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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.

Question about Separation for Cause Other Than Adultery

Question

I have a question, if you don't mind answering me. If adultery is not involved in a marriage, what are the correct steps to take in separating from a spouse? Or, can one even separate from their spouse even though there is not adultery but other issues such as worldliness, greed, arrogance?

Answer

Thank you for your good question.

First, scripturally there is no difference between permanent separation and divorce. In First Corinthians 7:10-11,15, the word translated "depart" (New King James Version) is the Greek word "chorizo." It is the same word the Master used in Matthew 19:6 and Mark 10:9 to answer the Pharisees question about divorce for just any reason (Matthew 19:3; Mark 10:2). Christ forbade it (Matthew 19:4-6; Mark 10:6-9). Furthermore, the woman who has departed from her husband is unmarried (1 Corinthians 7:11).

In First Corinthians 7:11 he is not giving the woman some unnamed reason for divorce or separation, as some contend, but is telling her her options if she has sinned by departing. This is parallel to First John

2:1-2, where John tells us not to sin, but then tells us what to do if we do sin.

Temporary separation is allowed by mutual consent for spiritual reasons (1 Corinthians 7:5). A woman married to a sinful man should follow the guidelines of First Peter 3:1-6, and all husbands should obey verse seven.

Christ forbade divorce for any reason except fornication (Matthew 19:9), and this applies to permanent separation.

Gay Marriage

Pat Donahue | Harvest, Alabama, USA

Any passage that condemns homosexual would automatically condemn gay marriage, because sex is an integral part of marriage (1 Corinthians 7:2-5). And there are plenty of passages that condemn homosexuality. Romans 1:24, 26-27 destroys the gay church's contention that the Bible approves of their practice. It reads:

"Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonor their own bodies between themselves ... For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which was meet."

Romans 1 not only proves homosexual is a sin, but three times it calls the practice unnatural. That is, we could know homosexual is not what was intended by our creator even without the Bible. The physical anatomies of a man and a woman tell us what is supposed to happen sexually. In plumbing you have to join a male part to a female part. Everybody knows it won't work otherwise. See the parallel?

I once read a Yale and Columbia Universities study which found homosexuality common to only 6.7% of male identical twins and 5.3% of female identical twins. If being gay was genetic, it should have been 100%. They have the same genes, right? So gays are not born that way. Instead their sexual thinking/attraction/orientation has become perverted.

But what does God say about Gay Marriage specifically? When I have debated the gay church they usually claim Jesus personally said nothing against it. But doesn't Matthew 19:4-5 speak to the issue? There Jesus said, "Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?" Jesus quotes from the beginning to say marriage should be between male and female. The familiar cutesy saying makes a good point: "God made Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve."

Compare Matthew 19:4-5 with this quote: "The Presbyterian Church ... voted to redefine the church constitution on marriage to include a commitment between two people ..." (**Time Magazine**, 3-18-2015). Notice they've changed God's (and their) definition of marriage from a "commitment between a man and a woman" to a "commitment between two people" in order to open up to gay and lesbian marriages. I Corinthians 7:2 adds to this discrepancy by saying "... to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband." Frank Richey has documented how the Presbyterian Church USA has changed from being staunchly against homosexuality before 1978, to saying it is okay in 1991, to then allowing gay preachers in 2010, to finally performing gay wedding ceremonies in 2015. Here is a link my Personal Evangelism outline which includes Frank's quotes:

<http://www.bibledebates.info/PersonalWork/PresbyterianChangesOnHomosexuality.doc>

Question: What would a gay married couple need to do if they wanted to repent of their relationship and be

forgiven by God? Isn't it obvious? Then why isn't the same similarly obvious when we are talking about an adulterous marriage per Matthew 19:9? It is the same in principle.

The Old Testament also condemned homosexuality. Notice Leviticus 20:13 - "If a man also lie with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination: they shall surely be put to death ..." You say "Pat, why is that important?; that's Old Testament law." Here's why it's important. If the Old Testament admittedly demonstrated homosexuality was wrong for the Israelites, then that would prove homosexuals were not born that way. God would never make something a sin that a person could not help, even in Old Testament times.

