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In This Issue...

- **It's a Lot Deeper Than That!** | *Keith Sharp*
- **Why Marriages Fail** | *Jefferson David Tant*
- **But To The Rest Speak I, Not The Lord** | *Pat Donahue*
- **You Are Salt & Light** | *Jim Mickells*
- **In Jesus Name, Amen** | *Mike Thomas*
- **Many Other Things That Jesus Did: Texts To Pause & Ponder On** | *William Stewart*
- **The Nature of Marriage** | *Keith Sharp*

Finally, brethren

WHATEVER THINGS

are true
are noble
are just
are pure
are lovely

PHILIPPIANS
4:8

are of good report
IF THERE IS ANY VIRTURE AND IF THERE IS ANYTHING PRAISEWORTHY –
meditate on these things.

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It's a Lot Deeper than That!

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

March 19 of this year Brother Elijah Aaron, the preacher at Northside a Church of Christ in Conway, Arkansas, preached a sermon there entitled, "It's a Lot Deeper than That!" This sermon has been posted to their website. Brother Aaron admitted he did not and would not preach on the necessity of biblical authority and how to determine what is authorized. He said the congregation there had decided not to use instrumental music in worship and to use congregational funds for only limited things before he was even born, but he gave no scriptural basis for those decisions. My reaction alternated between righteous indignation and sadness.

"Northside a Church of Christ," began in 1951 as the "Northside Church of Christ," a friendly swarm out of the Robinson & Faulkner Church of Christ, so there would be a church of Christ on the north side of Conway. Robinson & Faulkner was and Robinson & Center, which it has become, is "institutional" in their practices. It is certainly true Northside never used instrumental music in worship, but the use of the church treasury was far from settled in 1951.

My father, H.F. Sharp, preached at Northside from 1952 to 1965 and was primarily responsible for keeping the congregation from going with institutionalism. Giles Crow, one of the elders then, was very supportive. During this time Dad debated the president of Central Baptist College on their campus in Conway. The debate had sufficient impact that the Baptist president, Dr. Cobb, resigned shortly thereafter.

My late friend A.W. Goff also preached at Northside, and anyone who casually knew him knew he ardently preached the necessity of scriptural authority.

I preached for Northside from 1977 to 1984 and had three debates during this time. The first in February, 1978, was with organic evolutionist Dr. Neil Buffalo. I also had two debates with Baptist preachers during those years. My father and I both repeatedly answered a local Baptist preacher on KCON radio.

In 1980 the Northside elders and I had a Sunday afternoon study with the elders and preacher from a rural, institutional congregation in Central Arkansas. The spokesman for the other congregation grew frustrated and blurted out, "We do lots of things without Bible authority!" I replied, "Yes you do, but we don't, and if you'll show us one thing we do without Bible authority, I'll make a public confession of error tonight." That ended the study.

The point is we all preached extensively on scripture authority. We pulled no punches. The church grew. During the seven years I preached at Northside the congregation grew from 200 to 250 members, and there were no divisions. Several young men who were in my college age class became preachers or elders.

The apostle Paul in his farewell to the elders of the church in Ephesus declared, "Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:26-27). In his sermon Brother Aaron referenced Colossians 3:17: "And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him." That passage is a declaration of the authority of Christ, which authority is expressed in the New Testament Scriptures. How can I be free from the blood of all and refuse to proclaim and apply the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ as expressed in the New Testament?

Brother Aaron claimed that by preaching from the Bible he was preaching biblical authority. That is the fallacy of equivocation, using terminology in more than one sense in an argument. I appreciate the fact Brother Aaron preaches from the Bible, and I've been told he does a good job of exegesis. Good. But that's a far cry from showing the audience we must have authority from the Scriptures for our practices, demonstrating how to determine what is authorized, and making practical applications.

In defense of his refusal to preach on biblical authority, Brother Aaron claimed we are supposed to go on from the first principles (Hebrews 6:1-3). Does this mean we are to quit preaching the elementary principles altogether, or does it mean to add the meatier material? Does Brother Aaron ever preach on "the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment"? (Hebrews 6:2) How much of the Bible has he thrown into the trash heap?

