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Finally, brethren

WHATEVER THINGS are true
 are noble
 are just
 are pure
 are lovely

PHILIPPIANS
 4:8

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 christstheway.com.

Abortion

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

According to christianliferesources.com, since 1973 (Roe vs. Wade) approximately 67,460,000 legal abortions have occurred in the U.S.. In contrast, approximately 1,300,000 American soldiers have been killed in battle since 1775. In comparison to the killing of the unborn in America today, Pharaoh's murder of the Hebrew baby boys (Exodus 1:15-22) would not make the front page, Herod's destruction of the babes in Bethlehem (Matthew 2:13-18) was a minor incident, and Hitler's savage slaughter of 6 million Jews wouldn't rate headlines.

When Mary was pregnant with Jesus and went to visit her cousin Elisabeth, who was pregnant with John, Luke records of Elisabeth, "the babe leaped in her womb" (Luke 1:41). John, when as yet a fetus in Elisabeth's womb, was called by the Holy Spirit a "babe." This word (Greek "brephos") is also used to describe Jesus as a newborn infant (Luke 2:12), the evangelist Timothy as a young child (2 Timothy 3:15), infants brought to Jesus (Luke 18:15), and the children Pharaoh had killed (Acts 7:19).

Not only is the fetus in the mother's womb a baby, it has emotions. Elizabeth exultantly informed Mary,

“the babe leaped in my womb for joy” (Luke 2:16).

Little babies are, of all people, innocent (Matthew 18:1-4; 19:13-14; 1 Corinthians 14:20, **NASB, NEV**). A primary reason the Lord God destroyed ancient Judah was for murdering “the innocents,” their own babies (Jeremiah 19:2-5). How long can this wicked nation endure?

I recently asked a friend who favors abortion, What is the difference between abortion and the Holocaust? He had no answer. Actually, abortion is worse. In abortion, all the murder victims are innocent.

The New Testament makes no distinction between the nature of an unborn child and one already born. To kill the unborn is no different than Pharaoh’s slaughter of the Hebrew babes.

And remember, both Pharaoh and Herod acted under the approval of the law of the land. How can anyone favor abortion on demand and at the same time oppose brutal child abuse? What is more brutal than killing?

The unborn child is a person. Give him/her the same love God demands we give all people, especially innocent, helpless people. Stop killing babies!

Was Jesus' Death Only Vicarious In Appearance?

Pat Donahue | Harvest, Alabama, USA

Galatians 3:13 plainly says Jesus was "made a curse for us." But Maurice Barnett said about the verse, "In fact, Jesus was not cursed but it appeared to others that He was" ("The Substitution Theory"). In response I suggest that if we are allowed to add “appeared” to any verse that contradicts our human theory, we can make the Bible say anything we want it to.

Similar Statements

Consider some analogous quotes on this same topic:

- “In the psalm (22:1), the ... phrase does not intend to express the idea that God has literally and actually forsaken anyone. The forsaking is in appearance, not in reality.” - Doy Moyer (“Was Jesus Literally Forsaken?,” The Auburn Beacon, 2010)
- “God had not forsaken Jesus; it just appeared that way.” - Maurice Barnett (“Did Jesus Die Spiritually?”)
- “2 Corinthians 5:21 ... is a case of ... what is not actually true, but what appears to be true ... (cf. Matt. 27:39-46)” – Gary Eubanks (11-7-2020 email)

Parallels We Agree Are False

These “appearance only” quotes on the Substitutionary Death Of Christ are just like the following quote on another topic - “Christ did not actually partake of humanity - He only ‘seemed to.’” (docetism - “an early Christian doctrine that the sufferings of Christ were apparent ...” - dictionary.com). The Barnett and Moyer quotes also sound a lot like “Biology is the study of complicated things that give the appearance of having been designed for a purpose.” (Richard Dawkins, “Pope Of Evolution,” **The Blind Watchmaker**.1). The Muslims say Jesus only appeared to die. See the similarity to the Barnett quotes above? Wouldn’t it be absurd to take the Muslim position on Jesus’ death simply because we don’t want to agree with the Calvinists that Jesus did actually die? Baptist Fred Vacaro argued something similar against me in a 1992 oral debate – “Acts 22:16 teaches it appears our sins are washed away in baptism.” How about this one you’ve probably heard before? – “New Testament demon possession wasn’t real. Certain maladies only appeared to be demon possession before modern medicine could explain them.” Do you see the parallels to our brethren’s statements?