As a matter of fact Leviticus 18:22-23 ("Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it is abomination. Neither shalt thou lie with any beast to defile thyself therewith: neither shall any woman stand before a beast to lie down thereto: it is confusion") in effect puts a man having sex with another man in the same category as a man having sex with an animal. Pointing this out to my gay audiences is the hardest thing I have ever had to do in a public debate. This parallel (even if I explain it in a super sweet way) is always received with mortification and revolt by many gay churches attendees. Try putting yourself in their shoes, and I think you will understand why.

There are other passages in the New Testament which condemn the heinous sin of homosexuality. Jude 3 confirms for us the sin of "Sodom and Gomorrah" (Genesis 19:1-24) was homosexuality by calling the "fornication" there "going after strange flesh." I Corinthians 6:9-10 condemns both types of gay men (those taking female roles and those taking male roles respectively) by stating:

"Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers. Neither homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, will inherit the kingdom of God" (NKJV).

And I Timothy 1:9-10 condemns the former type by saying:

"We also know this: The law was not made for a good man, but for people who are lawless, rebels, ungodly, sinners, unholy, not religious, father-killers, mother-killers, murderers, sexual sinners, homosexuals, slave traders, liars, and those who break promises. These and other things are against the healthy teaching as found in the glorious gospel of the blessed God which He trusted to me" (The Simple English NT).

Last question: Can homosexuals stop this sin if they put their mind to it? Of course! Remember from above how I Corinthians 6:9-10 condemned homosexuality? Well, verse 11 says, "and such were (past tense) some of you." They had quit being homosexuals in order to become Christians, that is, followers of Christ. Gay marriage is unscriptural. Those who practice homosex need to stop such sexual sin in order to be forgiven and go to heaven (Luke 13:3). Let's keep being plain about this.

When There Is A Conflict, Which Do You Choose?

Jefferson David Tant | Hendersonville, Tennessee, USA

Is the Bible Sufficient?

Catholic Church – Why does the Catholic Church have the Catechism in addition to the Bible? A telling statement was given to Pope Pius III by the College of Cardinals:

"Of all the advice that we can offer your Holiness we must open your eyes well and use all possible force in the matter, namely, to permit the reading of the gospel as little as possible in all the countries under your jurisdiction. Let the very little part of the gospel suffice which is usually read in mass, and let no one be permitted to read more. So long as people will be content with the small amount, your interest will prosper, but as soon as the people want to read more, your interest will fail. The Bible is the book which more

than any other, has raised against us the tumults and tempests by which we have almost perished. In fact, if one compares the teaching of the Bible with what takes place in our churches, he will soon find discord, and will realize that our teachings are often different from the Bible and oftener still, contrary to it" (National Library of Paris, Folio #1068, V. 2, pp. 650-651).

The Methodist Church – “We have, therefore, expected that the **Discipline** would be administered, not merely as a legal document, but as a revelation of the Holy Spirit, working in and through our people.” (Page 2)

It is amazing that the Methodist Church claims they have a new revelation from the Holy Spirit. That implies that the New Testament revealed in the first century is either (1) old and no longer relevant, (2) full of errors, or (3) was only intended as a temporary guide for the first 1700 years until the establishment of the Methodist Church in England in the mid-1700s.

The Mormon Church – Many are familiar with the Mormon missionaries that go door-to-door teaching the doctrine originated by Joseph Smith. Their books of doctrine are the **Book of Mormon** and **Doctrine and Covenants**. Although the claim was made that the **Book of Mormon** was pure and without error when it first appeared around 1830, there have been literally hundreds of corrections in later editions. Joseph Smith said,

“that the Book of Mormon was the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion, and a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book,” (**History of the Church**, vol. 4, p. 461).

Of many changes in the **Book of Mormon**, note just one. In referring to the Black race, 2 Nephi 20:6: “...and many generations shall not pass away among them, save they shall be a white and delightsome people.” That’s from the 1830 edition, which was prophesying that in time the Negroes would turn white. Then the 1981 edition says “...and many generations shall not pass away among them, save they shall be a pure and delightsome people.”

Evidently Mormon founder Joseph Smith believed that in time through the Mormon religion the black skin would become white. But after 150 years of this not happening, they changed the wording of “the most correct of any book on earth.” There are many such examples.