Brother Aaron accused those of us who preach on biblical authority of applying it only to the work and worship of the church. The most influential book on the authority of the Scriptures among brethren who maintain the New Testament pattern is "Walking By Faith" by Roy. E. Cogdill. It has a chapter applying Scripture authority to all five relationships of the Christian's life.

I have a favorite sermon entitled "Do All in the Name of the Lord." The text is Colossians 3:17. I begin by noting that the phrase "in the name of" means "in recognition of the authority of" (Vine. 3:100). I apply the text to our relations in the family (Colossians 3:18-21), business (Colossians 3:22 - 4:1), community (Colossians 4:5), civil government (Romans 13:1), and the church (Ephesians 1:22-23).

The truth is Brother Aaron slanders faithful preachers to excuse himself from fulfilling his duty as a preacher. He cannot say he is "innocent of the blood of all men."

I debated Mack Deaver on the institutional issues in Camden, Arkansas in 1991. My moderator was the local preacher, Keith Camp. The debate came about because of his home Bible studies with several young couples in the institutional congregation. After the debate Brother Camp went back and talked with all those young couples. They all agreed I had taught the truth but said it was the elders' decision to practice institutionalism, and they would follow the elders. Is that the standard at Northside? "We decided" I

presume means the elders decided. Is their authority superior to the Scriptures? The apostle Paul warned the elders of the church in Ephesus:

“For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves” (Acts 20:29-30).

Should we follow “savage wolves”?

Think, brethren, what’s the basic difference between the church we read about in the New Testament and evangelical denominations? Whether it be immersion in water for the remission of sins, singing as the exclusive kind of music in worship, independent, autonomous congregations as the organization, male leadership in those congregations, church work being spiritual, marriage exclusively between one man and one woman as a life long relationship, obedience to civil law, honesty in business, and on and on, the people of God submit to the authority of Christ as expressed in the New Testament, and denominations do as they please. A congregation where Scripture authority is not preached from the pulpit is on the road to becoming denominational.

Three of the elders at Northside were childhood friends of mine. One was my best friend when we were in high school. One was an elder when I preached there. My heart is heavy for them. The flock is not being properly fed, and they are the shepherds responsible (Hebrews 13:17). I fear for them, for Brother Aaron, and for the congregation.

Why Marriages Fail

Jefferson David Tant | Hendersonville, Tennessee, USA

The failure of marriage has become the American way of life - a significant change from former generations. In 1870, one of 34 marriages ended in divorce. By 1900, the rate had risen to one in twelve, increasing to one in five by 1940.

According to an article in American Demographics (Oct., 1981, p. 11) entitled “Divorce Deluge,” “the overall divorce rate in the 1970’s was 40%, with 59% of all second marriages ending in divorce.”

In addition to all the homes broken by separation or divorce, what about all the homes torn by dissension, strife and discontent? These homes must also be considered failures, and studies show a significant number of such loveless marriages. Some have estimated that 70% of retired couples live in mutual hostility.

There is far more damage than just the broken homes — there are broken lives. Many psychological problems are encountered by divorced people, as can be seen in the fact that nearly 60% of second marriages end in divorce. Then there is the tragedy of the children. “Census Bureau demographer Paul C. Glick has estimated that given current divorce rates, 32% of all children under 18 will live with a divorced parent at some point” (op. cit.). That divorce has its effect upon children is well documented.

“The breakdown in the home is one of the reasons I think crime in our state is on the upsurge. Broken homes, common law marriages, the working mother..., all have contributed to this and have filled our prisons... (most inmates are) from broken homes”

(Dr. George Beto, former Director, Texas Dept. of Corrections).

There is one basic, fundamental cause of all this - the influence of Satan. We pointed out in a previous lesson many of the factors that are leading the attack on the home, the family and morality. We quoted from women’s lib leaders, humanists, sex education authorities, government officials, religious leaders, etc., who are opposed to all that God and Christians stand for. If Satan can destroy the home, then the rest of his work is easier. Therefore, let us be forewarned as we note some of the reasons why marriages fail.

