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Finally, brethren
WHATEVER THINGS are true
 are noble
 are just
 are pure
 are lovely
 are of good report
 IF THERE IS ANY VIRTURE AND IF THERE IS ANYTHING PRAISEWORTHY –
meditate on these things.

PHILIPPIANS 4:8

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 the creation order

William Stewart | Odessa, Ontario, Canada

Question

Please explain the light and darkness before the creation of the sun, moon, and stars.

Answer

It is a good question. How can light and darkness have existed before the sun, moon, and stars were created? Paul wrote, "...it is God who commanded light to shine out of the darkness..." (2 Corinthians 4:6). Darkness was already there (Genesis 1:2) and God commanded the light (Genesis 1:3). Obviously, the source of light on days 1-3 could not be the sun or stars since they hadn't been created yet (Genesis 1:14-19). We're not told what the source of light was, but we are told the purpose. The light and darkness were divided from one another to distinguish the day from the night (v 4-5), which would seem to be an important distinction to establish on day 1, as every day (24-hour period) consists of both. Thus, even the first 3 days of creation, despite not having sun, moon, or stars, had day and night.

Any effort to specifically identify the source of light would be speculation. Ultimately, God provided the light, whether He was the light (1 John 1:5; Revelation 21:23; 22:5) or He employed some other temporary

means of illumination. In Acts 9:3, when Saul of Tarsus met the Lord on his way to Damascus we're told, "...suddenly a light shone around him from heaven." Certainly, it was not the sun, moon, or stars. We're not told it was specifically the Lord either, but doubtless, it was from the Lord. I would draw the same conclusion about the light on day, 1, 2 and 3.

Question from Nigeria about Eternal Life

Question

Do Christians currently possess eternal life or is the possession of eternal life a future thing? Kindly consider passages like 1 John 5:11-13 and Titus 1:2.

Answer

The great promise that we have in Christ is eternal life (John 10:27-28). Calvinists teach the present possession of eternal life by Christians as a basis for the doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints (Once Saved - Always Saved). Some brethren teach eternal life is presently possessed. When do Christians come into actual possession of eternal life?

Definition

"Eternal" means

without beginning or end, that which always has been and always will be.... 2. without beginning.... 3. without end, never to cease. everlasting.... gives prominence to the immeasurableness of eternity... (Thayer. 20-21); "without end" (Arndt & Gingrich. 28); "indeterminate as to duration, eternal, everlasting" (Mounce. 1074).

"Life" is more than mere existence. In the resurrection the wicked shall exist but shall not have life (John 5:28-29).

Spiritual life is the opposite of spiritual death (1 John 3:14). Spiritual death is the result of separation from God's fellowship. Adam died in the day he first sinned (Genesis 2:16-17); but he lived many more years physically (Genesis 5:3-5). He lost the intimate fellowship with the Lord God he had previously enjoyed on the very day he sinned (Genesis 3:22-24). The body separated from the spirit is physically dead (James 2:26). Sin separates us from God (Isaiah 59:1-2), bringing spiritual death.

Conversely, spiritual life is fellowship with God (1 John 1:3; 5:12).

Thus, eternal life is fellowship with God which is endless in duration.

Arguments Which Demonstrate Eternal Life Is a Future Possession

Any passage which demonstrates the possibility of apostasy proves eternal life is a future possession. For example, Galatians 5:4: "You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace."

Many passages plainly teach eternal life is a future possession.

"And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life" (Matthew 25:46)

"So Jesus answered and said, 'Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel's, who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time—houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions—and in the age to come, eternal life'" (Mark 10:29-30 cf. Luke 18:29-30)

"He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life" (John 12:25).

"But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God,

who 'will render to each one according to his deeds': eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality" (Romans 2:5-7).

"But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life" (Romans 6:22).

The way Christian presently possess eternal life is in hope (Titus 1:2; 3:7). We do not hope for something we actually possess (Romans 8:24-25).

Passages Which Affirm Christians Have Eternal Life

But there are several passages which affirm that saved people have eternal life (John 3:15-16, 36; 5:24; 6:47,54; 10:28; 1 John 5:11-13). We have eternal life in the same way Abraham was a father of many nations before he even had the promised son (Genesis 17:5), in the same way God had given Joshua Jericho while the walls of the city still stood (Joshua 6:2), in the same way the divine Son had been born when Isaiah wrote (Isaiah 9:6), and in the same way Christ had shed His blood when He instituted the Lord's Supper(Matthew 26:28), i.e., by hope through the divine, unbreakable promise (Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:13-20).

Quality or Quantity?

Some brethren argue that "eternal life" refers to quality, not quantity, and is presently possessed but can be forfeited. They make the comparison to a gold coin, which may be long lasting but not possessed very long. Life is a relationship, not an object to be carried in one's pocket. If that relationship, fellowship with God, is eternal, it cannot be lost.

