may be extreme examples, yet what excuse can one offer to God for not obeying Him? If He didn’t accept Saul’s excuses, what makes us think he will accept one offered by us?

Sin Has Consequences

God is willing to forgive sin when repentance takes place. Godly sorrow leads to repentance (2 Corinthians 7:10). True repentance will manifest itself by the fruit it bears (Matthew 3:8). There must be a change of mind which results in a reformed life. One turns away from sin and turns to God. If I have been forsaking the assembly, the fruit of my repentance will show itself by my presence at all the gatherings of the saints.

The consequences of Saul's sin remained, even though he may have repented. He was still rejected from being king. We can be forgiven of our sins when we repent, yet that does not remove the consequences we might have to suffer because of our failures. A person may be promiscuous, catch AIDS, repent and be forgiven, and yet still die physically because of his sin. Sin has consequences. If we fail to repent when guilty of sin, God will reject us, not allowing us to be a part of His eternal kingdom. May the Lord help each of us to learn these valuable lessons from the example of Saul.

At My Funeral

Mike Thomas | Bowling Green, Kentucky, USA

Not that I am advocating for it to happen anytime soon, but there are a few things I want to set straight before my time of departure occurs. (This is something I have written about over the years, so do not assume I am referencing any recent funerals. I have held these beliefs a long time.) At my funeral...

1. Tell it like it is.

Don't dance around the facts regarding my character and manner of life. If I died faithful in the Lord, as best as can be determined by observation, so be it, emphasize those things and encourage people to do the same. It might persuade others to follow suit. But if I died while in rebellion to God, then tell it like it is! It might discourage others from doing the same. You will not change my condition before God anyway (cf. 1 John 5:16), so use that platform to persuade the living. Let them know that God "now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world" (Acts 17:30-31). In other words, say what those in torments would say if they could return from the dead (Luke 16:27-28).

2. No instrumental music.

My wife and children know how much I love music and how I listen to it every day, even as I write this article. My only two exceptions are rap music and religious instrumental music. (A close third would be polka music. Ha!) I avoid instrumental music in worship because I believe Jesus wants His saints to use their hearts and voices in praising Him. He specifically instructs saints to worship by "singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord" (Ephesians 5:19). If He had said to "sing and make melody on a harp," we would have permission to use mechanical instruments in worship. But since He limits song worship to singing with a spiritual instrument, I want to remain within the confines of His will. I realize a funeral is not a church service, nor is listening to music on the stereo the same as public worship, but my conscience does not permit me to distinguish between the two. So, I do not sing Amazing Grace with the accompaniment of a piano (at any time), whether collectively or privately. And since that is the case, I do not want to encourage people to worship like that at my funeral. Not everyone will agree with me, nor do I expect it, but we each must be convinced in his own mind (cf. Romans 14:22-23). The secular music in the background at a funeral home is one thing, but the ceremony itself should consist of saints "teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace" in their hearts to the Lord (Colossians 3:16).

3. Preach the gospel.

A funeral is a unique opportunity to emphasize spiritual matters to an audience that is well aware of the brevity of life. The time is right to tell men of "our Savior Jesus Christ, who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (2 Timothy 1:10). But don't leave out the rest of the gospel! Let sinners know how to enter the body of Christ: "Repent and let everyone of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:38). They must know that their only hope of salvation is in the Lord (Galatians 3:26-27) and by returning to Him (1 John 1:9-10).

4. Go to church.

If there is ever a time for Christians to “seek the Lord and His strength” (Psalm 105:4) it is when in the valley of the shadow of death. It is not the time to miss church services to grieve or to plan the arrangements, so please do not do that with my funeral! Keep your faith in God and remain devoted to Him by seeking Him especially in moments of loss (Ecclesiastes 3:1, 6). It will dishonor me to forsake our Lord to tend to my funeral.

So there it is, brethren, should this article be available when my departure occurs. My prayer is that “Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death” (Philippians 1:20).

Jesus and the Holidays

DO YOU REALLY KNOW JESUS?

William Stewart | Odessa, Ontario, Canada

Did Jesus keep the holidays? Absolutely, but His holidays (better described as holy days) were not the same as what people today keep. Born under the Law, Jesus observed the seven holy days as described in Leviticus 23: Sabbath, Passover, Feast of Firstfruits, Pentecost, Feast of Trumpets, Feast of Atonement, and the Feast of Tabernacles.

