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In This Issue...

- **Psalm 150**
- **Is Divorce (Not For Fornication) Scriptural, As Long As There Is No Remarriage?** | *Pat Donahue*
- **A Prophet Sharing Plan (1)** | *Jefferson David Tant*
- **"He Saved Others"** | *Jim Mickells*
- **Possess Your Vessel** | *Mike Thomas*
- **Exceeding Abundantly Above... : Texts To Pause & Ponder On** | *William Stewart*
- **Music in Worship** | *Keith Sharp*

Finally, brethren

WHATEVER THINGS

are true
are noble
are just
are pure
are lovely
are of good report

PHILIPPIANS
4:8

IF THERE IS ANY VIRTURE AND IF THERE IS ANYTHING PRAISEWORTHY –
meditate on these things.

"To neglect or reject the authority of God at one point prepares the way and leads to the setting aside his authority at all points" (David Lipscomb, **A Commentary on the New Testament Epistles** [Volume 2, First Corinthians]. 80. Comment on First Corinthians 6:1). "For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all" (James 2:10).

"Decisions of the church are brought into disrepute, because they are so often mere effects at compromise instead of decisions of justice. Compromise of right, truth, and justice can never command the respect of God or man" (Ibid. 81).

"He has shown you, O man, what is good;
And what does the LORD require of you
But to do justly, to love mercy,
And to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8)

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.

Psalm 150

"Praise the Lord"

*Praise the LORD! Praise God in His sanctuary;
Praise Him in His mighty firmament!
Praise Him for His mighty acts;
Praise Him according to His excellent greatness!
Praise Him with the sound of the trumpet;
Praise Him with the lute and harp!
Praise Him with the timbrel and dance;*

Praise Him with stringed instruments and flutes!
Praise Him with loud cymbals;
Praise Him with clashing cymbals!
Let everything that has breath praise the LORD.
Praise the LORD!

The Psalms are part of the Law of Moses (cf. Psalm 82:6; John 10:34) and no more authorize mechanical instruments of music in New Testament worship than they do the offering of animal sacrifices (cf. Psalms 51:19; 66:15). But they offer many lessons for us to learn (Romans 15:4).

The theme of the Psalms is "Praise the Lord." This phrase is a translation of the Hebrew phrase transliterated in English "Hallelujah."

*"This beautiful and animated psalm closes the series of the Hallelujah Psalms Ps. 146-150, and appropriately also closes the entire volume. Its author is unknown, but in respect to the object for which it was composed there can be no uncertainty. It was manifestly designed, whoever wrote it, to occupy the very place which it does occupy - to complete the volume devoted to praise. Praise is the suitable ending of the book; praise is what the Spirit of inspiration meant to secure in the heart and on the lips. In the review of the whole there is occasion for praise. In view of all that has been disclosed about God, about his religion, about the manifestations of his mercy and grace to his people, there is occasion for praise. After all that has been experienced, observed, and recorded in this book - all of trial, sorrow, temptation, conflict, disappointment, sickness, bereavement, persecution, war, captivity, bondage, exile, tears, pain, darkness, trouble - there is, as the result of the whole, as there will be at the end of our own troubled and chequered lives, occasion for exultation, praise, triumph - songs, rejoicings, raptures, hallelujahs. This psalm, then, made up wholly of expressions of gratitude and praise, is an appropriate close to the entire Book of Psalms. So may our lives close, when its varied scenes are over, with thanksgivings and praises, as a proper expression in view of the past, and as emblematic of the uninterrupted employment that awaits us in the heavens" (Albert Barnes, Introduction to Psalm 150. **Notes on the Psalms**).*

Is Divorce (Not For Fornication) Scriptural, As Long As There Is No Remarriage?

Pat Donahue | Harvest, Alabama, USA

Many gospel preachers teach it is scriptural to divorce one's spouse for reasons other than fornication as long as no remarriage follows. As a matter of fact, it is probably the majority view of Christians. Let's examine a few of their arguments, and then prove their position false by God's word.

Contingency Legislation, Not An Exception

First Corinthians 7:10-11 is a critical passage to examine in regard to this issue. It reads:

"And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband: But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband: and let not the husband put away his wife."