These same brethren affirm "eternal" refers to the quality of the "life" in Christ. They are redefining biblical words to suit themselves. If I can be my own dictionary, I can prove anything I want, just like the queen in "Alice in Wonderland." "Eternal" refers to duration; "life" refers to quality of existence.

Pertinent Questions

Here's some pertinent questions for these brethren. If eternal life can be forfeited now, why not in heaven? (Matthew 25:46; cf. Luke 16:26) If eternal life can be lost, what about eternal destruction? (Matthew 25:46) If eternal life can be forfeited, can God forfeit His eternal existence? (1 Timothy 1:17) To actually "have" eternal life is to "inherit" it (Matthew 19:17; Mark 10:17), i.e., to actually possess it as our own.

Conclusion

Christians presently actually possess life, fellowship with God, which can be broken by sin (Romans 6:11). We live in hope of eternal life, endless fellowship with God, which can never be terminated (Romans 6:22-23). Do you have this life and this hope?

A young man named Sam

Jeffrey W. Hamilton | Omaha, Nebraska, USA

A young man named Sam came for Bible class today and stayed for worship. After services, he asked if he could be baptized. "Absolutely!" I replied. "When? How long will it take?" "We can do it now." "Then I want to be baptized now."

So while the baptistery was filling, I sat down for a quick study with the young man, since this was the first time we met. Turns out he is 16. He started reading his Bible on his own when he was 14. He was recently reading Acts and realized that baptism was required by God and he wanted to do what God said. He wanted to assure me that he knew we are saved by grace through faith and he knew baptism wouldn't save him, but he wanted to do all that God commanded.

We started in Ephesians 2, and I had him read starting at verse 1. Before he started reading, he said, "I just don't understand how baptism is connected with being saved by grace." I pointed out the phrases "we

were dead," "raised us up," and "made alive." I asked him to keep those phrases in mind. I also pointed out that in verse 9 we cannot create any works to save ourselves, but verse 10 shows that God has works for us to do. Those works are not the same as the man-made works in verse 9.

From there we went through Romans 6:3-7. We discussed how baptism represents Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. That is why baptism is by immersion. I could see the connection explode in his mind. I then pointed out that for the believer it represents the death of our old life and the rising to a new life where we leave sin behind. I then asked him if he remembered those phrases and pointed out that the same phrases were in Romans 6. He saw the connection.

We then went to Acts 22:16 and I reminded him of Paul's conversion. I asked him if Paul believed. "Of course!" Did he pray? "For three days." But notice that Paul still had to wash his sins away.

Next, we talked about circumcision and how that caused an Israelite to enter a covenant with God. We then went to Colossians 2:11-14 and saw that baptism was like circumcision. I asked him what was cut off, and we saw that it was the body of sin. We also talked about how a covenant was a lifelong commitment and that by being baptized he was to enter into a covenant with God.

Then we turned to the conversion of the Philippian jailer in Acts 16:29-33. I pointed out how the jailer believed but still had to be taught. I then asked him why they were in such a rush to be baptized. "Because you don't know how long you have to live!" (That was a topic of discussion in the Bible class that morning.)

Finally, I told him he should now be able to understand 1 Peter 3:21 better. I pointed out that it says, "baptism now saves." I could see him wrestling with that because it was so different from what he had been told. I used the illustration of a person being rescued out in the ocean. I asked him when is the person saved? When he sees the rescuers? When he is pulled out of the water? Or when he is finally standing on land? It took a bit, but he saw that all were necessary parts of being saved, so all had to be done.

That was all done in about 15-20 minutes. By then the baptistery was filled and a few minutes later, we had a new brother in Christ.

Please pray for Sam. He knows a lot from his reading, but he also has a lot to learn to pull it all together.

Matthew 19:9 States The Facts Of The Case; Romans 7:2-3 States The Reason

Pat Donahue | Harvest, Alabama, USA

Jesus states a moral and theological fact in Matthew 19:9a - "Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery." But how could marrying a second wife in this case result in adultery? Doesn't Vine's define an "adulterer" as "denotes one who has unlawful intercourse with the spouse of another"? If a man divorces his wife for say incompatibility and marries another, how could it be adultery for him to be married to the second wife? Isn't the second his current spouse?

The answer lies in Romans 7:2-3:

For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man.

The reason it is adultery for a man to divorce his wife for any reason other than fornication and marry

another, is because that man is still bound (obligated) to his original wife as long as she lives, and the unscriptural divorce and remarriage doesn't change that fact.

So if she is still alive, he is still obligated to her even though the state of Alabama may say he is free to marry another. The original wife is supposed to be his spouse according to God. Since he is still obligated to her, if he has relations with another (even within legal marriage), that makes him an adulterer because he is cheating "against" his original wife (Mark 10:11).

Conclusion: Matthew 19:9 states the fact that if a man divorces his wife (other than for fornication) and remarries, he commits adultery. Romans 7:2-3 states the reason for that fact: he is still bound (obligated) to his original wife even though he is married to a second. Romans 7:2-3 states the reason "divorce followed by remarriage" results in adultery.