Jehovah’s Witnesses --

“Furthermore, not only do we find that people cannot see the divine plan in studying the Bible by itself, but we see, also, that if anyone lays the Scripture Studies aside, even after he has used them, after he has become familiar with them, after he has read them for ten years. if he then lays them aside and ignores them and goes to the Bible alone, though he has understood his Bible for ten years, our experience shows that within two years he goes into darkness” (“The Watch Tower,” September 15, 1910, p. 298, **Watchtower Reprints**, p. 4685).

The Bible -- Why do we need the Manuals, Catechisms, Creeds, and Doctrines all written by men? Note that they all teach doctrines that differ from one another, and above all, they teach doctrines that differ from the Bible. But this was anticipated by the Holy Spirit when he inspired the men who wrote in the first century.

The Jehovah’s Witness claim seems to be a direct insult to the intelligence of God, as he was not capable of giving us a revelation that we can understand. If this is true, then for over 1,800 years man was not able to understand and follow God’s instructions until the Jehovah’s Witnesses came along. Who can believe it?

Joseph Smith’s claim about the **Book of Mormon** echoes this same sentiment. Smith claimed that the

angel Moroni in 1830 revealed the “most correct of any book on earth.” Thus the **Book of Mormon** is better than the **Bible**, and for 1,800 years mankind didn’t have a true revelation from God. Who can believe it?

Note Jude 3:

“Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.”

Note that Jude claimed that God’s revelation had been given “once for all,” which would include all people and all time. Thus there were to be no new revelations.

The New Testament’s closing words warn us:

“I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God shall add to him the plagues which are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book”
(Revelation 22:18-19).

The apostle Paul encouraged young Timothy with these words:

“You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them; and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:14-17).

If the thousands of denominational creeds are necessary for mankind to know how to serve God, then how did the people in the first centuries know what to do? All they had was God’s word, the Bible, and it equipped them for every good work.

Now consider a question. Can we all unite upon the Catholic Catechism, or the Methodist Discipline, or any other of the multiplied thousands of denominational creeds? I think most people would say that’s an impossibility.

Consider Christ’s prayer to his father in John 17:20-23:

“I do not ask in behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be in Us; that the world may believe that Thou didst send Me. And the glory which Thou hast given Me I have given to them; that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, that the world may know that Thou didst send Me, and didst love them, even as Thou didst love Me.”

What did Christ pray for? He prayed for unity among his followers, even as he and the Father are one. Could we think of the Father as a Presbyterian and the Son as a Moravian? Obviously not. Is what we have on earth what Christ prayed for--unity? Are Baptists “one” with Mormons? Are Presbyterians “one” with Unitarians? Are Catholics “one” with Seventh Day Adventists? Is the Methodist Church “one” with The Nudist Christian Church of the Blessed Virgin Jesus? Obviously not.

Consider Christ’s word to the apostles:

“I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to

come. He shall glorify Me; for He shall take of Mine, and shall disclose it to you”
(John 16:12-13).

Did the Holy Spirit do what Christ said he would? Did he reveal “all the truth” to the writers in the first century before the last one died? If we believe Christ spoke the truth, then the revelation was complete before the apostle John died late in the first century. That means there is no new revelation as the Methodist Discipline claims, or as Joseph Smith, or Charles Taze Russell or Mary Baker Eddy claim.

So, what has caused all the division? The obvious answer would be Satan. Wouldn't these creeds of men that differ from the Bible be in line with what Paul warned about in his letter to the Galatian church?

“I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we have preached to you, let him be accursed” (Galatians 1:6-8).

Consider – If the Baptist Manual, or the Catholic Catechism, or the Methodist Discipline, or the Book of Mormon, etc. teaches something different than what the Bible teaches, wouldn't that be a different gospel? If not, why not?

There is an obvious conflict between what the Word of God says and what the words of men say. Which will you choose?

Isaiah's Description of Christ

Jim Mickells | Lewisburg, Tennessee, USA

Isaiah the prophet has been referred to as “The Shakespeare of the prophets,” “The Paul of the Old Testament,” and as “The Messianic Prophet.” Within the sixty-six chapters of the book he penned by inspiration, there are a great number of prophecies concerning our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The book of Isaiah has been called the miniature Bible. “The first 39 chapters, like the 39 books of the Old Testament, are filled with judgment upon immoral and idolatrous men. The final 27 chapters, like the 27 books of the New Testament, declare a message of hope” (Taken from Barnes' Bible Charts, “Interesting Facts About Isaiah”). Notice with me one of the prophecies stated by this great man as he describes our Lord.