One key to verse 11 is to understand it does not contain an exception to verse 10, but instead expresses "contingency legislation." Contingency legislation ('if ... then' legislation) gives instructions about what to do if something occurs but does not necessarily give approval for the something that has occurred. This is how 1 Corinthians 7:10-11 is parallel to 1 John 2:1. The two passages are parallel in that both passages follow a command with contingency legislation, that is, what do I do if I sin by violating the command stated previously? Neither passage gives an exception to the command expressed; contingency legislation does not necessarily imply an allowance. The only exception to verse 10 is found in Matthew 19:9, therefore it is wrong to separate/divorce from your spouse for any reason other than fornication, even if you

don't remarry.

Galatians 5:15 and James 3:14

Saying 1 Corinthians 7:11 shows it is not a sin for one to depart as long as she doesn't remarry is about like saying it would not be a sin to "bite and devour one another," as long as you "take heed that ye be not consumed one of another" (Galatians 5:15). It would be about like saying it would not be a sin to "have bitter envying and strife in your hearts," as long as you "glory not, and lie not against the truth" (James 3:14).

Does 1 Corinthians 7:12-13 Allow Departing?

More than one has made the argument that because "Paul says that if the unbeliever is content to dwell with the believer, the Christian is not to leave" (from verses 12-13), that "implies that if the unbeliever is not content to dwell with the Christian, then the Christian can leave." But verses 12-13 do not imply what is claimed. The "if" construction does not necessarily imply it is okay to leave a spouse who is "not agreeing on an amiable relationship."

Notice a parallel passage, 1 Corinthians 7:28, "... and if a virgin marry, she hath not sinned." If the reasoning on verses 12-13 is correct, this verse would imply "if a virgin does not marry she hath sinned." Notice also Matthew 11:14, "And, if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come." Again according to the divorce only advocate's reasoning, this verse would imply "if ye will not receive it, this is not Elias, which was for to come."

Notice also in 1 Corinthians 7:12 we have a conclusion based upon two conditions: (1) "If any brother hath a wife that believeth not, and" (2) if "she be pleased to dwell with him." If it is valid to assume the converse of the conclusion if the second condition is not met (but the first is), why would it not likewise be valid to assume the converse of the conclusion if the first condition is not met (but the second is)? Therefore, by the reasoning under examination, this verse would also teach "If any brother hath a wife that does believe, and she is pleased to dwell with him," then the brother may leave. I doubt even Olan Hicks believed that.

The real converse of verses 12 and 13 is found in verse 15, "If they are not pleased to dwell with you" (verse 12), then "let them depart" (verse 15), not ... then leave them yourself, or put them away. We should let the Bible interpret itself!

Does Luke 18:29-30 Allow For Departing?

The last common argument that I would like to deal with is from Luke 18:29-30 which reads:

"And he said unto them, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left houses, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God's sake, Who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting."

Some argue this verse allows for another cause for divorce ("for the kingdom of God's sake" - who knows what this could include) in addition to the cause of fornication. But I would ask the reader, "Have you ever mentioned this passage when asked where the Bible ever tells a man to leave his wife in the case of an unscriptural marriage?" The point is - this passage does not provide another cause for divorce, it is just talking about a person leaving his spouse because they are in an adulterous marriage.

1 Corinthians 7:10 Obviously Does Forbid Divorce

So far we've dealt with several arguments being made to advance the position of divorce without remarriage. Now let's notice a few affirmative arguments against the position. First of all, after proving 1 Corinthians 7:11 does not provide an exception to verse 10 but instead only provides contingency legislation, 1 Corinthians 7:10 can now be used as conclusive proof that divorce is wrong, in and of itself. Paul states here the general rule that departing is wrong; Matthew 5:32 gives the only exception to that rule. Since divorce involves departing, then divorce is necessarily forbidden by 1 Corinthians 7:10.

Contrary to popular belief, Matthew 19:3-9 does not just condemn divorce and remarriage; it also condemns divorce all by itself. The initial question raised by the Pharisees in verse 3 pertains to divorce and not necessarily also to a remarriage. And Jesus answers the question of verse 3 (“Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?”) with a resounding NO (“what therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder”) in verse 6. Jesus then gives an additional thought (“And”) in verse 9, when he states if you divorce for a reason other than fornication and remarry, you commit the further sin of adultery. So Jesus provides the general rule that divorce is wrong in verse 6, and then gives the only exception to that general rule in verse 9.