So You Want to be a Preacher: Female Fatalities

Jefferson David Tant | Hendersonville, Tennessee, USA

If there is a road with more dangerous potholes than this, I am not sure what it is. More preachers have lost their souls, marriages, influences or employment due to improper relationships with the opposite sex than I can count. And this is not a new phenomenon. We can remember an influential song-writer long ago who suffered the rest of his life because of an improper relationship with a woman. He was David - a song-writer, king and prophet. His sin is recorded in 2 Samuel 11.

Where did David go wrong? How did he get off track so far? Some suggest he had neglected his duty as a king to lead the army in battle and thus was at home when he saw Bathsheba. That may have been true, but we do know that on occasion his men urged him not to go into battle: "Then the men of David swore to him, saying, 'You shall not go out again with us to battle, that you may not extinguish the lamp of Israel'" (2 Samuel 21:17). Be that as it may, we do know that while enjoying the evening breeze on his rooftop, he "saw a woman bathing" (2 Samuel 11:2). Sometimes we cannot help what comes across our line of vision. But evidently he continued to look, which look turned into lust, adultery, and murder. "How are the mighty fallen" (2 Samuel 1:19).

Paul gave some fatherly and godly advice to a young preacher, his son in the gospel Timothy. He encouraged Timothy to be an example in his conduct (1 Timothy 4:12), and to regard "the older women as mothers, and the younger women as sisters, in all purity" (1 Timothy 5:2). As a man, how would I want another man to treat my mother, and how would I want my sister treated? I would want them treated with respect—"in all purity." I know of a man who enjoyed watching the "Girls Gone Wild" videos until he saw his college-aged daughter in one of them. That changed his attitude, and he became a leader in the fight against pornography.

What precautions should be taken to avoid falling into temptation? Consider:

(1) Watch what you view with your eyes. "I have made a covenant with my eyes; How then could I gaze at a virgin?" (Job 31:1). "Turn away my eyes from looking at vanity..." (Psalm 119:37). "Turn away mine eyes—literally, 'Make my eyes to pass, not noticing evil'" (**Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Commentary**). We know Satan uses "the lust of the eye" to entice us, as he did with Eve. (cf, 1 John 2:16) This caution would involve avoiding pornography whether in print or on the internet. I personally know of divorces that have come from an addiction to internet porn.

(2) Watch your circumstances. Under most circumstances, it is not wise to go into a female's home without someone with you. This may present a problem when trying to arrange a Bible study. If I cannot take someone with me, I will try to arrange a meeting in some public place. I have had Bible studies in

places like IHOP restaurants when the place is not busy. This has worked well. There may be times when a woman wants some counseling or a private conversation about something troubling her. Do it in a room with a door open and someone else in the vicinity, not necessarily hearing the conversation, but at least near enough to allay any suspicions by others. At times I have had such meetings in my home with my wife obviously in the house.

(3) Be wary of invitations. Sadly, there are some women who set out to capture men. Solomon warned about this, as he said “reproofs for discipline are the way of life, To keep you from the evil woman, From the smooth tongue of the adulteress. Do not desire her beauty in your heart, Nor let her catch you with her eyelids...Can a man take fire in his bosom, And his clothes not be burned? (Proverbs 6:23-25, 27) That’s a rhetorical question, folks. If you partake in sexual sins, you will get burned! If you are faced with such a situation, Paul gave a simple solution—“Flee fornication” (1 Corinthians 6:18). Run, don’t walk, to the nearest exit!

Outreach

Jim Mickells | Lewisburg, Tennessee, USA

The word "outreach" is a term which has been coined in recent years by some of our brethren. If I understand the way in which they use it, it is applied to an effort by the local church to reach out to those who are lost in sin, to bring them to the Lord. Certainly, this is the work of the Lord's church. Paul in writing to the young evangelist Timothy said the church is the pillar and the ground of the truth (1 Timothy 3:15). It (the church) is to defend and preach the truth to a world filled with those who are lost in sin. This same apostle commended the church at Thessalonica for doing this very thing, sounding forth the word of God (1 Thessalonians 1:8). When persecution arose against the church at Jerusalem, those saints went everywhere preaching the word (Acts 8:4).

One was asked recently about the local church of which they were members having a gymnasium. The answer which was given to this question, “It is just an outreach tool to reach the lost.” One needs to consider what means the New Testament church used to reach those who were lost in sin. Was it not simply the gospel message which was preached by its members? Such was all they used to appeal to those who were in sin. Paul, in his epistle to those at Rome, said he was ready to preach the gospel to them (Romans 1:15). In the very next verse, he said the gospel of Christ is God’s power unto salvation (Romans 1:16). In his letter to those at Corinth, he says:

“Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you--unless you believed in vain” (1 Corinthians 15:1-2).