Failure To Recognize The Divine Aspect Of Marriage

Marriage is fundamentally a divine institution. It is divine in origin in that God created man and woman, and brought them together (Genesis 2:18). It is divine in purpose, as expressed in “for this cause shall a man..., cleave unto his wife” (Matthew 19:5). Among the various purposes fulfilled in marriage, we note (1) the fulfilling of marital (not sensual) love (1 Corinthians 7:3); (2) procreation (which many seek to avoid today) (Genesis 1:28); and (3) the avoidance of fornication (which is disregarded by many) (1 Corinthians 7:2). We find fornication often practiced before marriage, and adultery often practiced during marriage. Marriage is also divine in its regulation. God has designed for marriage to be a permanent human relationship (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:4-6, 9). Although divorce is allowed, it is not “the answer” and is allowed only “in extremis.” Within this relationship certain responsibilities are given by divine revelation. The husband is to provide for his family (1 Timothy 5:8); he is to treat his wife with honor and respect (1 Peter 3:7); and he is to be the head of the family (Ephesians 5:23). The wife is charged to be in subjection to her husband’s leadership (Ephesians 5:22); honor and respect him (Ephesians 5:33); and to be a worker at and guide the home (Titus 2:4-5).

Failure to respect these divine directives is but to invite disaster. When I bought my car, I received with it an owner’s manual. It gives certain instructions concerning maintenance: change the oil every 4,000 miles; use a certain weight or grade of oil. It is only reasonable to assume that those who made the car know best how to care for it. Therefore, if I follow directions, I will get the best service. But if I decide to change oil every 25,000 miles and use sewing machine oil, I should not marvel when the car breaks down.

Likewise, God made man and woman, and ordained marriage for them. In doing so, he gave us an owner’s manual, and if we have good sense, we will follow the directions! But in looking at the situation today, it is obvious that most, if not all, of the regulations governing marriage have been discarded. It is, therefore, no marvel that most marriages are not working!

Inadequate Preparation

Every serious undertaking should be preceded by careful preparation. This is no less true of marriage. In this light, spiritual preparation is a must. As noted previously, God has had much to say to insure the success of marriage. Are we teaching our children these values and principles? Are our children brought regularly to Bible classes and assemblies where these instructions and values are taught to them? Do they see the influence of God’s word in the home — in the relationship between mother and dad; in family Bible study? Are they taught moral purity by example as well as by word? There is a physical aspect of marriage as well as a spiritual. In spite of all the openness and frankness with which sex is dealt in our age, many young people are woefully ignorant on this subject due to parental neglect. Many assume that children know more than the parents, or that the schools will handle this matter, or that nature will simply take its course. But is this physical preparation not a part of the teaching of such passages as Titus 2:4, where older women are told to “train the young women to love their husbands...”? Our children also need to be taught principles of good health and nutrition as well.

Emotional preparation is another necessary ingredient for a healthy marriage. How many marriages are flawed or doomed because of immaturity — selfish, childish behavior, or over dependence upon parents? Marriage is meant for adults, not children, and this is why God told us to leave parents when time for marriage comes (Genesis 2:24). Emotional immaturity is also seen in alcoholism, drug abuse, spouse abuse, tantrums, etc. Emotional preparation has to do with growing - growing up, growing in love, growing in accepting responsibility.

Sexual Problems

When both partners respect the will of God, there will be few problems that will threaten the marriage. Marriage is the one relationship where the sexual desire can rightfully be fulfilled. “Let marriage be had in honor among all, and let the bed be undefiled” (Hebrews 13:4). In referring to this aspect of marriage, Solomon urged, “Let thy fountain be blessed; and rejoice in the wife of thy youth. As a loving hind and a pleasant doe, let her breasts satisfy thee at all times; and be thou ravished always with her love” (Proverbs

5:18-19). God teaches us to honor and respect one another in this realm. "The wife hath not power over her own body, but the husband: and likewise also the husband hath not power over his own body, but the wife. Defraud ye not one the other..." (1 Corinthians 7:4-5). In this most intimate aspect of marriage, there is the greatest need for understanding, patience and respect for one another.

But Satan has perverted that which is beautiful into that which is shameful. He has degraded sex through pornography and perversion. He has caused husbands to be demanding and inconsiderate. He has caused wives to use sex as a reward or punishment. In view of such matters, I believe Judgment Day will have some startling revelations for some.