True – Jesus’ Vicarious Death Can’t Be Proven If “Appear” Is Added To The Proof Texts

The detractors are right - One can never prove a position if “appear” is added to the verses that state the position – whatever that position is. Someone might also argue on this issue:

- Isaiah 53:6c our iniquities appear to have been laid on Jesus
- John 11:48-52 it only appeared Jesus died in our place

How Did They Know It Was Only In Appearance?

Ask yourself this question. How did Barnett and company know Jesus appeared to be cursed or appeared to be forsaken? The Bible doesn’t use any word synonymous with “appear” in those texts, does it? Is it because our texts actually say Jesus was cursed and forsaken, but that contradicts their position, and so they conclude Jesus must have been cursed or forsaken only in appearance? In other words, the only verses Barnett has to prove Jesus appeared to be cursed or forsaken are verses that say Jesus actually was! And did they add the idea of “appeared to” because the verses (as read) don’t fit their preconceived theory? Who knows why they felt the need to add to the Biblical texts. I guess the Bible isn’t supposed to tell us what is actually so; instead it just tells us what appears to be so?

Conclusion

In short we should accept that Jesus was cursed because Galatians 3:13 says He was, and we should accept that Jesus was forsaken by the Father on the cross because Matthew 27:46 says He was. It is that simple. What do we have to gain by struggling so hard to get around those plainly inspired facts?

Children Do Come With Manuals!

Jefferson David Tant | Hendersonville, Tennessee, USA

Some months ago, my wife and I bought a new car. Well, it is about five years old, but it was new to us. Thankfully, it had an important document in the glove box - an Owner's Manual. I don't think I will ever learn about all the gadgets that the car has, but in following the manual we have learned how to drive the car and make use of all the important things that make the care useful. And the manual gives information concerning taking good care of the car so that it will have a long and useful life.

Don't we all have items, gadgets, and machines that come with an Owner's Manual? Even our refrigerator has one. We want to know how to take good care of things that are important to us, from our refrigerator to our automobiles. That just makes good sense, doesn't it?

But what is absolutely the most important “thing” that parents have? Well, it's not a “thing,” but a precious child—God's gift. And that child came with an owner's manual. It's called a Bible.

Now, all parents want their children to be successful. That's why we send them to school, so they can get an education and make their way in the world. And good parents are diligent in tending to their children's education. They see to it that their children get their homework done, limit their TV and computer times, etc., and prepare for their exams so they can graduate.

That is all well and good. But parents must also remember that there is an even final exam—the Day of Judgment. We are familiar with the words of Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:10-11:

“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men, but we are made manifest to God; and I hope that we are made manifest also in your consciences.”

Allow me to apply one phrase to the point of this article: "Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we teach our children."

So, just what instructions does our "Owner's Manual" give concerning raising our children? We get some good advice in Deuteronomy 6:4-9:

"Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates."

With respect to the "doorposts," the Jews give the name "Mezuzah" to certain pieces of parchment, which they fix on the doorposts of their houses, understanding this precept in a literal sense. A small metal holder containing a verse of Scripture is attached to the doorpost, and whenever a person leaves the house, one's fingers pass over it as a reminder. They were even on the doorposts of the hotel rooms where my wife and I stayed when we were in Jerusalem.

Did the Hebrew children have to learn math and language, etc?" Obviously so. But there was something of greater importance, for while their learning in math was good for some years, their learning in spiritual matters was good for eternity.

That reminder might be good, but if "remind" is all it does, then it's of no more use than the practice of many who have a Bible sitting on the shelf or on the coffee table in their homes. It's not studied, but serves as a reminder.