“For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6).

The prophet was so sure of God's ability and willingness to fulfill this prophecy, he speaks as if this Child had already been born and this Son had already been given. The Son spoken of is the same One he mentioned in 7:14 whose name is Immanuel, God with us (Matthew 1:22-23). This Child of whom he speaks, whose government would be upon His shoulder, is King Jesus ruling over His kingdom of which there is no end (Luke 1:32-33). Isaiah gives us at least four names by which our Lord is identified – Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and the Prince of Peace.

Wonderful Counselor – Some translations have a comma between these two words, which indicate two separate thoughts. Yet several others do not, which would imply one thought. When the two words are connected together, one is truly amazed at the advice or counsel which we can receive from our Lord. The way we receive guidance from Him is through His word. Peter said, “You have the words of eternal life” (John 6:68). Are you in need of salvation? He has the answer. Want to know how to have a happy marriage? Turn to the Bible. Need help in raising godly children? He tells us. Do you need help in overcoming some temptation? Instruction is given. Are we worshiping properly? The New Testament

supplies the answers. Instead of searching for answers in the writings of men, why not go to our Wonderful Counselor and let Him give us the answers we so desperately need?

Mighty God – This tells us of the deity of Christ. In the gospel of Matthew when speaking about Jesus (Matthew 1:21), as he quotes Isaiah 7:14, he tells us that the Son the virgin would give birth to whose name was Immanuel meant God with us (Matthew 1:23). John, as he describes to us the Christ, calls Him the Word who was not only with God the Father in the beginning but was also God (John 1:1). The apostle Paul speaks of the power which Jesus has as the Mighty God to create all things in heaven and on earth, and by Him they also consist (Colossians 1:16-17). Not only was He God but He was also Man, robed in flesh. While walking this earth as a Man He demonstrated His deity by restoring sight to the blind, healing those with crippling diseases, casting out demons, calming the raging seas, raising the dead, and forgiving sins, etc. While in the flesh and facing the same kind of temptations which you and I face daily, He resisted and was without sin. Yet because of this He can sympathize with our weaknesses, knowing the difficulties we face, and is willing to provide aid, grace, and mercy to those who boldly come to His throne for help (Hebrews 2:17-18; 4:15-16). What a Mighty God we have as our Savior!

Everlasting Father – This obviously speaks of His eternal nature. Jesus said, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End,” says the Lord, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty” (Revelation 1:8). As a Father He provides for us and protects us. The word “Father” is defined as “a benefactor or guardian.” The Messiah is called The Everlasting Father, Isa. 9:6” (**Wilson’s Old Testament Word Studies**. 159). He certainly promises to provide our material needs when we seek Him first (Matthew 6:33). Yet the greatest provisions which He supplies for us are our spiritual blessings. He willingly died on the cross so that His children could be saved. His word was given to comfort, guide, inspire, and to give hope as we face life each day. Our Everlasting Father is always there for us and will never leave nor forsake us (Hebrews 13:5-8).

Prince of Peace – He is the ruler or the captain through whom we can experience peace. The word “peace” is defined as, “to be whole, complete; to be at peace, in friendship with anyone” (**Wilson’s Old Testament Word Studies**. 305). We need peace with Jehovah because of our sins. Those iniquities have separated us from Him making us His enemies (Isaiah 59:1-2; Romans 5:10). Yet Jesus through His death has made it possible for us to be at peace with our Heavenly Father (Ephesians 2:13-14). There is such a beautiful thought expressed in the word “shalom” (peace). Because of what Christ has done for us we can have tranquility of the soul, knowing we have been divinely loved, divinely forgiven, and are assured of our eternal salvation if we are faithful to our Prince of Peace. I can pillow my head at night knowing if I never rise to see tomorrow that all is well my soul because of my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Thanks be to God the Father who gave Isaiah the words so he could describe to us our Savior and Redeemer. He is a Wonderful Counselor, a Mighty God, an Everlasting Father, and the Prince of Peace. Go to Him for counsel, trust in His power, look to Him for provisions and protection, and seek Him for the peace which is offered for the souls of all men.