Many husbands or wives have been placed at temptation's door because of the selfishness of their mates in this realm. And how many marriages have been dissolved because of unfaithfulness, when in reality the so-called "innocent" party must share the blame? I remember one couple talking to me after they had been married seven years. In their relationship, sex was only for the man's pleasure, with no consideration for the wife. When she learned that there was more involved, and that God intended this for her as well, her husband still refused to give her any consideration. She then looked elsewhere for her satisfaction, which caused her husband to divorce her for her unfaithfulness. But will God hold him guiltless when he refused to dwell with her according to knowledge and refused to give her her due (1 Peter 3:7; 1 Corinthians 7:4)?

Financial Problems

"But they that are minded to be rich fall into a temptation and a snare and many foolish and hurtful lusts, such as drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil: which some reaching after have been led astray from the faith, and have pierced themselves through with many sorrows" (1 Timothy 6:9-10).

We live in a materialistic society, and this puts many pressures on the family — pressures to acquire and to have; pressures to go into debt; pressures for Dad to take a second job and for Mom to leave home and go to work. Such pressures then lead to arguments: "You don't make enough money," and "You spend too much money," and so forth.

These pressures tend to pull the family apart. There is worry about bills; there is little time for one another; perhaps less time for the children; and no time for the Lord. Then a divorce may come, along with alimony and child support payments, with the subsequent two households to maintain. Then in the case of a second marriage, even more financial burdens are compounded on top of the old ones, and the pressure intensifies.

Parents sometimes have to share in the blame for these circumstances. They give children too much, and place too much emphasis on material things. They often do not teach their children patience — how to wait for things. They do not teach children the value of working and earning and saving and showing responsibility in financial matters. Then we make our children as the daughters of the horseleach. "The horseleach hath two daughters, crying, Give, give..." (Proverbs 30:15).

What a great blessing to learn contentment. "But godliness with contentment is great gain: for we brought nothing into the world, for neither can we carry anything out; but having food and covering we shall be therewith content" (1 Timothy 6:6-8).

"Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therein to be content. I know how to be abased, and I know also how to abound: in everything and in all things have I learned the secret both to be filled and to be hungry, both to abound and to be in want. I can do all things in him that strengtheneth me" (Philippians 4:11-13).

See also Hebrews 13:5-6 and Philippians 4:6-7.

Working Wives

God has created a special role and a special place for women. The special role is one of respecting the

leadership of the husband and teaching future generations. That special place is a “worker at home” (Titus 2:1-5). This is not to suggest that the woman cannot set foot outside her home, nor that she cannot seek gainful employment outside the home. But this should not be the goal of the woman. Such should only be when necessary, not simply to afford luxuries. No matter what reasoning man comes up with, God knows what is best! No one can take the place of mother in the early, formative years of a child. The wife and mother should see to it that she is not better known out in the world than in her own home.

Consider some of the hazards of the working wife and mother. (1) Financial independence may hasten a divorce. In other words, there may be less incentive to work things out when difficulties arise at home. (2) Such arrangements often increase the stress at home, for the “homework” is still there, even if the husband does pitch in to help. (3) The working woman is exposed to more temptations. The woman sees her boss or other male employees in the best circumstances apart from the pressures of the home, the clogged sink, the worn furniture, the grumpy husband who cannot even speak until he has his morning coffee. Then there are sexual pressures from bosses who promise a raise or promotion, and from fellow-employees who invite her to the two-martini lunch. Such situations are not always present, but the number of them is significant. (4) There are also pressures from the feminists in the work force. “You mean you’ve got to go home and wash and cook supper? What a drag!” The wife may look at the so-called glamorous life of the single woman, or at the so-called freedom of the liberated woman, and feel she has been cheated. (5) Children are often left to be raised by others. They thus learn values from people about whom little is known. And then after catching up with the household chores, there is little time left for the children. Furthermore, because mother has to punch a time clock, oftentimes the children have to be taken to the nursery and left even when they are sick. And older children are often left unsupervised after school, which may lead to trouble. It is well known that after-school vandalism is a problem among children left unsupervised. Other problems may arise, such as when the police raided an after-school sex and pot party among seventh graders. These affairs took place in homes where both parents were away at work. Dear reader, I’m not just talking through my hat about these things. Even people in the world recognize the hazards of the working wife, even apart from any religious consideration.

“Women who have become financially independent of their husbands may be more likely to seek, or agree to, a divorce. And having to go to work to make ends meet may increase the strains on a family that lead to divorce. The exposure to more people outside the home may cause many working women to become dissatisfied with their husbands, some researchers have suggested. However, nobody fully understands the relationship between more working women and growing divorce” (“American Demographics, Divorce Deluge,” Oct., 1981, p. 11).