However, there are other Jewish feasts not given in the Law of Moses, such as Purim (a celebration of the Jews deliverance from Haman's plot in the days of Esther, see Esther 9:17-32) and Hanukkah (remembering the rededication of the temple after the Maccabean revolt in 165 BC). Did Jesus observe these days?

Some have speculated that the unnamed feast in John 5:1 was Purim, though there is no way to know for sure. However, John 10:22-23 specifically mentions the Feast of Dedication (a.k.a. Hanukkah). Nothing is said in Scripture of the activities to be done on either day, but there are a few things we should consider about the Lord and these days.

Jesus did not condemn these holidays. He did condemn any traditions or observances which negate God's law (Matthew 15:3-6) or involve misusing things dedicated to Him (Mark 11:15-17). These days were celebrations of important national events; perhaps comparable in some ways to Canada Day or Remembrance Day. Though participation in these national holidays was acceptable, they were not equal to those commanded by God. The Passover was a required feast day in Israel, Hanukkah was not.

Some have spoken of Purim as the Jewish Mardi Gras. It appears Mardi Gras began as a Catholic festival, culminating a day before Ash Wednesday. But in practice, Mardi Gras seems to be nothing more than an excuse for immodest costumes, excessive drinking, lustful dancing, and all kinds of debauchery.

Purim is identified as "days of feasting and joy" (Esther 9:22). So long as the activities of the festival accord with holiness, there is no reason to think the Lord didn't participate; however in the things that would invite wickedness, He would not join in or condone. For example, according to the Talmud,

A person is obligated to drink on Purim until he doesn't know the difference between "cursed be Haman" and "blessed be Mordechai." (Megillah 7b)

The rabbis may condone such an activity, but Jesus would not.

What about Easter or Christmas? Of course neither existed in the first century, at least not as we know them today. In Jesus' day, it was Eastre, a feast to the goddess of fertility during the Spring equinox and Saturnalia, which occurred at the Winter solstice. Would the Lord have kept either of these? Absolutely not, for to do so, He would have participated in pagan worship.

Should we celebrate Easter and Christmas, knowing that the Lord wouldn't participate in the festivals they

originated from? A few things to think about:

1. Are Christmas and Easter pagan holidays? I'm not asking if their origin is pagan. They were. But now, are they pagan holidays? That is, when folks celebrate these today, is the focus on exalting Eastre and Saturn? If not, then they're no longer pagan holidays, and the gods formerly linked with them get no more glory than Thor does if we say Thursday.
2. Are the practices sinful? If there is nothing wrong with eating chocolate and turkey, painting eggs, giving gifts, decorating a tree, etc., then it is fine to participate. But, if a Christmas tree makes you think of Woden, Adonia, or some other pagan god, then don't put one up!
3. Finally, don't try to make them Christian holidays. They are not found in the Bible at all. Enjoy family, friends, and food; but don't turn them into religious holidays. We have no right to create holy days that God hasn't authorized.

Sources:

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God's Plan Concerning Marriage | Areas of Focus

Marriage, Divorce, and Cohabitation

Julius C. Nwankwo | Aba, Abia State, Nigeria

Introduction

The lesson before us is of very great importance and as such, it demands that we should approach it with all sense of respect to God and His word - the Bible. It so because God means what He says and says what He means. People sometimes say things that they do not mean, promise things that they intend not to keep, and make threats which they do not mean to fulfill; but God is not man, for He always mean what He says, whether it is to punish the disobedient or to bless the obedient.

There are three institutions set up by God; they are the home, government, and the church. But two are directly controlled by the law of God; these are the home and the church; of these two the oldest is the home. God set up the home out of His love for man, when He saw that ".....it is not good for the man to be alone...." (Genesis 2:18). God created for the man a woman suitable for him (Genesis 2:18, New American Standard Bible). And like every other thing that God created in the beginning, marriage was very good. But like other good plans of God, man has corrupted or perverted the divine pattern for marriage; consequent upon this, instead of blessing, marriage has turned out to be a curse to many people. Because of this, instead of admiring it many men dread to hear about it. In spite of this many marriages have however proved to be honorable and successful.

Before we continue it is good we define some key words in the topic.

God: the creator of the heaven and earth, the Almighty.

Plan: a detailed proposal for doing or achieving something.

3. Marriage: The legally or formally recognized union of two people as partners in a personal relationship; these two people are and must be a man and a woman (Matthew 19:4)

4. Divorce: The legal dissolution of marriage by a court or other competent body.

5. Cohabitation: The state of living together and having a sexual relationship without being married.

So in this lesson we are going to see what the will of God is concerning marriage, divorce, and cohabitation.