Someone Else Died

Mike Thomas | Bowling Green, Kentucky, USA

We are saddened to learn this week of the death of one of our congregation’s most valuable members: Someone Else. His passing leaves a void that will be difficult to fill. For years now, we relied on Someone Else to teach a class, send a card, greet a visitor, prepare the communion, encourage the struggling, or meet a financial need. But now that he is gone, who will do his work?

I believe this fictitious story can be a reality for a lot of Christians. We sometimes view the growth of the local church as something for others to do and that God does not expect much from the rest of us. Not so! He wants “the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love”

(Ephesians 4:16). No single member can do the work for the whole, nor should it be attempted. We all have talents and opportunities (given to us by God) that we can use to improve the local church, spread the gospel, and become more like Christ. Perhaps it is helping in the teaching program, which in many churches is performed by a few worn out members carrying the load. Perhaps it is learning to lead a public prayer, visiting the shut in, having people in our home, or preparing a meal for someone recovering from surgery. Every Christian is capable of doing something to improve the atmosphere of the local church and its presence in the community. Pray for the work. Support the local efforts. Encourage the faint of heart. Find a way to serve! Remember that “even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve” (Mark 10:45). How can we view ourselves any differently and not do what we can to help out? Frankly, just being friendly to visitors and getting up out of our pew to greet others will make a major difference.

A very sobering thought is presented in Hebrews regarding personal development. The writer said, “For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food” (Hebrews 5:12). The word “ought” is loaded. It shows how God wants every Christian to eventually learn how to share His word, whether it be in the role of teaching or the role of bringing someone to be taught. Both roles are necessary in evangelism (Acts 10:24), and both demonstrate what every Christian “ought to be.” It is like what Jesus told one man, “Go home to your friends, and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He has had compassion on you” (Mark 5:19). We should view ourselves in the same way. It is a privilege to tell others about God and His mercy. If we have assigned that responsibility to Someone Else, we have failed to grow in our faith. Every Christian “ought to be teachers” of God’s word because we may be the best person possible to reach our neighbors, grandchildren, or coworkers with the gospel. God may have put us in their lives for that very purpose! Or maybe we are the ones He uses to reach a prospect as a result of our prayers to be used. Whatever it is, we can be useful to the Master IF we are willing to serve. He is a God who opens doors for those who are looking for opportunity (see Revelation 3:7-8).

Jesus emphasized the principle of remaining active when He told the story of servants who were given various sums of money and told to “do business” while the Master was away (Luke 19:11-27). Some worked and brought an increase, while one did nothing and hoped his laziness would not be discovered. His plan did not work, and instead he was labeled a “wicked servant” (verse 22) for not trying. Jesus may have told this story for various reasons, but His underlying message was clear: true disciples will do what they can to honor the Master. Every Christian has something to do in God’s kingdom and He expects us to do it. It is easy to tell ourselves the growth of the church will come from those more talented and capable than we, but in doing so, we are blinding ourselves to the privilege and responsibility of honoring God with our own efforts. These talents and opportunities are His way of helping us grow in our faith and service to Him. We miss out on that progression whenever we delegate that work to Someone Else. “By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples” (John 15:8).

He will Baptize you with the Holy Spirit and Fire

IS THAT REALLY WHAT IT MEANS?

William Stewart | Odessa, Ontario, Canada

In Matthew 3, John spoke to those who came to his baptism,

...I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. (Matthew 3:11)

Occasionally I've had people tell me they have received the baptism of the Holy Spirit and fire. Invariably folks will link John's statement from Matthew 3:11 with the events of Acts 2 where we read about the apostles receiving the Spirit of God. Luke wrote:

...suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. there hey appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit

and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. (Acts 2:2-4)

Certainly we find some of the same terminology in the texts. Both mention the Holy Spirit. Both refer to a baptism of the Holy Spirit (see Acts 1:5 regarding Acts 2). And both texts mention fire. So, the texts must be about the same thing, right?

When John foretold Jesus' coming, he didn't say how widespread or how limited Holy Spirit baptism would be. Perhaps he didn't know. It may not have been revealed to him. As we go forward in the Bible, we find that the baptism of the Holy Spirit happened just twice. That's right, just twice! Acts 2 (the apostles) and Acts 10 (Cornelius' household).