Parents, you must count the cost when you decide mother needs to work outside the home.

Religious Discord

Nowhere is unity and harmony more important, for religious differences create many problems. There is the problem of priorities (one wants to attend services, the other wants to go see a movie); values (one wants to stop by a lounge for a drink, but the other doesn’t drink); raising children (one wants children to partake in worldly activities, but the other doesn’t believe in such things); finances (one wants to give to the Lord, but the other thinks that is a waste of money); friends (one wants to invite some Christians over for the evening, but the other is bored to tears by such company). With all the forces working against the home and family, one certainly doesn’t need to seek out stumbling blocks deliberately.

Religious discord presents some difficult choices. The Christian may have to give up the Lord in order to have peace at home, but then there is no peace with God or with self. This choice also pretty well destroys any hope of heaven for the whole family. Or, the Christian may have to give up the unbelieving companion (1 Corinthians 7:12-15). A third choice would be for the two to continue living together, either in a state of warfare (neither happy together nor happy apart), or in relative peace because the two are mature enough to work out some sort of peaceful coexistence. But can a Christian truly be happy when married to a person that is going to be lost eternally — separated from the one whose love has been shared through the years?

God's attitude towards mixed marriages has been revealed. In the Old Testament, God plainly prohibited such (Deuteronomy 7:1-4). Is God any less concerned about the spiritual welfare of his children now? Is it conceivable that a child of God can marry a child of Satan without trouble from the father-in-law? One preacher made a survey of some 49 such mixed marriages. Of these unions, 57% of the Christians became unfaithful to the Lord. Of the number, 75% were unable to convert their mates, and 57% suffered a divorce. It is no wonder that many gospel preachers refuse to be involved in such marriage ceremonies, for they cannot in good conscience help one get into a situation that will probably cause a soul to be lost. When you couple the problems of religious discord with all the other pressures that affect marriages now, why borrow more trouble? "Shall two walk together, except they have agreed" (Amos 3:3).

Conclusion

Other problems will arise, but I believe these are some of the major ones. If we were to summarize them all, I would use the words pride and selfishness. These words are opposed to all that God wants us to be — humble and loving. If we could learn to apply these principles in service to God, then we could avoid these problems, and the home and family would be secure. I hope this discussion will have a positive effect upon all of us — in existing marriages as well as in those which our young people will make. God intended marriage for our good, and it will be, if we just have enough sense to follow the directions. — "Vanguard Magazine," Dec 1982

But To The Rest Speak I, Not The Lord

Pat Donahue | Harvest, Alabama, USA

Homer Hailey wrote:

"But of a mixed marriage, that is, a marriage between a believer and an unbeliever, Paul said, 'But to the rest say I, not the Lord' (1 Corinthians 7:10-12); the Lord did not speak of the marriage relationship between a believer and an unbeliever. If Matthew 19:3-9 is universal in application, then Paul's answer to the second question would have been the same as his answer to the first" (The Divorced And Remarried Who Would Come to God. 58)

Of course this was our brother Hailey's logic for teaching Matthew 19:9 does not apply to the unbeliever, and therefore it is okay for unbelievers to divorce and remarry (for any reason, even multiple times) and stay in whatever marriage they are in when they become Christians.

But you should notice 1 Corinthians 7:10-11 does not specify only marriages involving two Christians, it speaks to "the married." That would be all marriages on the face of it. So verse 12 is not saying Matthew 19:9 does not teach concerning mixed marriages, but shows Jesus in Matthew 19:9 (or at any other time while on earth) did not specifically state what the Christian is to do if his spouse (an unbeliever would be assumed) leaves him. Paul answers that question in verse 15 - "let him depart." In other words —

"If the believer couldn't do anything to stop it, she has not sinned when the unbeliever leaves. Don't go to the point of casting your pearls before swine in trying to convince him otherwise. Even if the marriage is restored, who knows if you would be able to convert him to Christ anyway (verse 16)?"