The New Testament church never built any kind of structure to draw or attract people so they might then share the gospel with them. They didn’t have soup kitchens, offer medical care, give away free vacations, nor did they have church sponsored basketball or softball. Actually, what has happened when a church has built a gym, they have involved the local church in a work which God never gave her to engage in. At least a part of its work would then be recreation. Where would one find authority in the New Testament for such a work? If a local church can build a gym and justify having such by simply stating it is a part of our outreach program, could they not build a hospital, a nursing home, a retirement community, etc. and find just as much authority for one as the other? Sure, they could. The problem is that none of these are authorized in the Scriptures.

In my limited travels in this country and abroad, I continually see a need for gospel preachers which are not being met. Part of the problems is men cannot find enough financial support to go to these areas and live so they can share the truth with those who are lost. Or those who live in these places either are not supported or not adequately provided for materially so they can give themselves totally to the preaching of the gospel. While some local churches are spending thousands of dollars to build a gym to play in, men and women are dying lost because there is no one to share the gospel with them. Are they really

concerned about trying to save the lost or are they more concerned about entertaining their members? They will need to answer this question for themselves.

I have had a good number of people through the years ask me, "What do you offer at the church where you preach?" Usually what they want to know is do you have entertainment, will you take my children on various outings, etc. The only thing the Bible permits us to offer those who are lost in sin is the gospel of Christ. If that is not enough then I am just as sorry as I can be, but that is all I'm authorized to extend to anyone. I can assure you we will do our very best to teach you and your children the Bible and to help in whatever way we can in your obedience to that gospel message so you can go to heaven when your life ends on this earth. We will encourage you to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and help equip you so you might use your talents or abilities to better serve the Lord.

May we each be busy doing our best in trying to share the gospel of Christ, reaching out to those who are lost in sin. This is the outreach program which God is interested in.

You are Eternal

Mike Thomas | Bowling Green, Kentucky, USA

Jesus taught people to believe in an existence beyond the grave. He said:

"Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation" (John 5:28-29).

We all take comfort in the promise of eternal life and believe everyone we know will experience it, regardless of our various responses to God's Word. I hope so, but the final Judge says differently. Jesus also said, "He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words has that which judges him - the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day" (John 12:48). Consequently, He taught people to believe in the realities of both heaven and hell (Matthew 25:45-46). If one outcome is true based on His word, the other must be equally true. And since Jesus came back from the dead, He confirms our eternal existence and accountability to God beyond the grave. The Bible says:

"Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead" (Acts 17:30-31).

Ultimately, life is nothing more than a test with eternal consequences. Will we live for the world and its lusts, and suffer eternally for it? Or will we be wise and choose life and faith in God, and live with Him in heaven forever? These are the two options presented to us. The apostle Paul warned:

"Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God" (Galatians 5:19-21).

Notice those last words again, "those who practice such things" will not go to heaven. We all struggle with sin and wrestle with its temptation daily, but the challenge of inheriting eternal life is based on our willingness to surrender our will to God's by not continuing in sin. He is holy so we must strive for holiness to have a relationship with Him. This means we turn away from every sin we know of as soon as we are aware of it and commit our hearts and lives to Jesus—"in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins" (Colossians 1:14). The fact that God still wants us after our wickedness should be overwhelming evidence of His tremendous love for us. But to provide us with forgiveness through the sacrifice of His Son is the ultimate demonstration of mercy.

"In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten

Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:9-10).

He truly does love us and want us in heaven.

If the dead could return, they would beg us to love God, obey His word, and be saved from sin through Jesus. “And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him” (Hebrews 5:9). To obey Jesus, we must have faith in Him as God’s Son (Acts 18:8), repent of sin (Acts 2:38), confess faith in Him (Romans 10:9-10), and be immersed in water for forgiveness (1 Peter 3:21). It is then that we are set free from sin and in fellowship with Jesus (Galatians 3:26-27).

Be wise. Prepare for eternity. Life is but for a moment. “Then the dust will return to the earth as it was and the spirit will return to God who gave it” (Ecclesiastes 12:7).

...it is appointed for men to die once...

IS THAT REALLY WHAT IT MEANS?

William Stewart | Odessa, Ontario, Canada

Let me paint a scenario that I'm confident we've all participated in. The preacher is drawing a great lesson on _____ (insert whatever topic) to a close, and as he extends the invitation, he wants to emphasize that we need to prepare ourselves for judgment, for unless the Lord comes first, we will all die and meet our Maker. To drive the point home, he supplies a quick quote from Hebrews:

...it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment... (Hebrews 9:27)

The lesson ends; the word has been proclaimed; folks have been encouraged; maybe someone even responded to the gospel by repenting of sin, confessing Christ, and being baptized in water for the forgiveness of sin. All is good with the world, right? Yeah, well, for the most part.

Some will read this article and think, "What a nitpicker." Others will read it and think, "That makes sense." I hope more will be of the second opinion.

When citing a Bible text, we do not want to use it in a way the Bible does not. Further, we want to employ it in a way that is consistent with the context in which it is found. We want to deal with God's word with integrity and honesty so we give no opportunity, no matter how small, to those who might seek to oppose.