Now, some may say, "We take our children to church on Sunday and Wednesday, and they get to study the Bible in their classes." Good! So how about sending them to school for half a day each week. That would be about the same number of hours spent at church services. I think you see the point.

Now, turning to the New Testament, we see some useful passages. "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4). "Bring them up" is from the Greek *"ektrepho,"* to rear up to maturity, i.e. (genitive case) to cherish or train:--bring up, nourish."

If your son wanted to be a scientist or your daughter wanted to be a doctor, could that goal be accomplished by studying two or three hours a week? You know the answer. Note that Paul's admonition wasn't to Bible class teachers or preachers. It was to fathers.

Ok, what about mothers? We remember Paul's words to his son in the gospel, Timothy. "For I am mindful of the sincere faith within you, which first dwelt in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am sure that it is in you as well" (2 Timothy 1:5). Timothy's father was not a Christian, but his faith was so strong that it impressed the apostle Paul. Who had taught Timothy? Evidently his mother and grandmother.

When my wife and I had children at home, we would have daily Bible studies/devotions around the breakfast table. We also invited neighborhood friends of our children, two of whom were baptized into Christ.

It is well known that in the United States, a large percentage of students who enter college believing in God lose their faith. Why? Consider the following quotes.

"We try to arrange things so that students who enter as bigoted, homophobic, religious fundamentalists will leave college with views more like our own... We are going to go

right on trying to discredit you (fundamentalist parents) in the eyes of your children, trying to strip your fundamentalist religious community of dignity, trying to make your view seem silly rather than discussable. We are not so inclusivist as to tolerate intolerance such as yours” (Prof. Richard Rorty, in his essay “Universality and Truth”).

*“Every child in America entering school at the age of five is insane because he comes to school with certain allegiances towards our founding fathers, towards his parents, toward a belief in a supernatural being... It is up to you teachers to make all of these sick children well by creating the International Children of the Future” (Chester M. Pierce, Harvard Professor addressing public school teachers. [Berit Kjos, **Brave New Schools**. 161].*

So the question is, “How do we prepare our children for the warfare and for heaven?” The apostle Paul gives some good advice about this.

*“Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand firm therefore, **having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints” (Ephesians 6:13-18).***

Parents, are you carefully following the “Owner’s Manual” in the discipline and instruction of the Lord?”

I Have No Appetite

Jim Mickells | Lewisburg, Tennessee, USA

Quite often as people get older and their health is failing, they lose their appetite. I spoke with a lady just a few days ago who said, “I am just not hungry.” We know if they don’t eat, inevitably their health will continue to deteriorate, and that will eventually lead to their death. Those in such a condition often hear the words, “You must try to eat something even if you are not hungry.”

Just as this happens to one’s physical health, the same often occurs to the spiritual health of Christians as well, yet age has nothing to do with it. They have no appetite for “the pure milk of the word” and they cease to grow (1 Peter 2:2). Before long they have become so weak, they refuse to partake of the spiritual nourishment provide by God, and they die spiritually. We see this pattern over and over in the body of Christ. How sad, especially in view of the abundance of spiritual food available to them.

In the parable of the seed or the sower in Luke 8, Jesus paints us a word picture of the hearts of mankind. There are four types of soils or hearts which He describes in verses 5-18. There is the wayside, rocky, thorny, and good soil in which the seed was sown. The seed is the word of God (verse 11). It seems the type of soil which describes far too many Christians is that which is thorny. The cares, riches, and the pleasures of life choke out the word, so it brings no fruit to maturity (verses 7,14). These things are the candy eaten before a meal which destroys the appetite. It is not that these things are necessarily evil within themselves; one makes them wrong because they are placed before their service to God (Matthew 6:33).

What happens is the cares, riches, and pleasures of life demand so much of one’s time none is left to eat spiritually as they should. A man or woman gets up in the morning, grabs a bite of breakfast, and heads off to work an eight-hour shift. They come home in the afternoon, have dinner, and off to the ballgame or some other activity the family is involved in. Get in close to bedtime, shower, get ready for bed and rest before retiring for the night. While resting before lying down they are either on their computer or cell phone checking e-mail, texting someone, watching YouTube, or TV. Then off to bed till the next morning and the

same thing plays out all over again. Even if some take time to pray, read their Bibles, and help their children with their Bible lessons, how much time is spent on these good wholesome things in comparison to all the other things they are involved in? If these other interests demand more time, less time and effort will be spent on these spiritual activities.