Verses 12-14 then are Paul's way of keeping the Corinthians from getting the wrong idea from his answer as stated in verse 15. Paul wanted to make sure the Corinthians didn't get the impression from his answer in 15 that the Christian could initiate the departing himself. I might do something similar if my youngest son were to ask me if he could play outside. Before answering his question directly, I would probably precede the answer with, "now let me make this clear; do not go near the road. If your ball goes near the road, don't go get it; come get Daddy and I will get it for you. Don't go near the road!" Then I would finally answer, "Yes, you may go play outside." Consider this Biblical parallel: Suppose someone asked me - "Does baptism save?" Before I answered "yes" (1 Peter 3:21), I might precede my answer with two points to make sure they don't get the wrong idea from my "yes" answer: (1) baptism doesn't earn our salvation (no, Jesus'

death does that), and (2) the power is not in the water, but in God. Then I might answer “yes baptism saves” (in the sense a sinner must be baptized to be saved by the death of Christ).

The same thing is going on in I Corinthians 7: “But to the rest speak I, not the Lord” (verse 12) is not Paul’s way of saying he is only discussing Christian marriages in 10-11 but mixed marriages in 12ff. Instead Paul tells all the married (Christian and non-Christian alike) to stay married in verse 10, and in verses 12-16 he is answering the question – “What if they leave me?” Paul’s answer is found in verse 15 (you have not sinned if they leave you), and verses 12-14 (but you can’t leave them) are Paul’s way of making sure he doesn’t leave the wrong impression with his answer in verse 15.

Conclusion: Jesus is talking about all marriages in Matthew 19:9 (“whosoever”), and therefore even if an unbeliever divorces his spouse and remarries, that is adultery and needs to be repented of upon conversion. There is only one exception for everybody, not just Christians.

You Are Salt & Light

Jim Mickells | Lewisburg, Tennessee, USA

No doubt one of the greatest sermons ever delivered to man was by our Lord, referred to as “The Sermon on the Mount” (Matthew 5-7). The first part of this discourse deals with the beatitudes, the blessings or favors received from the Lord when one conducts his life as He instructs. As He gives instructions to His disciples of how to live their lives, He tells them of the impact they can have on others. They were to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

“You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:13-16).

There are at least three qualities I can think of which salt possesses. (1) It flavors food. (2) It can serve as an antiseptic. (3) It can preserve certain foods as well. Every Christian should conduct themselves in such a way that their lifestyle is appealing to others. They don’t just talk about the gospel; they practice it every day. Not only did Jesus teach the good news to all whom He met, He followed those precepts in His life. He taught His disciples “you ought to wash one another’s feet.” Yet before He said this, He washed their feet (John 13:3-17). Such teaching and such an example can lead others to God where forgiveness is found, the healing of the wounds of sin. This leads to the preservation of spiritual life in the souls of individuals. By saving one soul opportunities are presented to save others in the family. When families are taught the gospel, their influence can be great in a community. On and on we could go of how a righteous life can have a preserving influence on others. Only ten righteous souls could have prevented the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah from being destroyed (Genesis 18:16-33). I am convinced if our nation is permitted to stand, it will be because of the righteousness of its people (Proverbs 14:34).

The Lord’s disciples are to be the light of the world as well. The word “light” is defined as, “Metonymically, a light, the author or dispenser of moral and spiritual light, a moral teacher” (**The Complete Word Study Dictionary – New Testament**). “In Matt. 5:14ff. both the disciples and their works serve as light; one cannot abstract the one from the other” (**Theological Dictionary of the New Testament**). Certainly, the followers of the Lord are to teach others (2 Timothy 2:2). They are also to be examples to all with whom they encounter as well (Philippians 3:17). By these means a disciple can illuminate others, dispel the darkness of sin and ignorance and fill the hearts with glorious gospel of Christ.

How can we be a light in a world filled with darkness? By being humble in spirit, realizing our bankrupt state without Christ, able to weep because of our sins, and ready to come to Him for forgiveness (Matthew 5:3-4), never willing to forget this, always having a kind and gentle spirit when dealing with others (Matthew

5:5). We have an intense desire to be correct in what we think, what we do, where we go, who we associate with, and what we say. Our righteousness is determined by what the Bible says, not what one may think or feel (Matthew 5:6). We must be willing to show mercy to others even when they may be unworthy, because such was true of us, totally undeserving (Matthew 5:7). It is the person who not only speaks to others about a holy and pure life but is one who strives to walk in the light as well (Matthew 5:8). It would be those who strive to live in peace with all men, and even try to help others to be at peace as well. He puts forth the effort to spread the gospel a message which brings peace to all who will obey it (Matthew 5:9). Even when persecuted because of his righteous lifestyle, he does not retaliate. Instead, he is willing to do them good and pray for those who spitefully use him (Matthew 5:10-12).