Matthew 5:32

This same argument can be made even stronger from Matthew 5:32, because this verse does not mention the remarriage of the person doing the divorcing (as Matthew 19:9 does). Matthew 5:32 reads:

“But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery.”

This verse teaches it is wrong for a man to divorce his wife (not mentioning the remarriage of the man), and gives the only exception to that rule, fornication. Put in the words of the text, if a man divorces his wife (unless it is for fornication), he sins by putting her into a place of undeserved temptation (“causeth her to commit adultery”), regardless of whether or not he remarries. Anybody that can see Matthew 19:9 gives the one and only cause for “divorce and remarriage” by using the word “except” and therefore rules out Homer Hailey’s interpretation of 1 Corinthians 7:15, ought to be able to also see Matthew 5:32 gives the one and only cause for divorce (period) and therefore rules out any interpretation of 1 Corinthians 7:11, 1 Corinthians 7:12-13, or Luke 18:29-30 allowing divorce for causes other than fornication.

Two Options, But Are They Equal?

Some say it is wrong to leave, but if you do, 1 Corinthians 7:11 shows it is scriptural to remain apart. Besides flying in the face of what repentance means, this understanding is not born out by verse 11. Just because 1 Corinthians 7:11 mentions two options about what to do if someone departs (sins), that does not mean these two options are on equal footing. Notice a parallel verse that illustrates this possibility (that two given options are not necessarily “equal”) - Revelation 3:15: It says, “I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot.” I raise the question “Did the Laodiceans have the scriptural ‘option’ to be cold?” If not, why not? (since two options are given) All understand God wants a person to be hot, but if he isn’t hot, God would rather him be cold than lukewarm. Now this verse is not parallel to 1 Corinthians 7:11 in every respect, but it is parallel in that both passages give two options where one option is preferable over the other.

In our passage, verse 11 could mean the person who departed is to be reconciled if possible, but if reconciliation is not possible (suppose their former spouse won’t take them back), then they are to remain unmarried; they are not to commit the additional sin of adultery via remarriage. The fact that verse 11 could mean this, means verse 11 cannot be used as proof that either divorce, or a refusal to return, is not sin. As a matter of fact, not only could verse 11 mean this, it must mean this considering what the previous verse says!

Must She Be Reconciled?

Not only does Matthew 5:32 teach you sin by divorcing your spouse (even if you don’t remarry), it also teaches that if you do sin by divorcing your spouse, you continue in sin as long as you refuse to return back to the marriage. Matthew 5:32 teaches you sin when you divorce your spouse saving for the cause of fornication, because you place your spouse in a position of undeserved temptation. This implies that as long as you have opportunity to reconcile and don’t, you continue to be guilty of placing your spouse in that position of undeserved temptation.

Repentance of sin always requires correcting the sin where possible. For example, a man repenting of stealing should return what was stolen. But sometimes, only limited correction is possible. If a person

commits murder, he will never be able to bring back his victim from the dead, but he can still be forgiven upon genuine repentance. Likewise, repentance by a woman who sins by departing from her husband would demand she seek restoration of the marriage – God expects her to fulfill her marriage vows. But if the man refuses to take her back, then she has done all she can do; she is forgiven; she cannot do the impossible. If the man will take her back (like he should), but she is unwilling, then she hasn't really repented of breaking up the marriage, has she?

Conclusion

Yes, God "hateth putting away" (Malachi 2:16), even if no remarriage follows. God expects husbands to "dwell" with their wives "according to knowledge." "And duh, you can't dwell with your spouse according to knowledge unless you are dwelling with her. The Lord commands, "Let not the wife depart from her husband" (1 Corinthians 7:10).

A Prophet Sharing Plan (1)

Jefferson David Tant | Hendersonville, Tennessee, USA

Profit-sharing is often on the mind of those seeking employment. Prospective employees want to discuss working conditions, hours, responsibilities, wages, and sometimes inquiry is made concerning "profit sharing." But there is another kind of sharing that should concern us—"prophet sharing"—sharing the word of the prophets with the lost. We want to look at a simple plan of action for doing just that.

The Need for Such a Plan

I believe we have a God-given responsibility to share the good news. When Christ gave the Great Commission, his words certainly included all who would be his followers. "Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you: and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" (Matt. 28:19-20). This commission was not just for the apostles, or else the church would have died by the second century. Note that Christ told his disciples to "make disciples," and then they were to teach them to do the same. If that doesn't make soul-winning a responsibility of every Christian, then I confess I do not understand the language.