Paul tells us we need to be, “redeeming the time, because the days are evil” (Ephesians 5:16). The word “redeeming” is defined as “make the most of, make good use of” (**A Concise Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament**, . 62). What better way for one to make wise use of their time than to study, pray, and take advantage of every opportunity to do good in the Lord’s service.

Look once again at 1 Peter 2:2. There must be a desire for the pure milk of the word if one is to grow and remain alive spiritually. **Vincent in his Word Studies of the New Testament** says of the word “desire” – “The compound is intensive; earnestly desire.” Jesus said those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be filled (Matthew 5:6). I know a good number of people who are struggling with their faith. One of the primary reasons for this is, a lack of appetite for the word of God.

Is there anyone who does not have access to the word of God? It is available through a great number of sources. We have it in book form in our language, online, and easily downloaded to our phones. There are Bible Classes provided each week at the local church. Men and women give themselves to hours of study so members and their children can be taught God’s word. Various churches of our Lord have Gospel Meetings, invite men to preach from the Scriptures on a great variety of subjects to instruct those present not only how to be saved but also how to live as a child of God. Many of us have opportunities to attend these meetings on a pretty regular basis. As a Christian, one of the great spiritual blessings we have is the privilege to pray to our Heavenly Father at any time. He tells us to cast all our cares on Him for He cares for us (1 Peter 5:7). A lot of spiritual food. One thing which is lacking in the lives of many, is the hunger for this food. I am sure you have heard the same things which I have heard. “He/she struggles with their faith.” They will until there is a desire for the nourishment provided them by Jehovah. Have you lost your appetite?

Do You Rob Temples?

Mike Thomas | Bowling Green, Kentucky, USA

When Paul indicated the Jews for their hypocrisy, he asked if they also robbed temples. "You who say, 'Do not commit adultery,' do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?" (Romans 2:22, **NKJV**). The **King James Version** reads, "Thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege?"

Sacrilege is the act of abusing sacred things. The question then becomes which sacred things did Paul have in mind – those of God’s Temple or those of pagan temples? Either application can describe a covetous person.

If Paul had in mind the things of God (in saying the Jews committed sacrilege), he could have been referring to their irreverent approach to worship. That is what R.L. Whiteside said about this verse, “They had profaned God’s holy things by putting the common and the unclean—things of their own devising—into the worship and service of God” (**Paul’s Letter to the Saints at Rome**. 61). This sin was definitely addressed in Jesus’ ministry when He said:

“This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’ For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men—the washing of pitchers and cups, and many other such things you do” (Mark 7:6-8).

Hence, Paul rebuked his audience for claiming an offense to idolatry while showing the same irreverence to God in their neglect of sacred things.

Another interpretation for Romans 2:22 is Paul was using a figure of speech to describe greedy behavior. Strong’s Concordance says the term “sacrilege” (*“hierosyleoð”*; from 2417) means “to be a temple-robber

(figuratively).” In other words, a robber of temples was a person who cheated people financially regardless of the circumstance. The apostles were accused of this when they converted people away from paganism. By teaching people to follow the Lord, they infringed on the lucrative trade of idolatry (Acts 19:23-25) and gained the reputation of “robbers of temples” (verse 37) because of their economic impact on the industry. No one viewed them as literal plunderers of pagan temples, but by diverting people away from the lifestyle, they cut into the profits of idol-makers and devastated temples in the same way a thief would. This is likely the way Paul used that phrase in Romans 2 when addressing greedy Jews, who had a history of taking advantage of people for financial gain (Matthew 21:12-13) and depriving God of what was rightfully His (Malachi 3:8-10). They may not have been bowing down at an idolatrous temple or even plundering them for that matter, but by cheating people and living only for money, they were just as carnal and worldly-minded as those who “rob temples.”