What is God's purpose for marriage?

Purpose One: Mirror God's image. After God created the earth and the animals, He said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." The account continues, "God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him;

male and female He created them” (Genesis 1:26-27).

God’s first purpose for creating man and woman and joining them in marriage was to mirror His image on earth. Center your attention on those words, mirror His image. The Hebrew word for “mirror” means to reflect God, to magnify, exalt, and glorify Him. Your marriage should reflect God’s image to a world that desperately needs to see who He is. Because we’re created in the image of God, people who wouldn’t otherwise know what God is like should be able to look at us and get a glimpse.

Purpose Two: Complete each other and experience companionship. Scripture clearly outlines a second purpose for marriage: to mutually complete each other. That’s why God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him” (Genesis 2:18). Adam felt isolated in the garden, and so God created woman to eliminate his aloneness. Writing to the first-century church in Corinth, Paul echoed the teachings in Genesis 2 when he asserted, “However, in the Lord, neither is woman independent of man, nor is man independent of woman” (1 Corinthians 11:11).

The two of them are like a computer and software. Standing alone, the computer and software are impressive, but combined as a team; they can accomplish so much more! And that’s exactly what God had in mind when He performed the first marriage with an original groom and bride named Adam and Eve. You need each other. You recognize that now. But if you build your marriage according to God’s blueprints, as the years go by, you will really appreciate the genius of how God has custom-made your mate for you.

Purpose Three: Multiply a godly legacy. A line of godly descendants—your children—will carry a reflection of God’s character to the next generation.

God’s original plan called for the home to be a sort of greenhouse—a nurturing place where children grow up to learn character, values, and integrity. Too many couples today seem to be raising their children without a sense of mission and direction. They aren’t imparting to them the importance of leaving a spiritual legacy of changed lives. They aren’t evaluating their lives in light of the word of God (Deuteronomy 6:1; Proverbs 22:6; 13:24; 23:13-14; Ephesians 6:1-3).

One of your assignments is to impart a sense of destiny, a spiritual mission, to your children. Your responsibility as a couple is to make your home a place where your children learn what it means to love and obey God. Your home should be a training center to equip your children to look at the needs of people and the world through the eyes of Jesus Christ. If children do not embrace this spiritual mission as they grow up, they may live their entire lives without experiencing the privilege of God using them in a significant way.

Your marriage is far more important than you may have ever imagined, because it affects God’s reputation on this planet. That’s why it’s essential for you to set Jesus Christ apart as the Builder of your home.

In the beginning God created the woman that was suitable for the man (Genesis 2:18). Let me ask this question, can we say that an unbeliever is a suitable mate for a Christian? When the man, Adam, saw the woman that was made for him he could rightly say “this is the flesh of my flesh and the bone of my bones (Genesis 2:23) because she was made of the rib that was taken from the side of the man. Again can a believer, a child of God say that an unbelieving man or woman is his or her flesh and bone? If anyone can say yes it means that such Christian is not faithful to his or her allegiance to God, for the body of the Christian is a member of Christ, and joining the member of Christ with a member of the devil (an unbeliever) makes the Christian one body with the unbeliever, therefore sinful (1 Corinthians 6:16-17). If we really know and understand who a Christian is, it will be very difficult for a Christian to think of marrying outside the church. And if we should imitate the great Apostle as he urged to (1 Corinthians 4:16; 11:1), we will marry within the faith according to him, because if he had married he would have married a Christian. (1 Corinthians 9:5).

What is God's purpose for Divorce?

The mind of God is that marriage should be a life contract. (Matthew 19: 5-6; Romans 7: 2; 1 Corinthians 7:10-11). In fact the word of God made it clear that God hates divorce (Malachi 2:16). The only thing that will end any marriage in God's sight is death. (Romans 7:2; 1 Corinthians 7:39). Though Jesus gave a kind of allowance for divorce in the case of sexual immorality (Matthew 5:31, 32; 19:3-10; Mark 10:2-12; Luke 16:18). But care must be taken, because in divorce there is no place for forgiveness, and God said, for us to be forgiven, we must forgive ourselves (Matthew 6:14-15; 18:21-35).

What about cohabitation, Is it approve by God?

The answer is no; the word of God said that to avoid cohabitation, which is fornication, every man should marry his own wife, and every woman should marry her own husband.(1 Corinthians 7:2). So cohabitation is sinful and the church should not in any way encourage it.