Furthermore, Paul wrote to the Philippians, reminding them that they should be "blameless and harmless, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom ye are seen as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life" (Phil. 2:15-16). Who are the ones who are to hold forth the word of life? The letter was addressed not only to the bishops and deacons, but to "all the saints."

Most anything we do is done more effectively if we have some plan of action. We are more likely to begin a task if we have some purpose in it, and we are more likely to complete a task successfully if we have some direction mapped out.

There are basically three ways for a church to grow. (1) The Christians can have babies and raise them to know the Lord. That's great, but some can't do that, and this does nothing for those out in the world. (2) Christians can move into town and attach themselves to the local congregation. We are always thankful to receive faithful saints into the congregation where I labor, but the kingdom does not grow by this "shifting of the sheep." One church's gain is obviously another church's loss. (3) We can convert the lost. We cannot base our future on the first two, so let us consider some simple, but effective methods that will help us to be effective.

In the course of the following pages, some of my personal experiences will be shared. Some say that a preacher should not relate experiences, but these are the only kind I have ever had, and I hope they will be helpful to the reader.

"He Saved Others"

Jim Mickells | Lewisburg, Tennessee, USA

Jesus was often falsely charged with violating the Sabbath when healing the sick (John 9:1-6) or even using the power of Beelzebub on one occasion when casting out a demon (Matthew 12:22-32). It was alright for these Jews to get the ox out of the ditch, or if their disciples cast out a demon it proved them to be servants of God, yet they condemned the Lord for these great deeds which were proof He was the long-awaited Messiah. Such hostility toward Christ was not unusual at all. Even when hanging on the cross, for which He was so undeserving, the Jewish leaders were still ridiculing Him. "Likewise the chief priests also, mocking among themselves with the scribes, said, "He saved others; Himself He cannot save" (Mark 15:31).

One of the facts they admitted was "He saved others." The word "saved" is defined as "to save a suffering one (from perishing), e.g. one suffering from disease, to make well, heal, restore to health" (**Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament**). He had indeed saved many from sickness and disease; He made the lame to walk, restored the sight to the blind, raised the dead, and the greatest of all deeds was He forgave the sins of sinners (Matthew 9:1-7; 18-35; John 11:41-45). Most if not all these Jewish leaders who are now mocking our Lord either had been eyewitnesses to these acts or else had hear the testimony of those who had seen them done. The other part of their statement, "Himself He cannot save," ironically is true. Oh, it is not that He has no power with which to deliver Himself from the cross. He said:

"Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father" (John 10:17-18).

Think of what would have happened if He had saved Himself from the cross.

1) He would not have done the Father's will. The fact of Jesus suffering and dying on the cross was according to the foreknowledge of God (Acts 2:23). In *The People's New Testament With Notes*, Johnson says, "It was the will of the Father that he should die, and was known to the Father before his coming" (422). Christ said it was written and necessary that He suffer, die, and rise again the third day (Luke 24:46).

2) Prophecy would have been unfulfilled. The Old Testament spoke of His suffering, death, burial, and His resurrection from the dead (Psalm 16; 22; Isaiah 53; etc.). If such was revealed in the Old Testament and not fulfilled by our Lord dying on the cross, that would mean the Bible cannot be trusted. Would there be any part of God's word one could have confidence in if these prophecies had not been fulfilled? The answer would be no!

3) Man would die lost because of his sins. There is no forgiveness without the shedding of blood (Hebrews 9:22). Yet not just any blood would do. "For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins" (Hebrews 10:4). It took the blood of the sinless Lamb of God. "Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption" (Hebrews 9:12).

4) There would be no resurrection from dead and no hope of eternal life. Paul's argument about the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15 is based on the fact Christ died (verse 3). He was then buried and rose the third day (verse 4). Because Christ was raised from the dead, conquering death, then we to can rise from the death and have the hope of living eternally with Him (verses 20-22). Our bodies are sown in corruption, dishonor, weakness, a natural body. Yet it will be raised in incorruption, glory, power, and a spiritual body (verses 42-44). Thanks be to God who assures us of this victory over death through Jesus Christ (verse 57).