Before we address Hebrews 9:27, let me first give a few examples of what I am talking about. In Matthew 18:20, Jesus said, "...where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them." This has been used to say that the Lord is with us in worship, no matter how few are assembled. That may be true, but that is not what Jesus is saying here. The context speaks about dealing with a brother who is in sin. The two or three are not worshipers, they are witnesses (Matthew 18:15; cf. Deuteronomy 17:6; 19:15).

Consider another example from Amos 3:3, "Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?" This is used to speak about the need for unity among believers if we are to have fellowship. However, in context it is about the prophets walking with the Lord (Amos 3:7-8).

One more example. In 2 Peter 1:20, we read, "...no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation..." This has been used to say the Bible is not open to interpretation, that you or I do not have the right to apply our own understanding to a text. Though that is true, that is not what the apostle wrote about. The text deals with the transmission of Scripture, not the reception of Scripture.

So, what about our text in Hebrews 9:27? It is certainly true that a day will come when we will all die (unless the Lord comes first). Equally, it is true that the judgment is coming, and in fact, after we have passed from this life, though we do not immediately enter the final judgment, at that point our eternal destiny has been settled (see Luke 16:19-31). It is appointed for us to die once, and afterward judgment.

So, what's the issue? Though it is true that we will die and afterward stand before God in judgment, and that is what verse 27 says, that is not the main point of the context. Far from it. Take a moment and read Hebrews 9:15-10:14. Do you see the true focus of this text?

Verse after verse is focused on the necessity of a sacrifice. The sacrifices which were made under the Law of Moses were not sufficient. They were powerless to take away sin. Thus, the necessity of Jesus, God's Son, giving Himself as an offering for us. That is the focus of this text. And more pointedly, that this offering of Himself as an offering for our sin need only happen one time for all time for all people.

Verse 27 mentions our appointment with death and judgment, but it is a side note. To focus on our death and judgment but not the death of Christ in Hebrews 9 is like admiring a book cover but never opening it. Our focus is on the wrong thing! Verse 27 is an illustration, an example, a reference to something we are familiar with, to help us understand a bit better the reach and power of the death of Christ, one time for all time for all people (9:26, 28; 10:10, 14).

Homosexual Conduct

Michael Hickox | Olney, Illinois, USA

Homosexual conduct is a "hot topic" in the time and place we live. Not only is the practice becoming increasingly common, but there is a strong push for all to approve of this practice. As with all questions of morality, though, God has the authority to determine what is right and what is wrong. God tells us the truth about morality through His written Word (John 17:17; 2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Instead of molding our thinking after the world's view of right and wrong, the Holy Spirit exhorts us to let God's Word transform our thinking (Romans 12:2). God commands us to fit our beliefs to His will, instead of trying to make God's will fit our beliefs.

Understanding God's will related to homosexual conduct begins by recognizing what He teaches about gender. When Jesus was asked a question about divorce in Matthew 19, He responded by going back to God's original design of gender and marriage. Notice verses 4-5: [Jesus] answered:

"Haven't you read that He who made them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall be joined to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh?'"

God created exactly two genders. These genders are "male and female" (Gen. 1:27). God did not leave it to the man or the woman to decide what gender they'd like to be.

God did not create either the man or the woman to be superior in importance to the other. However, He did not create them to be identical. Instead, His design is for the man and woman to perfectly complement one another. The uniqueness of man and woman make them suitable for each another.

This is connected to God's design of marriage. God-approved marriage is between husband and wife. When both the husband and the wife fulfill their complementary roles, marriage works beautifully (Ephesians 5:22-33).

God never authorizes "husband and husband" or "wife and wife" marriages. Same sex "marriages" violate the complementary nature of man and woman that God intends to exist in the marriage relationship.

Given this truth, homosexual conduct is sex outside of God-approved marriage. It is therefore a form of fornication (see Strong G4202 & Thayer), which is sin (Galatians 5:19-21).

Homosexual conduct is also condemned through passages that directly address this type of sexual sin.

Homosexual behavior has been a problem since the patriarchal dispensation. Sodom and Gomorrah were given to this sin (Genesis 19:4-5), and were destroyed for sins that included “going after strange flesh” (Jude 7). God continued to condemn homosexual conduct during the Mosaic dispensation (Leviticus 18:22).

While this history helps us better understand how God looks at things, it must be conceded that the Law we are subject to today is the Law of Christ, which is revealed through the New Testament (Colossians 2:14-17).

The New Testament speaks of some “who exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator” (Romans 1:25). Given their determination to reject the Lord’s will, God “let them have it their way.” Notice verses 26-27:

“For this reason, God gave them up to vile passions. For their women changed the natural function into that which is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural function of the woman, burned in their lust toward one another, men doing what is inappropriate with men, and receiving in themselves the due penalty of their error.”

These verses speak of homosexual conduct in a way that leaves no doubt it is condemned by God (also see 1 Timothy 1:10).