Notice the reward for the person who follows these instructions: "For theirs is the kingdom of God" (v. 3); "they shall be comforted" (v. 4); "they shall inherit the earth" (v. 5); "they shall be filled" (v. 6); "they shall obtain mercy" (v. 7); "they shall see God" (v. 8); "they shall be called sons of God" (v. 9); "theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (v. 10).

The question we must all answer, "Are we the salt of the earth and a light to the world?" If so, what a difference one can make in the lives of others.

In Jesus Name, Amen

Mike Thomas | Bowling Green, Kentucky, USA

"In Jesus name" is as much a part of our prayers as "our Father in heaven." Our supplications would feel incomplete without it, even if we do not fully realize its implications. For many, it is something that must be said before the amen. Yet when we understand what we are saying, we will be humbled by the privilege of praying "in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Ephesians 5:20). Here are a few thoughts to consider from it.

We should know that the phrase is not a blanket statement or magic chant we must utter to get what we want. Instead, it is a humble plea for God to receive our prayer through Jesus – the one and only Mediator between God and man (1 Timothy 2:5), and a sincere request for Him to consider our petition. We are so unworthy of approaching our holy God because of our sins and wickedness. Yet, because of the powerful blood of Jesus Christ, we can go boldly before the throne of grace and have our prayers heard as forgiven sinners. Who among us is worthy of such honor? Yet, that is what is possible because of Jesus' name. "Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them" (Hebrews 7:25). This is why Paul wrote, "And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him" (Colossians 3:17). To pray in that glorious name is our way of letting the Father know that we acknowledge the greatness and importance of Jesus and that without Him we would have no chance of having our prayers heard. Amazing!

To pray in Jesus' name is to also let God know that we seek His will being done in response to our request. We may want a particular outcome to our prayer, but "in Jesus name" we understand that He knows what is best for us and that we are willing to abide in His response. When Paul was facing an unwanted burden, he found consolation in accepting Jesus' will with his circumstance instead of what he wanted. He wrote:

"Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.'" Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me" (2 Corinthians 12:8-10).

The apostle John said it this way, "Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us" (1 John 5:14). So, we wrap up our request with the Lord's name because we are letting God know that we will accept whatever He thinks is best for us. It is a humble

acknowledgement that even Jesus Himself uttered when confronted with His own trials – “Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done” (Luke 22:42). We are imitating His example in petitioning the Father through His authority as Christ.

And then we pray in our Savior’s name because we want it to be known that we intend to live by His will regardless of how He answers our prayer. We are declaring through Jesus that we intend to obey Him in all things. God’s word says, “One who turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination” (Proverbs 28:9). Yet since we are praying in our Lord’s name, we are acknowledging our awareness of our need to obey God for our prayers to be heard. It is like Peter wrote, “For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers; but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil” (1 Peter 3:12). We humbly come before the Ancient of Days through His Son because we want Him to know we intend to obey His word in all things.

So, let us pray to our merciful God with conviction, humility, reverence, and great confidence. We are approaching Someone Who loves us, cares for us, and will do what is best for us; and because of His Son, we can do so. And since we are bathing our prayers in our Savior’s name, we are demonstrating our understanding of God’s word and a willingness to accept His response.

“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).

In Jesus name, amen.

Many Other Things That Jesus Did

TEXTS TO PAUSE & PONDER ON

William Stewart | Odessa, Ontario, Canada

As John draws his gospel to a close, he writes the following:

This is the disciple who testifies of these things, and wrote these things; and we know that his testimony is true. And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. Amen. (John 21:24-25)

John was an eye-witness of the Christ. He heard the teachings of Jesus. He saw the Lord’s miracles. He walked and talked with our Saviour daily. He was with Him on the night He was arrested and tried, and he saw Him on the cross. On the third day, he glanced into an empty tomb where the body of Jesus had been, and later that day, he saw and heard the resurrected Messiah. Over the next month, he sat at Jesus’ feet being instructed and prepared to teach the gospel of Christ to the world. When John wrote about the life and work of Jesus, it wasn’t a second-hand account - he had detailed and intimate knowledge that only an apostle could give. His testimony is true, it is trustworthy, and it is God-inspired Scripture.