Acts 10:45-47 says the Gentiles received the Spirit just as the apostles had (cf. Acts 11:16-17). Peter said the Spirit fell upon them (this is a rather exclusive phrase) just as He did upon the apostles at the first. However, in Acts 10 and 11, there is no mention of divided tongues or fire. Why not? Divided tongues, fire, rushing wine, etc. are not inherent in the baptism of the Holy Spirit. They were present in Acts 2, they were not present in Acts 10.

Well, what is the fire in Matthew 3:11 about? May I suggest to you that John speaks of two distinct baptisms. One which would be very exclusive - Holy Spirit baptism; and the other which would be widespread - the baptism of fire. If you look at the context of Matthew 3:11, you will see "fire" in the text three times (v 10, 11, 12).

In verse 7, John rebuked the religious leaders who came to him, demanding that they repent. In verse 10, he warned that judgment was coming. He used the figure of a tree being cut down and thrown into the fire. That is not good for the tree! Then we have our text in verse 11, which says Jesus will baptize with fire. Is that a good thing or a bad thing? Let's hold off on drawing a conclusion until we have looked at verse 12. In verse 12, John again used another image to portray judgment as the threshing floor is cleaned out, the wheat brought into the barn, but the chaff is burned with unquenchable fire.

The word fire appears three verses in a row. In verse 10, it is about judgment. In verse 12, it is about judgment. Friends, we do not want a baptism of fire! The context is about judgment! The baptism of fire is reserved for those who do not have the Spirit of God, for those who do not walk in God's way.

There is a baptism we are commanded to receive. It is not the baptism of the Holy Spirit, nor a baptism of fire. It is baptism in water to receive the forgiveness of sins. Immediately after receiving the Spirit, the apostles proclaimed the gospel to a large crowd in Jerusalem and commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins. Have you done so?

Does Baptism Justify an Adulterous Marriage?

Ajayi Ojeva | Osogbo, Osun State, Nigeria

God desires that all men should be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:4). The truth sets men free from the bondage of sin (John 8:32). The gospel is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16). The gospel finds men in various conditions of life. In the New Testament period, it met some people in Judaism having believed in God but needing to believe in Jesus Christ, repent and be baptized (Acts 2:36-38; 3:19-21). The gospel met some others in heathenism, being idolaters. These needed faith in God as the creator and the only object of worship and faith in Jesus Christ, then repentance and baptism (Acts 14:14-17; 17:20-31; 20:21). The Bible does not tell us everything about the lives of those who were converted to Christ. However, the command to repent necessitates a turning from every form of sin in a person's life. How does a person who is in an adulterous marriage repent of adultery and polygamy?

I. God's original plan for marriage was monogamy (Genesis 2:18, 24-25; Matthew 19:4-6).

In the beginning God began the world of man with monogamy. He made one man and one woman, Adam and Eve (Genesis 2:20-24). After the destruction of the first world, He began the new world with monogamy - Noah and his one wife and their three sons with their one wife each, eight souls (Genesis 8:15-16, 18; 1 Peter 3:20). Polygamy, divorce, and remarriage are not God's plan but corruption of marriage. Lamech was the first polygamist in the Bible (Genesis 4:19). Abraham, Jacob, David, Solomon and some others followed suit and married multiple wives. Yet, many godly men like Isaac (Genesis 24:67), Manoa (Judges 13:1), Job (Job 2:9) and a host of others married only one wife. In the Old Testament God only tolerated divorce, remarriage and polygamy; He did not sanction it. Compare Deuteronomy 24:1-4 with Matthew 19:7-9. Jesus says that God allowed divorce because of the hardness of the people's heart.

II. Jesus teaching about Marriage.

1. No room for polygamy. In Matthew 19:4-6. Jesus points out that God made one woman for one man. This shows that God's original plan for marriage forbids polygamy.

2. What God has joined together, let not man put asunder (Matthew 19:6). Note: God only joins one man and one woman in marriage. He does not join one man and two women together. Therefore, God does not join people together in polygamy. Read Matthew 19:4-6 carefully. At the beginning, God made them male and female; A man shall leave his father and mother and shall cleave to his wife (not wives); They shall be one flesh. They are no more two, but one flesh; Therefore what God has joined together. What has God joined together other than the two (one man and one woman) who are no more two but one flesh? "If a woman marries another man while her husband is still alive, she is called an adulteress" (Romans 7:3). What about a man? God does not have double standard. To avoid fornication, each man should have his own wife (not wives), and each woman her own husband (not husbands) (1 Corinthians 7:2).