Perhaps the strongest rebuke of homosexual conduct is seen in 1 Corinthians 6. Notice verses 9-10:

“Or don’t you know that the unrighteous will not inherit God’s kingdom? Don’t be deceived. Neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor male prostitutes, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor slanderers, nor extortionists, will inherit God’s kingdom.”

Homosexuals are among the unrighteous who will face eternal condemnation in hell.

While sin leads to eternal punishment, God offers a means by which we can be forgiven. One thing He requires to be forgiven of any sin is repentance. This involves turning away from unrighteous behavior and turning toward God.

While some claim that homosexual behavior cannot be turned away from, God says otherwise. After homosexual conduct and other unrighteous acts are condemned in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, verse 11 says, “And such were some of you: but ye were washed, but ye were sanctified, but ye were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God.” According to our Creator, homosexuals can turn from that behavior (notice the words “such were”). Those in a same-sex “marriage” can (and must) leave that relationship to be right with God. Those practicing homosexual conduct can (and must) cease that behavior to be right with God.

Perhaps the misunderstanding concerning homosexuals’ ability to change stems from a failure to distinguish between temptation and sin. Hebrews 4:15 shows a crucial difference between the two. The verse speaks of Christ as the “One who has been in all points tempted like we are, yet without sin.”

It’s not a sin to be tempted. Rather, it’s a sin to yield to temptation. Some have stronger homosexual temptations than others, but this does not mean that some are forced to yield to temptation while others are not.

Notice 1 Corinthians 10:13:

“No temptation has taken you except what is common to man. God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted above what you are able, but will with the temptation also make the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.”

God assures that no matter what temptation one faces, he or she always has a “way of escape.” This is a comfort for those who want to please God.

While Christians must stand firm on these truths, we must avoid hypocrisy when condemning homosexual conduct.

This does not mean that we should never judge others (cf. John 7:24). We must be consistent, though, in identifying all sin as wrong. For instance, premarital sex should not be considered “less wrong” than homosexual acts. Both acts involve sex outside of God-approved marriage. Both acts are sin.

We must also guard against hypocrisy by watching our attitudes and motives. We must speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15), genuinely desiring to help others, rather than speaking condescendingly or merely to “win” an argument.

The fear of hypocrisy should not discourage us from standing firm on the truth, though. We should not “water down” the truth or be ashamed to proclaim it. God’s Word is unchanging (1 Peter 1:24-25). God does not “take back” the truth simply because some attempt to discard it (cf. Jeremiah 36:20-32).

As our society pushes for all to accept homosexual conduct, we should remember God’s truth and His strength (Romans 8:31).

May those guilty of homosexual conduct submit to God’s terms of forgiveness (including repentance), and may we all view and respond to homosexual conduct as God desires.

What Sin is and does : Luke 15:11-24

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"Then He said: 'A certain man had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me.' So he divided to them his livelihood. And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living. But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want. Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.' And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his servants, 'Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet. And bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry; for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' And they began to be merry."

The above story is a story of **sin**. It tells of the havoc that sin has done in the lives of men. It is a picture view of what sin will do to the individual. It is the most destructive, ravaging and enslaving force. It brakes countless homes each year. It fills man’s heart with lust, hate and murder. It blunts the will, hardens the conscience, masters the intellect, binds with the iron chains of habit, and leads one away as a slave to hard and cruel bondage.

1. Sin separated the young man from his family for “he journeyed to a far country.” He was tired of the restraints of the parental household. He was self-willed, he wanted glamor and independence. Rebellion was in his heart before he actually left the home; after inward separation comes the outward.

2. Sin has always separated man from God, it was the cause of separating Adam and Eve from God (Genesis 3:22-23). Through the ages it continues to be the cause (Isaiah 59:1-2). Paul, knowing this, advised that the Christian should come out and be separate (2 Corinthians 6:17).

3. Sin is wasteful - "but when he had spent all." All of his money was gone, pleasure gone, friends gone. Sin was so enslaving that it controlled him and he spent all. When sin thus gets control over one's heart he will spend all - deprive loved ones of the necessities of life. He will spend a good name, his influence, the qualities of his character - honesty, truth, purity, and self control. Sin will cause him to lose respect for himself and then for others. It destroys man's moral fiber. It hardens the heart.

4. Sin is an inevitable misery: "And he would gladly have filled his stomach...." There arose a great famine and he began to be in want. He got about as low as possible for him to get. Clothes were ragged, and he had no shoes, possessions all gone, spent. In his extremity he glued, attached himself to a citizen of that county. Nothing more despicable than for a Jew to feed swine, he would have eaten their food - the carob pod - no one man gave to him, instead of plenty in his father's house he now had poverty, instead of freedom he had servitude instead of honor, he had degradation and shame.

5. He had no intention of getting into this condition. Had any one asked him if he were going to eat and sleep with hogs, he would have loathed the idea. Ask a man who takes his first drink if he will be a drunkard, and he would deny it. Ask a beautiful young lady that her first boyfriend will cause her to be barren and eventually lead her to hell, she will not believe it. But sin is progressive: "But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse" (2 Timothy 3:13).