Paul wanted his audience to see the inconsistency with what they said of themselves in comparison to how they lived. They claimed to oppose theft, adultery, and false gods, yet practiced those sins when they felt they could justify it. Consequently, they made living for God look cheap and corrupt to those who saw their hypocrisy. “For ‘the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you,’ as it is written” (Romans 2:24). This included their stance against idolatry. They said they opposed the gods of men, but when it came to lusting after material things, they were just as corrupt and undermining as thieves. The god of their heart was covetousness, which we must constantly guard against even today. We may view ourselves as fully devoted to God, but if we lie to make a sale, cheat people in business, falsify our taxes, refuse to share, hoard material things, or withhold from giving to God, we are idolatrous to the core and no different than those who steal from temples. This too diminishes our influence for good and overshadows the appeal of the gospel. The solution then is contentment, faith, and a willingness to sacrifice everything to follow Christ, who said, “whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple” (Luke 14:33).

Idolatry will always be a threat to God’s people (Colossians 3:5). Jesus warned, “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money” (Matthew 6:24, **ESV**). This demands a choice on our part. Will we love this world more than God or will we choose the eternal over the temporal? Whatever decision we make will govern our approach to life. Thus, “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth...but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven...For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (vv. 19-21). Anything less than this makes us no less covetous than those who rob temples.

Wives, Submit ... In Everything

IS THAT REALLY WHAT IT MEANS?

William Stewart | Odessa, Ontario, Canada

For years, I’ve heard concern, even defiance from both non-Christian and Christian women to a particular Bible text. Their ages range from early 20s thru mid-70s. Some were single, some married, some divorced. But one thing they all had in common was a skewed idea about what the Bible says on marriage. Perhaps some heard a pontificating man use the text to affirm male dominance. Some may have read the work of a raging feminist spewing hatred about archaic Bible concepts. Or it may be that some simply read it themselves and failed to see the whole picture. Whatever the case, Ephesians 5:22-24 has been sorely mishandled at times. Notice the text:

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.

We have emphasized the necessity of context in previous articles. When a verse or even a short series of verses are not looked at in their context, falsehood or misunderstanding can result. Take a moment to read Ephesians 5:15-33.

Our context begins with an appeal to wisdom. Verse 17 specifically tells us to *"understand what the will of the Lord is."* Of our relationship to one another in Christ, verse 21 says we should be *"submitting to one another in the fear of God"* (cf. Philippians 2:3-4; 1 Peter 5:5). As Paul continues to write, he presents three common relationships wherein submission exists. That doesn't mean the relationships are parallel to one another - just that they all display submission in some way or another. The three relationships are: husband and wife; children and parents; and masters and servants. We'll only be focusing on the husband/wife relationship.

Any organization - a business enterprise, educational institution, religious assembly, government, or a sports franchise - must have appropriate roles and structure if it is to succeed. The same is true for the family unit. Being the Originator of marriage (Genesis 2:17-24), the Lord decides who will be given leadership in the marriage. This role was given to the man (Genesis 2:17; 3:16).

Those who oppose what the Bible says about the husband's headship will often say that it makes the wife a slave, that the husband is made superior to his wife, that he will always get his own way, etc.. The text must be misused to get to any of these results. If the text is followed, the result is selfless leadership in the home which focuses on what is best for the wife and family, not the man.

1 Corinthians 11 speaks of the concept of headship, giving examples beyond the marriage relationship. Notice:

...I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God. (1 Corinthian 11:3)

As the husband is given headship over the wife, so Jesus has headship over humanity, and the Father over His Son. It is no more oppressive for a woman to be subject to her husband than it is for us to be subject to Christ, or for Christ to His Father. Further, the husband is commanded by God regarding how he will exercise his role. He is to imitate Christ. Husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the church (v 25). He died for the church! Husbands are to love their wives as they do their own bodies (v 28). A man does what is best for his own body; likewise, he is to do what is best for his wife.

Three verses in the text address the need for a wife to be subject to her husband (v 22-24). The rest of the text (v 25-33) is about the need for a husband to have a sacrificial love for his wife, such that he would suffer harm, even death, if needed.