Because Jesus didn't save Himself, He did the Father's will, fulfilled those prophecies about His suffering and death, made it possible for man to have the remission of his sins, and assured us that death is not the

end but the beginning of eternal life. Such shows the great love He had for us, knowing He could save Himself, yet the results would be disastrous for mankind. May the Lord continue to be merciful to each of us, and may we always be thankful for His effort to redeem us.

Possess Your Vessel

Mike Thomas | Bowling Green, Kentucky, USA

The Thessalonians were surrounded by immorality and ungodly influences, but those who became Christians “turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God” (1 Thessalonians 1:9). In encouraging them to fulfill this commitment, Paul reminded them of the need to avoid the sexual immorality that was very common in their former ideology. He wrote:

“For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God” (1 Thessalonians 4:3-5).

It is evident that we are inundated with the same wave of licentious influences that ancient idolaters faced. We may not have heathen temples inviting passersby to participate in the “worship” of fertility deities by laying with temple prostitutes, but we have the same type of influences beckoning us each day to be immoral. With electronic devices that can produce any image we want and literature that corrupts the judgment of unsuspecting readers, we are just as exposed to heathenism as were the Thessalonians, if not more so. Satan is working aggressively to warp the views of sexuality in children, disrupt the unity of the home by corrupting marriages, and plaguing individuals with luring images. Our only hope of remaining free from these influences is to trust in God’s word (and mercy) to overcome this onslaught of lust. The things Paul said to the Thessalonians about possessing our “vessel in sanctification and honor” can be most helpful.

For one thing, this instruction implies it is possible for us to control our sexual desires and physical body. Joseph is a classic example of this possibility. A young man at the peak of his sexual desires was able to resist the continual seduction of a woman who pleaded with him “day by day” to be with her (Genesis 39:7-10). He had to choose between integrity and godliness or passion and lust, yet fortunately he chose to possess his vessel. This is exactly what happens to us every day on our devices and influences. Potiphar’s wife is pleading with us to yield to forbidden pleasure, and flirts with us to compromise our integrity and moral purity. Truthfully, it is the devil who issues these influences. He exposes our children to perverted images in storybooks, cartoons, and video games. He sees to it that our phones and computer monitors have enticing images pop up when we least expect it. He convinces people to walk around in skimpy, seductive attire. Satan is the reason young people are pressured to sacrifice their virginity and is the cause of married people compromising their wedding vows. It is in moments like these that we need the wisdom and character of Joseph to guard against Potiphar’s wife. Peter said it this way, “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8). The moment we dismiss this warning or believe we are immune to this threat is the moment we set ourselves up for failure. Paul referenced the Israelites who had twenty-three thousand die in one day for yielding to sexual temptations. He then said:

“Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall” (1 Corinthians 10:11-12).

The comforting thought in all of this is God is willing to help us if that is our sincere desire. He assures us that the devil will flee from us when we are serious about resisting him (James 4:7), so that should give us hope. Our Creator also assures us that His eyes “are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their cry” (Psalm 34:15; 1 Peter 3:12). One of the best ways He helps us is by giving us the strength and wisdom to remain content with our spouse. “Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you’” (Hebrews 13:5). Ironically,

He makes this promise after emphasizing the sanctity of marriage and the judgment against infidelity. "Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge" (verse 4). Contentment is key for married people. We are to save our sexual desires for our spouse and not share them with anyone else. It is the affection "due" them, so we must not selfishly use them in other ways.

"Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband. Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband" (1 Corinthians 7:2-3).

When we violate this commitment and selfishly look for other ways to fulfill our desires, we expose ourselves to a world of devastation and hurt. No moment of pleasure is worth the loss of honor, integrity, family, and the beautiful companionship of marriage. Yet no sin is as deceitful and powerful, yet crippling and devastating to families, churches, and society, as that of infidelity and sexual impurity. It brings severely painful consequences to its participants. Instead, God wants us to ask for help in remaining faithful and pure. He will not leave us nor forsake us as we seek to possess our vessel in sanctification and honor. Plus, the threat of eternal punishment should motivate us to look past the lure of sexual temptation and make better choices. Paul warned, "For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God" (Ephesians 5:5). Frankly, no sin is worth the flames of hell and eternal separation from God, let alone the highly deceitful lure of sexual persuasion. But that is not always easy to see when Potiphar's wife is coming after us day after day.