Conclusion

Let us fear God and keep his commandment in regards to marriage. (Ecclesiastes 12:13). And we will have happy homes and the church will a better place. Thank you and remain blessed.

Is It a Sin to Marry an Unbeliever?

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

I commend to you most of Brother Nwankwo's article, but I disagree on one point. Whereas I certainly encourage a Christian to marry another Christian and strongly believe this is the course of wisdom, I do not believe it is a sin for a Christian to marry an unbeliever.

Brother Nwankwo employs 1 Corinthians 6:16-27 to teach it is a sin for a Christian to marry an unbeliever. In this passage the apostle is forbidding a Christian to cohabit with a harlot, i.e., commit fornication (1 Corinthians 6:12-20). He makes no reference whatsoever to marrying an unbeliever. If it is a sin to marry an unbeliever, it is a sin to remain married to an unbeliever. But Paul specifically tells Christians married to unbelievers to remain with them (1 Corinthians 7:12-13).

It is not a sin for a Christian to marry an unbeliever, unless it places the Christian in a position of sharing the sins of that unbeliever. But it is sinful to remain in any relationship that forces us to share in the sins of unbelievers (2 Corinthians 6:14-18).

But, there is the "good" and the "better." Paul wrote First Corinthians at a time the church in Corinth was going through tribulation (1 Corinthians 7:26). In that context, a single person who married did "well," but one who remained single did "better" (1 Corinthians 7:38).

A Christian who marries an unbeliever who has the right to marry and who has righteous character does not sin. But a Christian who marries another Christian who has the right to marry and who has righteous character does better. They can help each other go to heaven, which is the most important consideration in any relationship (Matthew 6:33), and they can assist each other to raise up godly offspring (Malachi 2:15).

I would caution young single men who are Christians against looking at the wrong thing. Before the flood, righteous men saw the physical beauty of unrighteous women and married them (Genesis 6:1-2). The result eventually was "that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Genesis 6:5). Both young men and young women need to be far more concerned about the character than the physical attractiveness of the one whom they want to have as their closest companion throughout life.

Grace, Faith, and Works

Works - James Two

The greatest leader of the Protestant Reformation, Martin Luther, so strongly believed we are saved by faith alone that, where the apostle states in Roman 5:1 that we are “justified by faith,” Luther rendered it in his German version, “justified by faith alone” (cf. Revelation 22:18). He was perplexed by the book of James. It certainly has the credentials to be included in the New Testament canon, but Luther could not reconcile James 2:14-26 with his belief in salvation by faith alone. He once called James a “right strawy epistle” and asserted it had “no gospel character in it.” He even asserted, “I will not have it in my Bible in the number of the proper chief books.” When one’s doctrine leads him to deny a book of the Bible its proper place as inspired and authoritative, he needs to reexamine his doctrine. What does James teach about faith and works?

The Passage Examined

James poses a question: “What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?” (James 2:14) Thus, the inquiry of the passage is, Will faith apart from works save? The inspired writer answers his own query in verses fifteen through twenty-six.

James first demonstrates by three arguments that faith alone is a dead faith (verses 14-20). Just as it does no good to wish a needy person well unless we do something to relieve his needs, faith apart from works is dead (verses 15-17). If your neighbor came to your door in the freezing cold of winter, wearing tattered, thin clothing and looking gaunt from hunger, and asked for help, would you reply with a laugh, “Friend, I can’t help you, but I hope you find some food and clothing”? How much would that help? That’s how much good faith apart from works does in our salvation.

Then the inspired writer shows that, apart from works, one can’t even prove he has faith (verse 18). It’s not faith or works, it is faith and works. It is said a Scotsman once labeled the oars of his rowboat “Faith” and “Works.” When a neighbor asked him why, he pushed his boat into the water. He only pulled on the oar named “Faith” and just went in a circle. Then he just pulled on “Works” and went in the opposite circle. But when he pulled on both “Faith” and “Works,” he went to his destination.

Even the demons believe, but they are nonetheless condemned (verse 19). Thus, faith without works is a dead faith (verse 20). Do you think a dead faith will save?

Then James demonstrates by two Old Testament examples that we are justified by faith that works (verses 21-25). First he appeals to the example of Abraham (verses 21-24). Abraham was a Hebrew, godly, a man, a child of God, and the friend of God. He was justified by faith (verse 23; quoting Genesis 15:6), but his faith had to be perfected by works of obedience to God (verse 22), the greatest being his offering of his beloved son of promise, Isaac, upon an altar as a sacrifice in obedience to the command of God (verse 21; cf. Genesis 22:1-18). He thus was the friend of God (verse 23; cf. 2 Chronicles 20:7; Isaiah 41:8; John 15:14).