If a man's decisions are based upon what is best for his wife (not himself), would that not make it easy for a woman to be subject to him? And if a woman respects her husband's authority (v 33), will that not make it easier for him to love her, even to the point of death? Basically, if both husband and wife will commit to obeying God's direction for marriage, it will produce a happy and productive marriage.

Leadership doesn't mean dictatorship. A good leader will listen to those under his charge. A man who makes decisions without his wife's input shows himself to be unwise, maybe even sexist. Though he is the leader in the marriage, every husband would do well to remember that his wife is his equal before God (see Galatians 3:28).

In verse 24, Paul said the wife is to be subject in everything. That does not mean if he tells her to do something wrong, she must do it. It is qualified by the statement in verse 22, "as to the Lord." The Lord does not command wickedness, neither can a husband command his wife to do evil and she be bound to submit to it.

Finally, if a man is not the kind of husband Paul says he should be, that does not free the woman from being the kind of wife the text says she ought to be. Two wrongs do not make a right. His disobedience to God is not countered in some way by her also disobeying. Peter speaks to this, indicating that her

obedience may affect her husband for good, causing him also to obey the Lord (1 Peter 3:1-7).

Let's be the husbands and wives God wants us to be.

Religious But Lost

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

As the Master concluded the great "Sermon on the Mount," He encouraged His audience to obey His words by painting a terrifying word picture of the judgment.

Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'

(Matthew 7:22-23)

How horrible to contemplate standing before the Lord in judgment, having faith in Him and being able to plead I did many works I thought would cause the Lord to accept me, yet hearing the awful pronouncement, "I never knew you; depart from Me"!

Pollsters report that 99% of Americans believe they will go to heaven. But the Lord emphatically declared that many religious people who think they are saved will in fact spend eternity in hell. Why will many religious people be lost?

The Pharisees

The Pharisees were certainly actively religious. In looking back on his life before he became a disciple of Christ, the apostle Paul reported to King Agrippa, "according to the strictest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee" (Acts 26:5). The Pharisees were very religious and quite respected by their neighbors for their religious zeal.

But characteristically the Pharisees were hypocrites. The Lord warned them, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!", denounced them as "serpents, brood of vipers," and searchingly inquired, "How can you escape the condemnation of hell?" (Matthew 23:29-33) A hypocrite is an actor, one who pretends to be what he really is not. The Pharisees religion was for show to receive the praise of men. Their hearts were corrupt, and they were thus lost.

If you're just being outwardly religious so people will approve but are inwardly and secretly corrupt, then the Lord's words come to you, "How can you escape the condemnation of hell?"

Saul of Tarsus

But Saul of Tarsus, though a Pharisee, was not typical; he was very sincere in his religious service. He was "zealous toward God" (Acts 22:3), not just to receive the praise of men. In fact he truthfully claimed to have been, "more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers" (Galatians 1:14).

And he did this with a clear conscience. He testified to the Jewish council, "Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day" (Acts 23:1).

But Saul was sincerely rejecting Jesus as the Christ the Son of God. He also reported to King Agrippa, "Indeed, I myself thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth" (Acts 26:9). By rejecting Jesus as the Christ the Son of God, He was rejecting salvation (John 8:24,58; 14:6). Friend, regardless of how sincere and zealous you are in your religion, if you do not believe that Jesus Christ is the divine Son of God, you are lost.

The Disobedient

But it is not enough just to believe in Him. "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven" (Matthew 7:21). The doctrine of salvation by faith alone is a lie. "You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only" (James 2:24). If we want to go to heaven, we must do all things the Lord commands (Matthew 28:19-20; Hebrews 5:8-9).

The Lawless

But the people whom the Lord portrayed as lost on judgment day in the Sermon on the Mount were so sincere they argued with the Lord about their salvation, they believed in Him as Lord, and they had even worked miracles in His name, yet they were lost (Matthew 7:22-23). Why?

Christ Jesus charged them with working "iniquity" (Matthew 7:23, **King James Version**), that is, "lawlessness" (**New King James Version, New American Standard Bible, English Standard Version**). Because of this He revealed to them, "I never knew you," i.e., He never looked on them with approval or accepted them.