6. Sin is insanity: "when he came to himself." In the whole course of sin, he was beside himself, not in his right mind. Jesus believed and taught that a man away from God is truly not himself. This is spiritual insanity. Whoever hears God's word but will not do it is insane (Matthew 7:26). Paul reasoned with Felix "of righteousness." Righteousness is a reasonable thing. Unrighteousness is unreasonable, therefore it is insanity (Acts 24:25).

Conclusion

The son determined to go to his father: he arose and traveled the whole distance back home. Are you ready to go back to God today in repentance?

He fully confessed his sin. Are you willing to do same as a child of God in sin? Remember he did not blame others.

The father was happy to have him back, and he forgave his son, so God will be happy if we repent and go back to Him and He will forgive us. The father forgave him with no recriminations, no threats. He treated him as though he had never been away. So God will treat us if we will now decide to go back to Him.

To our friends outside the church of Christ, God is still waiting for your return by believing the gospel of Christ, repentance from your sin, confession of Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and submission of yourself to be baptized in water for the forgiveness of your sin (John 3:16; Hebrews 11:6; Acts 2:38; 17:30; Luke 13:3; Acts 8:37; Romans 10:9-10; Acts 2:38; Acts 22:16; 1 Peter 3:21).

Carnal, Sold Under Sin

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*A peck of pickled peppers Peter Piper picked;
If Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers,
Where's the peck of pickled peppers Peter Piper picked?*

Romans 7:13-25 is a logical brain teaser that reminds of a tongue twister like "pickled peppers." One honest student I was studying with expressed total frustration with it and decided he just couldn't understand Romans. Others, making excuses for their own sins or for broadening fellowship, apply the passage to faithful Christians and declare we cannot keep from sinning. The passage is difficult but not insoluble. Let's see if we can gain the apostle's point.

To understand Romans seven, we must view the chapter in context. The theme of Romans is justification by faith apart from the law (1:16-17; 3:21-26). To develop this theme, Paul had made some statements which he needed to clarify. Those statements are (1) the law does not justify but gives the knowledge of sin (3:20); (2) when the law entered, the offense abounded (5:20); and (3) you are not under law but under grace (6:14). In Romans six Paul argues that the Christian is free from sin (6:17-18). In chapter seven he contends the believer in Christ is free from the law (7:4).

To develop this theme in chapter seven, the apostle answers three questions about the law in three arguments. How and why did freedom from the law occur? (verses 1-6; Marriage Analogy) Is the law sin, i.e. the cause of sin? (verses 7-12; Saul of Tarsus the case in point of an honest Jew seeking to be justified by the law) Does the law cause death? (verses 13-25; Saul still the case in point)

Now examine with me Romans 7:13-25 verse by verse.

Remember, the first person singular pronouns point to the fact that Paul is using himself as an example.

Has then what is good become death to me? Certainly not! But sin, that it might appear sin, was producing death in me through what is good, so that sin through the commandment might become exceedingly sinful (verse 13).

"What is good" is the law, i.e., the Mosaic covenant (verse 12; cf. Romans 2:17-18). The law is not sin, (verse 7), i.e., the cause of sin. The law doesn't cause the sinner to sin, sin does. "Sin" here stands for the whole process that leads to sin and death - desire, temptation, sin, death (James 1:13-15).

The problem is within the sinner. "For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin (verse 14). "The law is spiritual, because it appeals to the inner man - the spirit of man" (Whiteside. 154; cf. 8:5-8). But the sinner is carnal, i.e., follows the desires of the flesh, and is sold under sin, i.e., the slave of sin.

Thus Paul is speaking of himself before he was saved, when he was still Saul of Tarsus, as an example of an honest, sincere Jew seeking to be justified by the law. Christians are not dead in sin (7:5, 9, 11; cf. 6:8, 11), carnal (7:14; 8:5-9), or sold under sin (7:14, 23; 6:12, 14, 16-22). We do not use our members as instruments of sin (7:18, 20; 6:13), nor does sin dwell in our bodies (7:18; 6:12, 19; 12:1; 1 Corinthians 6:13, 15, 19-20; 1 Thessalonians 2:10).

There is a passage that deals with the flesh and the spirit in the life of the Christian, Galatians 5:16-26. In Romans seven, the sinner trying to be justified by the law and without Christ has lost the struggle and is "wretched" (Romans 7:24). In Galatians five the Christian is commanded to "crucify the flesh" and "walk in the Spirit" (Galatians 5:24-25).

The present tense points not to time, Paul's present when he wrote Romans, but to position, his position at the time he was trying to be justified by the law. His problem is seeking to be justified by the law, which was no longer his problem when he became a disciple of Christ.

The honest Jew trying to be justified by the law (and any sinner trying to be justified by law keeping apart from the grace of God) has two great problems (verses 15-20). He is deceived by sin, not understanding the real results of sin; i.e., he dies while desiring life. Also, He wants to do good, but gives in to the desires of the flesh (Matthew 26:41).