III. Baptism Without Repentance will not save.

1. Men must repent and be baptized in order to be saved (Acts 2:38; 3:19-20. Repentance involves putting a stop to any sinful act or relationship. People who are in an adulterous marriage must repent. They must be separated.

2. The sin of adultery in unscriptural divorce and remarriage and in polygamy is continuous; it is not a one time act. (Mark 10:11-12; Luke 16:18).

"And he said to them, 'whoever divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her; and if she herself divorces her husband and marries another man, she is committing adultery'" (Mark 10:11-12 NASB).

Jesus says a woman who divorces her husband and marries another man is committing adultery. Her sin is not a one-time act, but continuous. Which means if after her baptism she remains with this other man she will be committing adultery. Since God joins only one and one woman together in marriage; in a polygamous marriage, God recognizes only the first wife, the wife of a man's youth who God had joined together with him (Malachi 2:14-15). If after baptism a man should continue with all the women in his polygamy, he is committing adultery whenever he goes in to the other women besides the wife of his youth. In the same way, a woman who is a second or third wife of a man is committing adultery every time the man has conjugal relation with her.

3. Times of ignorance? (Acts 17:30-31.)

It is taught by some that polygamy before conversion is in the times of ignorance which God overlooked. Does this passage give liberty to people to continue in adulterous marriages and relationships? Absolutely No. Paul had observed that the city was full of Idols (verses 16-18). They had been worshiping God in ignorance calling him an unknown God (verse 23). Paul assured them God overlooked the times of ignorance (verse 30). What does this overlooking mean? Paul explained in Acts 14:15-17, "in the generations gone by He permitted all the nations to go their own ways." What then is the conclusion? "God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should repent." Idolaters "should turn from these vain things to a living God" (Acts 14:15). Adulterers (including polygamists) should repent of their adultery. Ignorance is never an excuse. Men must repent of sins committed in ignorance (Acts 3:17, 19-21). Baptism Without

repentance will not save anyone (Acts 3:38). The grace of God demands denial of all ungodliness.

IV. Separation from partners in polygamy and all adulterous marriages.

For anyone in a polygamous or any other type of adulterous marriage to be right with God, he or she must put an end to the sin in his or her life. The unscriptural relationship must be severed. If a man put away the other women, will he be guilty of divorce thereby committing a greater sin than polygamy? Not so. God hates divorce of the wife of one's youth married early in life, not any other women besides her (Malachi 2:14-16; Proverbs 2:17; Matthew 19:4-6). Remember, the sin committed in polygamy is continuing in adultery. The sin must be discontinued. Does the Bible teach this kind of separation? How did Herodias and Herod understand John the Baptist statement "it is not lawful for you to have her"? (Matthew 14:1-11; Mark 6:18ff). They definitely knew it means Herod must put her away. Jesus told the Samaritan woman "the one whom you now have is not your husband" (John 4:18). Obviously, Jesus would not have expected her to remain with a man who is not her husband. All should come to repentance.

V. Polygamists in the church in New Testament days?

Some have asserted that there were polygamists in the church in Bible times, citing 1 Corinthians 5:1 and 1 Timothy 3:2 as proof texts. These Bible passages do not in any way prove that there were polygamists in the churches of the New Testament period. First, in the context of 1 Corinthians 5, Paul said nothing about this man's father being a Christian or a polygamist. Secondly, the mother might have died, so that the wife would be another woman whom the father married after the death of his wife. Also, the fact that Paul did not say anything about the judgment of the woman shows that she was not a Christian. For if the man was guilty of fornication, the woman was equally guilty. Paul's statement, "What have I to judge those who are outside?" could have been a reference to the other party in the fornication. This shows that the woman and possibly her husband also was not a Christian. In 1 Timothy 3:2, the qualification of an elder being "the husband of one wife" does not prove that there were men at Ephesus who had more than one wife any more than the qualification of a window to be supported by the church "having been the wife of one husband" (1 Timothy 5) prove that there were women in the church at Ephesus who had more than one husband. Therefore, there were no polygamists in the church in New Testament days.