One of my motivations in writing this article is the recent confession of a fellow-Christian who lost his family because he yielded to sexual immorality. His days are filled with darkness and tears because the pleasure that looked so promising was nothing but a façade and hoax. Wisdom is crying aloud with examples like these. The threat is real, dear friends, and the price is steep when it comes to sexual impurity. Yet, if like this fellow-Christian, we yield to foolishness, let us turn to God for mercy and be fully convinced of His love and willingness to save us. "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart—these, O God, You will not despise" (Psalm 51:17). The person who wrote that psalm was recovering from his own fall to sexual temptation, so this is not a sin God has not seen before and one He has not forgiven. He knows who wants to do right and be set free from wickedness. Let us remember that when we stumble in any sin, including this one. God is able to save to the uttermost because of the blood of Christ and His tremendous love for us. But the best scenario is to avoid failure altogether by praying for wisdom, strength, self-control, and contentment. We will never regret possessing our vessel.

Exceedingly Abundantly Above...

TEXTS TO PAUSE & PONDER ON

William Stewart | Odessa, Ontario, Canada

One of the things that stands out for me in the book of Ephesians is how emphatic the apostle Paul is. In each chapter, there are statements where he employs adverbs and adjectives to add intensity to an already powerful message. For example, Ephesians 1:19 doesn't just mention "His power," but "the exceedingly greatness of His power." Again, in 1:21, the Lord is not just "above all principality and power and might and dominion," but He is "far above all principality and power and might and dominion." In 2:7, Paul doesn't just tell us about "His grace in His kindness," but "the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness." Again, in 3:10 we don't read about the "wisdom of God," but "the manifold wisdom of God." We could keep going - as I mentioned, this occurs in every chapter of the book, and sometimes multiple times per chapter. However, in our study today, we want to focus on the last few verses of Ephesians 3. It reads:

Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen. (Ephesians 3:20-21)

Let's back up in the text to see what leads up to these final verses. In 3:1, the apostle wrote, "For this

reason..." It seems Paul may have intended to start his written prayer here, but instead, he spent the next 12 verses praising God for His word, His eternal plan, and the church. He speaks of these things as the manifold wisdom of God (3:10). Then, at 3:14 we read:

"For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ..."

This begins a prayer in which Paul thanks God for the church, for the presence of the Spirit, for faith in Christ, and seeking growth among the believers as relates to the love of God which is available in Christ Jesus. Our text is found as the prayer ends. It is given as a final word of praise to the Lord before Paul moves on to write about the unity found in Christ (4:1-16).

If the text read, "...to Him who is able to do all that we ask or think..." it would adequately convey the Lord's ability to answer prayer. Indeed, He is able to do all we ask or think. But such a statement fails to truly capture the true nature of God's power. So, as the Spirit led Paul to write about God's ability to respond to our prayers, he was emphatic. He is able to do above all we ask or think. Think about that! Our God works in the realm of things above and beyond the things we ask or think. God knows the things we need that we do not know. He is able to do above all that we ask or think. But the apostle doesn't stop there. He can do exceedingly above all that we ask or think. Stop and let that statement sink in for a moment.

God works in our lives on a higher level than our requests or thoughts could ever attain to. Not just above, but far above. But that's not all; continue reading in the text...

...according to the power that works in us...

What is the power working in us? Back in 1:13-14, Paul told us about the Spirit of God by whom we are sealed. We are not to grieve (4:30), but are to be filled with the Spirit (5:18). How does the power work in us? He doesn't give us specifics here, and speculation or assumption can lead to incorrect conclusions. If we go to Romans 8:26, Paul also wrote that the Spirit helps in our weaknesses. As an example, he spoke of the Spirit making intercession for us when we do not know what we should pray for. How does He do so? I don't know, nor do I need to know; but I am sure glad that He does. I don't need to know every detail of how God's power works - I cannot know every detail of how God's power works. There are things of God which are "...exceedingly abundantly above..." us (cf. Isaiah 55:8-9). However, what a blessed position we have, that God is mindful of us, that His power is working around and in us, and that we enjoy the benefit of such in this life and in the hereafter. We serve a God who cares and who provides for us even beyond what we know to ask for, and He does so by the Spirit given to those who love Him.

Music in Worship

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Among Christians in America dedicated to a return to the New Testament pattern for the first congregation on record to have instrumental music in worship was in Midway, Kentucky in 1860 (West. 1:312). The occasion that gave brethren the excuse to introduce a melodeon into the worship of the church was the "deplorable singing the congregation did." (Ibid. 311). According to L.L.Pinkerton, the "singing had degenerated into screeching and brawling that would ... scare even the rats from worship" (Ibid. 311). Does the Lord approve the use of mechanical instruments of music in worship?