There are many very religious people who claim to speak in tongues and to work other miracles, but who have women leading men in worship and Bible study in violation of the Lord's command (1 Corinthians 14:34-35; 1 Timothy 2:11-12) and who use instruments of music in worship, for which there is no New Testament authority (Colossians 3:17; 2 John 9; Ephesians 5:18-19). They are practicing lawlessness, and the Lord rejects them.

I have many brethren who zealously turn the work of the Lord's church, a spiritual relationship (John 18:36; Romans 14:17; Ephesians 1:3,22-23), into carnal labors by having church sponsored recreational activities, such as ball teams and camping trips, by having common meals as a church function, by extending church benevolence to alien sinners, by having secular education as a work of the church, "and many other such things." Repeatedly, preaching brethren have defended these practices to me by claiming, "We do lots of things without Bible authority." Beloved brethren, that is the essence of lawlessness. Do you really suppose you are ready to meet the Lord in judgment?

Conclusion

My friend, one day you and I will stand before the Lord in judgment (Romans 14:10-12; 2 Corinthians 5:10). I hope you are religious, but that's not enough to be confident you are ready for the great day. The hypocrites, those who reject Christ, the disobedient, and the lawless, however religious they may be, will be lost. Are you ready for that day?

Response To Brother Keith Sharp's Objection To My Position On A Christian Marrying An Unbeliever

Julius C. Nwankwo | Aba, Nigeria

In the December issue of "Meditate On These Things," I submitted an article titled "God's Plan Concerning Marriage" with the areas of focus on "Marriage, Divorce, and Cohabitation." In that work, I posited that a Christian should not marry an unbeliever; but my brother and friend disagrees with it. Let me say here that I am not ready to engage in endless argument but to make my position known. In fact if anybody had responded to it before now, I would have been silent, but since it seems that I am the only person holding such view, there is the need that I respond to it.

Brother Sharp's first point in his reply was like a player trying to defend his goalpost but instead scored against his team which is called "own goal." Brother Sharp said:

"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 Sharp strongly believed that a Christian marrying a Christian is a course of wisdom and if it is a course of wisdom as he said it means that when a Christian marries a non-Christian, it is not a course of wisdom and when one is not wise, he is foolish. So, marrying an unbeliever is a course of foolishness. By his own argument that "it is the course of wisdom to marry a Christian," he has at the same time defeated himself because the opposite of wisdom is foolishness. I know he will not argue this.

He also makes reference to my use of 1Corinthians 6:16-17 and he said;

"Brother Nwankwo employs 1 Corinthians 6:16-17 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)."

Yes I agree with him that Paul was not teaching on marriage but a Christian committing fornication with a harlot; however we all know that it does not mean that a Christian can fornicate with a Christian. I also know that brother Sharp believes that one can make a secondary application of a passage out of its immediate context, so what I did was a secondary application of that passage which I believe is not out of place.

He also said, "If it is a sin to marry an unbeliever, it is a sin to remain married to an unbeliever." This argument is not correct in that it says if it is a sin for a Christian to marry an unbeliever, the only way to repent of such sin is to put away the unbeliever, which will be a contradiction to the word of God. Now let me say here that not all sins demand that one undo the deed for repentance to take place. For example, a murderer cannot bring the person he killed back to life to show repentance, but what he needs to do is to change the bad attitude of killing that led him to kill and he will not encourage another person to kill. So is the case of a Christian that marries an unbeliever. He does not need to send the unbelieving partner away, but can change that bad attitude of not appreciating what Christ did to redeem him from the bondage of sin for if he did, he will not go back to where he was removed from to choose a partner, and when he repents he will show it by his effort to convert the unbelieving partner and will not encourage anyone to marry outside the church.

Furthermore Brother Sharp said; "But Paul specifically tells Christians married to unbelievers to remain with them (1Corinthians 7:12-13)." Yes this is true but remember that Paul did not say that those that are not married should go and marry unbelievers instead he said that a widow is free to marry but only in the Lord (1Corinthians 7:39).