Conclusion

Baptism Without repentance cannot effect the forgiveness of sins, since men are commanded to repent and be baptized in order to receive the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38). To continue in the grace of God man must deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts (Titus 2:11-14). Polygamy is a form of adultery which must not be mentioned among the Saints (Ephesians 5:2-7). All who are in adulterous marriages (including polygamists) must put away the unlawful mates to enjoy fellowship with God.

The Covenants (Part 3)

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The old covenant wasn't perfect (complete or mature); therefore, why would anyone want to follow any of it?

Hebrews 8:6-11

6 "But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises.

7 "For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second.

8 "For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: (remember Jeremiah 31:31-32?)

9 "Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord.

10 "For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to

me a people:

11 “And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest.” (all of this should sound familiar?)”

b. And that old covenant is superseded!

Hebrews 8:13

“In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away.”

“he hath made the first old” The Greek word for old is <palaioo>, which means: “worn out, declared obsolete.”

c But what if I want to “blend” the old and the new covenant? What if I want to keep just one or two of the Old Testament laws, like tithing or keeping the Sabbath holy?

Galatians 5:1-4

“1 Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage (Old Testament).

2 “Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing.

3 “For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law.

4 “Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace.

Why would anyone want to be cursed? You are cursed if you even try to continue in the old covenant, and you are not justified by faith in Christ!

Galatians 3:10-13

10 “For as many as are of the works (works=obedience) of the law are under the curse: for it is written, cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.

11 “But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of god, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith.

12 “And the law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth them shall live in them.

13 “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree:

d. Permit me to ask this very important question, is Paul an example for Christians to follow? He tells the Christians in Corinth, “Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1).

He also tells the Christians in Philippi, “Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample” (Philippians 3:17).

The Bible clearly states that Paul is an example for all Christians!

e. Did Paul (our example) hold on to any of the old laws that Christ fulfilled? No! Once Paul converted to Christianity, he didn't keep the “Jews religion” in any way.

Galatians 1:13

For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it: “

Paul also says, “Now after many years I came to bring alms to my nation, and offerings. (He hasn't been keeping the Passover, Pentecost, feast of booths which included Sabbaths)” (Acts 24:17).

Paul says that sabbaths and new moons are no issue...

14 "Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross;

15 "And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it.

16 "Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days:

17 "Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ" (Colossians 2:14)

But Seek First the Kingdom of God and His Righteousness

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

True Story. Billy was 6 years old. It was springtime close to summer vacation. When school was out, he and his mom, a widow who was remarrying, were moving. He came home from school and informed his mom he wouldn't be going back to baseball. When she asked why, he replied, "The rest of our games are on Wednesday night, and we'll be in church." She hadn't said a word to him about it. She didn't have to. How would that compare to our family practices?

In Matthew 6:19-34 Jesus contrasts the righteousness of the kingdom with the materialism of the Gentiles. Matthew 6:33 summarizes this contrast. "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you." What should be our chief goal in life?

The kingdom of God of Old Testament promise and prophecy is the rule of God in the hearts of His people.

"Now when He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, 'The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, "See here!" or "See there!" For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you'"
(Luke 17:20-21).

The kingdom of Christ is the church of Christ in that the people in whose hearts the Lord rules are those who compose His church. The terms "kingdom" and "church" are used interchangeably at least twice in the New Testament (Matthew 16:18-19; Hebrews 12:22-23, 28).

If we "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness," we put kingdom blessings and kingdom relationships at the absolute top of our priorities.

The context of this summary statement contrasts concern over material wealth with the spiritual blessings and relationships of the kingdom (Matthew 6:19-34). If I have a job which involves sinful activities or prevents me from serving the Lord, including assembling to worship with his people, I need to find a different job.

This also applies to family and friends. The Lord and His kingdom even come ahead of family (Matthew 10:34-38). If family comes to visit, and it's time for worship, invite them to come with you. If they won't come, ask them to stay until you return.

It certainly applies to recreation. Are we "lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God"? (2 Timothy 3:4) If we miss worship or Bible classes for sports, what does that tell us? Do we have time to go fishing but can't find time to talk to a neighbor about the Bible? If we put kids' sports ahead of the gospel meeting, what are we teaching our children? (Ephesians 6:4)

Brother J.D. Tant was a famous preacher of three or four generations ago. He used to close his articles in "Gospel Advocate" magazine by warning, "Brethren, we're drifting." It didn't make him popular, but he was right. Are we drifting?



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