The New Testament Pattern

The New Testament contains a pattern of worship that we are obligated to strictly follow (cf. John 4:23-24; 2 Timothy 1:13). An examination of every passage that mentions music in New Testament worship will reveal the pattern for music in worship.

In order, the passages are:

1. "But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were

listening to them” (Acts 16:25).

2. “Now I say that Jesus Christ has become a servant to the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made to the fathers, and that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy, as it is written: “For this reason I will confess to you among the Gentiles, and sing to Your name” (Romans 15:8-9).
3. “What is the conclusion then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding” (1 Corinthians 14:15).
4. “And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord” (Ephesians 5:18-19).
5. “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord” (Colossians 3:16).
6. “For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying: ‘I will declare your name to my brethren; in the midst of the assembly I will sing praise to you’” (Hebrews 2:11-12).
7. “Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms” (James 5:13).

This is every passage pertaining to music in worship on the earth in the New Testament age.

What We Are to Do

Acts 16:25 reveals Paul and Silas were “singing hymns of praise.” This entire phrase is from the one Greek term “humneo” which means “sing the praise of, sing hymns of praise to” (Arndt & Gingrich. 844), “praise, celebrate or worship with hymns” (Mounce. 1297). In Hebrews 2:12 the same Greek verb is rendered “I will sing praise.”

Romans 15:9 says, “I will sing.” This translates the Greek verb “psallo,” which is also translated “sing” (twice) in First Corinthians 14:15, “making melody” in Ephesians 5:19, and “sing praises” in James 5:13. Arndt & Gingrich define this “in accordance with OT (Old Testament - KS) usage sing (to the accompaniment of a harp) sing praise” (899). Mounce also gives the Old Testament usage “to play on a stringed instrument” but specifies the New Testament meaning as “to sing praises” (1313). In a play on words, the apostle Paul teaches we are to be “making melody (psallo) in our hearts” (Ephesians 5:19). The apostle specifies the instrument we are to “psallo,” the heart. Yes, the word has a root meaning “to pluck” but came to mean in the New Testament “to celebrate the praises of God in a song” (Thayer. 675). In fact, it originally meant “to pluck off, pull out ... the hair” (Ibid). Surely no one will contend plucking out unwanted hair is an act of acceptable worship! All words change their meaning through the years, and all New Testament lexicons and standard Bible translations recognize “psallo” means “sing praise” in the New Testament.

The apostle commands we are to be “singing” (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16). This verb means to “sing” (Mounce. 1073; Arndt & Gingrich. 18), always “of praise to God” (Vine. 4:35).

What We Are to Sing

The apostle specifies songs we should sing - “psalms and hymns and spiritual songs” (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16).

Those who defend instrumental music in worship contend psalms must be accompanied by stringed instruments to qualify as psalms. But psalms were spoken and written (Ephesians 5:19; Luke 20:42-43; 24:44). They are for “teaching and admonishing” (Colossians 3:16). Playing on a mechanical instrument of music neither teaches nor admonishes. Neither does humming, whistling, or making sounds like instruments of music with our mouths.

Participants

The apostle Paul commands us to speak “to one another” in our music in worship (Ephesians 5:19) and to teach and admonish “one another” (Colossians 3:16). Thus, congregational singing, not group or chorus singing, is what the Lord commands.

Purposes

Our purposes for music in worship are twofold: to praise God (Acts 16:25; Hebrews 2:12) and to teach and admonish one another (Colossians 3:16). Entertainment is not a purpose for music in worship. I enjoy good instrumental music as much as anyone, but just because you or I like it doesn't prove God wants it. I enjoy eating strawberries over vanilla ice cream and drinking Coca Cola, but that doesn't mean approves them on the Lord's table.

Conclusion

As many people around the world, I watched with fascination the British pomp and pageantry at the funeral of Queen Elizabeth. The music was often stirringly beautiful. But that doesn't mean God was pleased. The music He demands in worship is singing. If it involves the congregation, it should be congregational singing. It must be to praise God and to edify each other, not to please ourselves. Are songs should be spiritual rather than secular. The Lord God demands we worship Him in spirit and in truth.

Works Cited

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