"Good" and "Better" Argument

Brother Keith Sharp said:

"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)."

My answer is that there is no righteous character in an unbeliever, but an unbeliever can have good character, and that does not amount to righteousness of any kind, and if he says that a Christian who marries an unbeliever with good character does not sin that is his opinion not the Scripture.

He also said that if a Christian is married to a Christian, such Christian does better, because they can help each other go to heaven, which is the most important consideration. This means that when a Christian is married to an unbeliever instead of rendering that help, it will be discouragement. He also said that a Christian marrying a Christian will make them assist each other to raise up godly offspring. This will not be possible with the marriage to an unbeliever.

Let me conclude by saying that If we really know and understand who we are as Christians, it will be very difficult for us as Christians to think of or contemplate marrying outside the church. And if we should imitate the great Apostle as he urged us to (1Corinthians 4:16; 11:1), we will marry within the faith according to him, because if he had married he would have married a Christian. (1Corinthians 9:5).

Reply to Brother Nwankwo

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

Thanks, Brother Nwankwo, for vigorously defending your position. So far as I'm concerned, we remain brethren in fellowship, and you remain my beloved friend and brother. I appreciate Brother Nwankwo's courage for aggressively replying to me even though I regularly seek assistance for him. I would that all gospel preachers had such conviction.

This will be the last of this exchange, so it doesn't run on endlessly.

I did not encourage a Christian to marry an unbeliever; I do the opposite. I simply deny it is a sin to marry one outside Christ.

No, Brother Nwankwo, you're not alone. Unless I'm mistaken, and I have not conducted and will not conduct a poll, the overwhelming number of gospel preachers in Nigeria agree with you.

My dear brother, if one is foolish for failing to follow the course of greatest wisdom, I confess I'm unable to comprehend the apostle's point in First Corinthians 7:38: "So then he who gives her in marriage does well, but he who does not give her in marriage does better" (cf. verses 26-38). One course is good; one course is better; neither is sin.

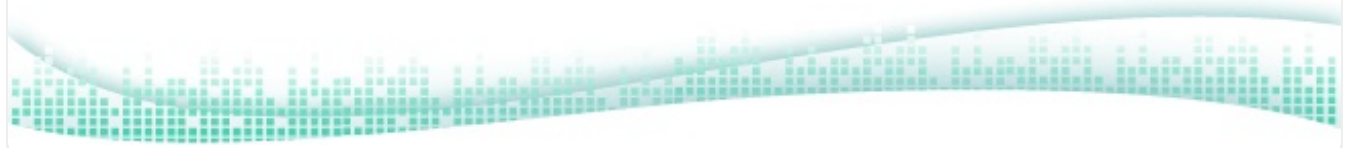
Yes, there are unbelievers, such as Cornelius the centurion, who have good character (Acts 10:1-2, 22).

Brother Nwankwo's "secondary application" of First Corinthians 6:16-17 implies that a Christian married to an unbeliever is committing fornication. The passage is dealing with fornication. Why then did Paul command them to remain married? (1 Corinthians 7:12-13) Is he advising them to go on committing fornication? (cf. Hebrews 13:4)

The apostle commanded a widow who decides to marry to marry "in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 7:39). If this means to marry a Christian, it is specifically directed to widows. It may simply mean in harmony with the Lord's will (cf. Ephesians 6:1).

Part of repentance is to undo, as far as possible, the results of a sin, i.e., to make "restitution" (e.g., Exodus 22:1-12; Leviticus 6:1-5). If a man repents of theft, he will return the stolen item. One cannot restore to life a person he has murdered, but he can leave a sinful relationship. When Jews were married to people to whom they had no right to be married, they had to put them away (Ezra chapter 10). If it is a sin for a Christian to marry an unbeliever, any Christian married to an unbeliever should put the unbeliever away. But Paul forbade this (1 Corinthians 7:12-13). It is not a sin for a Christian to marry an unbeliever.

If we follow the apostle Paul in all matters of liberty, we will not be married at all (1 Corinthians 7:8-9).



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