What does the example of Abraham demonstrate? “You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only” (verse 24). This is the only time the Bible even mentions the doctrine of salvation by faith alone, and the inspired writer James emphatically declares it to be a lie.

Then James refers to the salvation of Rahab the harlot (verse 25; cf. Joshua 2:1-22; 6:22-25). In contrast with Abraham, Rahab was a Gentile, immoral, a woman, an alien, and belonged to God’s enemies. How was she saved? She heard about the Lord and the terms of salvation (Joshua 2:10, 12-20), she believed (Joshua 2:11, 21; Hebrews 11:31), and she obeyed (Joshua 2:1-8, 21; James 2:25). Thus, when Jericho perished, Rahab was saved (Joshua 6).

What does James conclude about faith and works in our salvation? “For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also” (verse 26). James does not deny salvation by faith, but he

emphatically denies salvation by faith only (verses 14, 17, 20, 22, 24, 26).

Objections Answered

Protestants raise various objections to this simple analysis of James' teaching. Sometimes they contend that Paul taught justification by faith without works for the alien sinner, whereas James refers to the justification of Christians. To begin with, this does not help, for the same ones who teach the alien is saved by faith alone contend that the Christian cannot be lost. They deny anyone, saint or sinner, must obey Christ. Furthermore, both Paul and James quote the same passage to prove their point - Genesis 15:6 (Romans 4:3; James 2:23). And in the application that each makes, Abraham had already been an obedient believer for many years. Abram was saved by faith no later than his age seventy-five (Genesis 11:31 - 12:4; Hebrews 11:8), and that saving faith was obedient faith. He had worshiped the Lord for years (Genesis 12:7; 13:3-4), and Melchizedek blessed him as "Abram of God Most High" (Genesis 14:18-20). Thus, long before the events of Genesis fifteen, Abram was a saved, obedient, faithful worshiper of the Lord. Also, Rahab was certainly an alien when she was justified by obedient faith (James 2:25). The simple fact is that both the alien and the child of God must be justified by faith that works (Mark 16:15-16; Matthew 28:20).

Some argue that James speaks of justification before men, not God. But the subject of James 2:14-26 is salvation - Will faith without works save? (James 2:14) Who saw Abraham offer Isaac? (James 2:21; Genesis 22:3,5,12) When Abraham offered Isaac, he proved his faith to God (Genesis 22:11-12).

Others contend that Paul writes of true faith, whereas James speaks of alleged but false faith. Paul teaches that we must be saved by working faith (Galatians 5:6). James shows what makes alleged faith saving faith, and that is works of obedience (James 2:14,17,20,22,24,26).

Still others assert that demons just believe in God, not in Christ (James 2:19). The demons believe in one God (Ibid) and in Jesus as the Son of God (Mark 5:7). They confessed their faith in Christ (Mark 5:7), worshiped Him (Mark 5:6), submitted to Him (Mark 5:12-13), and they fear the judgment (James 2:19). Nevertheless, they are lost (Matthew 8:29). And James plainly teaches that they prove faith without works is dead (James 2:19-20).

Summary

The kind of works Paul teaches will not save are works that demand sinless obedience, works whereby one would earn righteousness, the works of the law of Moses (Galatians 5:1-4). The works James teaches do justify are works of the obedience of faith, works whereby we meet the conditions of divine grace, works of obedience to the gospel (cf. Luke 17:10).

Faith alone does not profit (James 2:14), will not save (James 2:14), is dead (James 2:17,20,26), cannot be shown (James 2:18), is possessed by demons (James 2:19), is incomplete (James 2:22), and will not justify (James 2:24). The only kind of faith that will save is a working faith.

The alien sinner must work to be saved (Matthew 7:21), and so must the child of God (Philippians 2:12). The alien must believe in Jesus (John 6:28-29), repent of his sins (Acts 3:19), confess his faith in Christ (Romans 10:9-10), and be baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). The child of God must "observe all things" Christ commands (Matthew 28:19-20). When he fails to do so he must repent, confess his sin, and pray for forgiveness (Acts 8:22; 1 John 1:9).

The doctrine of salvation by faith alone may be "very full of comfort," but it is also very full of damnation. "You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only" (James 2:24).

Works Cited

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