John’s gospel is a detailed account of the ministry of Christ. He tells us that Jesus is the incarnated Word. He chronicles 7 miracles of Jesus. He focuses on a few of the Lord’s discussions with the Pharisees. He includes some of Jesus’ teaching and spends a lot of time looking at the betrayal and suffering of Christ on our behalf.

Despite all this detailed content, John tells us that there is so much more that could have been written. When we read the gospels, we’re reading but a fraction of what Jesus did. I am not saying we are lacking anything. God’s word is sufficient, we’ve got all He intended to give us. And yet Jesus did much more beyond what is recorded in the Bible. So, where do we go to find the rest? We don’t. There is no record of it.

John comments on these unrecorded works in our text. He says,

...if they were written one by one, I suppose the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.

We acknowledge that this was written in a day when books were rare. He exaggerates to place emphasis on the work of Christ. Literally, it would be possible for all Jesus did to be recorded, had someone with knowledge of His works set out to do so. Regardless, we can be assured in the course of His ministry Jesus did a lot! He was busy serving God. His days were filled with serving God. How about us? If books were written about our service, how much could be written?

The Nature of Marriage

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

In our secular society, in which those who believe in God, Christ, and the Bible are a minority and are becoming more so, marriage is viewed as a relationship of human origin that we can change at will to conform with modern mores. No fault divorce began in California in 1970 and has since spread throughout the country. In 2015 the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that states cannot ban same sex marriage. Among young adults, cohabitation (living together outside marriage), has become more common than marriage.

The Lord emphatically stated that the marriage relationship was begun and governed by the Lord God (Matthew 19:3-6). Vital conclusions follow from this bed rock principle. (1) We should study God's will for it, not human philosophy about it. (2) Humans, including courts and legislative bodies, do not have the right to change it or alter its relationships to suit themselves or society. (3) Man does not have the right to enter or leave it at will; God determines who can enter or leave.

According to the Lord, marriage is a bodily and spiritual union of a man and a woman (Genesis 2:23-24; Matthew 19:4-6). It has three outstanding characteristics.

(1) Marriage is a bond or covenant (legally binding agreement, cf. Malachi 2:14). As such it includes conditions (1 Corinthians 7:2; Matthew 19:9), promises (mutual agreement, Luke 1:26-27), and ratification (meeting legal requirements, Galatians 3:15; John 2:1-11).

(2) It is a binding of two who were formerly separate (Romans 7:2; 1 Corinthians 7:39).

(3) They form a new bond or relationship (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:4-6).

"Marriage is an institution ordained of God for the honor and happiness of mankind, in which one man and one woman enter into a bodily and spiritual union, pledging each to the other mutual love, honor, fidelity, sympathy, forbearance, and comradeship, such as would assure an unbroken continuance of their wedlock so long as both shall live" (H. Leo Boles).

Marriage as ordained by the Lord has three purposes: Companionship (Genesis 2:18), Procreation of godly offspring (Genesis 1:27-28; Malachi 2:15), and Avoidance of fornication (1 Corinthians 7:2).

Divinely approved marriage is Monogamous (one man and one woman) and Heterosexual (one each of the opposite sex - Matthew 19:4-5).

The Lord intended marriage to be for life. He does not want it to be ended by divorce (Matthew 19:6), He only wants it to be culminated by the death of one of the marriage partners (Romans 7:2), but death does end the relationship (Romans 7:2). Marriage is for life but for this life only.

The result of marriage begun and conducted as the Lord ordained is the happiness of the husband, the wife, and the children (Genesis 1:25-28,31; Proverbs 18:22). Such homes are a blessing to the church, the

community, and the nation.

Rather than seeking to alter God's plan, we should in faith conform to it (Hebrews 13:4). Marriage can either be the greatest source of happiness this side of Heaven or the greatest cause of misery this side of Hell. Whether your marriage will be one of joy and permanence or of despair and separation will be determined by whether or not you follow the law of the Lord concerning marriage.



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