The word “do” appears sixteen times in verses 15-21 in the **New King James Version**. Three times it is an interpolation, an English word added by the translators with no Greek term underlying it but which gives the sense of the statement.

The word “do” is translated from three different Greek words with different shades of meaning in this passage. The terms are “*katrergadzomai*” (“to perform, accomplish, achieve” (**Thayer**. 339), “*prasso*” (“to exercise, practice, be busy with, carry on” - **Thayer**. 535) and “*poieo*” (“to produce, construct, form, fashion” - **Thayer**. 524). In verses 15-20, I have, in the translation below, followed the **NKJV**, except every time the word “*katrergadzomai*” occurs I have translated it “accomplish,” every time the word “*prasso*” is found I have rendered it “practice,” and each time “*poieo*” is found I have used the word “produce.”

The apostle is not claiming he couldn't help but sin while under the law, a denial of personal responsibility, for Israelites could have kept the law (Deuteronomy 30:11-14), and Jesus, a man (1 Timothy 2:5) tempted in all the ways common to mankind (Hebrews 4:15), lived His entire life under the law without one sin (Hebrews 4:15; cf. Romans 8:3).

“For what I am doing (accomplishing), I do not understand. For what I will to do (practice), that I do not do (practice); but what I hate, that I do (produce)” (verse 15). David knew from the law that coveting another man's wife, and committing adultery and murder were wrong (He violated three of the Ten Commandments). But he did not realize all the dreadful consequences his sins would bring, and by giving in to fleshly desires, he practiced evil, while within he desired to do right. Nonetheless, he was held accountable for his sins until he repented.

“If, then, I do (produce) what I will not to do (produce), I agree with the law that it is good” (verse 16). Obedience to the law brings life, whereas sin brings death. The sinner really wants to live. So, even while in sin, he agrees that the law is good. Thus, the problem is not with the law itself, but with the one under the law. He violates it, and the law had no provision for his forgiveness. The law could maintain life, but it could not give life to one dead in sin (Galatians 3:12, 21; Hebrews 8:7-12).

“But now it is no longer I (only - KS) who do (accomplish) it, but (also - KS) sin that dwells in me” (verse 17). Paul is not denying personal responsibility but emphasizing the role of sin. This is an ellipsis, “The omission of a word or words in a sentence” (Bullinger) in which the apostle denies the lesser to emphasize the greater (John 6:27; 12:44).

“For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find” (verse 18). Romans 8:5-8 demonstrates Paul's use of the word “flesh.” Someone “in the flesh” cannot please God, for their mind is “set on the flesh,” and “is hostile to God” (**NASB**). Thus, the term “flesh” is used to summarize the lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and pride of life (1 John 2:15-17), the totality of desires that lead to sin.

“For the good that I will to do (produce), I do not do (produce); but the evil I will not to do (practice), that I practice” (verse 19). This is reiteration of two principles of verse fifteen.

“Now it is no longer I (alone - ellipsis) who produce it, but sin (also - ellipsis) that dwells in me” (verse 20). The apostle restates the principle of verse seventeen.

Paul is picturing the helplessness of the sinner without Christ - without the regenerating and saving power of the gospel. Here again is emphasized the need of the power of the gospel. The inward man, the spirit, in its contest with the passions of the flesh is helpless without the gospel” (Whiteside. 160).

“I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do (produce) good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members” (verses 21-23).

“This is in harmony with what Paul had said about the condition of a person under the law, and without Christ. Such a person endorsed the law, but sin hindered him from carrying out what he knew to be right. Every normal person out of Christ finds himself wishing for a better, cleaner life; but without Christ he finds himself unable to free himself from the dominion of sin” (Ibid. 161).

What the apostle identifies as “another law in my members” which brings him “into captivity to the law of sin,” he later calls “the law of sin and death” from which “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” frees the one in Christ (8:2). The “law of sin and death” is the rule of sin over the lives of sinners that leads to death, i.e., separation from God. The “law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” is the gospel, for it frees us from death (Romans 1:16).

The apostle’s point in Romans 7:13-25 is that one outside Christ seeking to be justified by keeping the law is fighting a losing battle. He wants to live, but sin has slain him, and the law is powerless to give him life. He wants to do right, but sin is addictive, and he doesn’t (I didn’t say can’t) always obey, and the addictive pleasure of sin pulls him further under.

If Romans 7:13-25 is a description of faithful Christians, we are “in captivity to the law of sin” (verse 24) and are “wretched” (verse 24). Perish the thought!

Victory over the guilt and power of sin is in Christ (chapter 8), where we are freed from the condemnation and power of sin. All our sins are forgiven. Satan cannot tempt us beyond our ability to resist (1 Corinthians 10:13). Victory is ours in Christ. “Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us” (Romans 8:37).

(I recommend the chapter by Steve Reeves on “Roman Seven” in the Faith & Facts publication **The Christian and Sin.**)

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