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- unless otherwise noted, answers to questions by Keith Sharp -

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Finally, brethren

WHATEVER THINGS

are true
are noble
are just
are pure
are lovely

PHILIPPIANS
4:8

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

"A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches; Loving favor rather than silver and gold" (Proverbs 22:1)

"A good name will protect you from false and malicious reports about you. Jealous people will say terrible things about anyone whom they envy. Often, they will spread lies and false reports about those whom they hate and would seek to destroy. When that happens, and you can be sure that it will eventually, those who know you best will say: "I do not think that is true. I know him, and he is not that kind of person." Your good reputation will protect you when you are not present to fend for yourself. Your good character creates good expectations for you, even when you cannot speak out in your own defense." (Daniel H. King, Sr., The Book of Proverbs. 662)

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.

First Things First

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

I got a "check in" call from John, Jennifer, and their son John Edward the other day. They were driving from their home near Elmira, New York to a gospel meeting of the Indian River Church of Christ at Philadelphia, New York. John and Jennifer were baptized in September, 1996, our first local converts after Sandy and I moved to Watertown, New York in August, 1995. John is a traveling nurse, Jennifer has muscular dystrophy, and John Edward is her caregiver. Their drive to Philadelphia takes three and a half hours.

When we were in Northern New York we expected brethren to make drives like that for gospel meetings. Ben and Wendy Ritzenthaler drove three and a half hours from Palmyra, New York to our first gospel

meeting in 1996. Gary and Debbie Jalbert, with their sons Dennis and Charlie, would drive three hours from Lyons, New York for every gospel meeting. Sewell and Caneta Hall would drive six hours from Manhattan and get a motel. William and Shelly Stewart regularly made the 90 minute trip from Kingston, Ontario, Canada. Our own members were there faithfully. Brethren were few and scattered, and we treasured the opportunities to hear the gospel preached and to have fellowship with our beloved brothers and sisters.

How far would you drive for a football game or a Branson show?

“But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness...” (Matthew 6:33).

Do You Know The Word?

Jefferson David Tant | Hendersonville, Tennessee, USA

Our school years have some regular events. There are class sessions, recess periods, lunch periods, sports events, graduation days, etc. And one of the important events is what we would call “Final Exams.” We know the consequences of not preparing for these exams, as we will fail. And how do we prepare for the finals? I’m afraid some students more or less coast along through the semester and then really dig in at the last few days in an effort to prepare for the finals. Too often, this does not result in a passing grade. That’s why parents and teachers urge students to prepare daily for their finals. Many parents will tell their children when they come home from school, “No TV or computer until you get your homework done.” Parents want their children to use their time wisely day by day, so that when the final exams come, they will be prepared.

And we all know that there is another and greater “final exam” that every human being will face one day, and that is the Judgment Day, when we will stand before our Creator at our “Final Exam” and be judged.

“Say among the nations, “The LORD reigns; Indeed, the world is firmly established, it will not be moved; He will judge the peoples with equity. Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; Let the sea roar, and all it contains; Let the field exult, and all that is in it. Then all the trees of the forest will sing for joy. Before the LORD, for He is coming, For He is coming to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness And the peoples in His faithfulness.” (Psalm 96:10-13).

When Satan tempted Christ, Christ replied, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God’” (Matthew 4:4). It is quite obvious that Christ implied the need for our knowledge of God’s Word, since partaking of this “spiritual bread,” the Word of God, is essential for spiritual life.

Knowledge is very important in many aspects of our lives on Planet Earth. We trust doctors who care for our bodies to be knowledgeable, as we also trust mechanics who care for our cars. We are quite aware that they spent time studying in order to prepare themselves for their work. They are “servants” who know what they are doing.

Likewise, Christians are “servants,” and they need to serve according to knowledge. And what is the source of this knowledge? Obviously, it is the Word of God.

Dear Reader, since we are going to be judged by the Word of God, we really need to spend time in reading, meditating on, and obeying God’s Revelation to mankind. “So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty.” (James 2:12)

On one occasion, Jesus told the crowd around Him, “and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” (John 8:32)

There is no more important information that you can have than a knowledge of God’s Word. I well

remember a Bible verse I memorized when I was young. "Say Brother, have you seen Second Timothy Two Fifteen -- "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth."

Examples Of Marriages All Believers Would Agree Need To Be Terminated

Patrick Donahue | Harvest, Alabama, USA

There are at least some marriages all believers would agree need to be terminated...

For example, it is easy to understand from Mark 6:17-18 ("For Herod himself had sent forth and laid hold upon John, and bound him in prison for Herodias' sake, his brother Philip's wife: for he had married her. For John had said unto Herod, It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife") that God through John the Baptist was demanding termination of the Old Testament era marriage between Herod and Herodias.

And we can read from Ezra 10:10-11 ("And Ezra the priest stood up, and said unto them, Ye have transgressed, and have taken strange wives, to increase the trespass of Israel. Now therefore make confession unto the Lord God of your fathers, and do his pleasure: and separate yourselves from the people of the land, and from the strange wives") that God was requiring the Israelites, who had married foreign wives against His Deuteronomy 7:3-4 direction, to separate from them, even such wives they had children with ("All these had taken strange wives: and some of them had wives by whom they had children" – verse 44).

And believers with any convictions at all can understand from passages like I Corinthians 6:9-10 ("Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God" - NKJV) that all gay marriages must be terminated. Gay marriages and adulterous marriages (and just "shacking up") are all wrong for the same reason – man but not God has "joined" (Matthew 19:6) the two together in sexual union (I Corinthians 6:16-18).

And as we know, texts like 1 Corinthians 7:2 ("Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband") condemn polygamous marriages and therefore require separation of such. What is the essential difference between an adulterous marriage and a polygamous marriage, that makes the former right but the latter wrong? They both involve being bound/obligated to one while married to another – Romans 7:2-3. The truth is – all adulterous marriages must be terminated, not just polygamous ones.

I was surprised in my March 2024 debate with Derek Baker in London, KY on whether or not adulterous marriages must be terminated. As usual I paralleled adulterous marriage with polygamous marriage – if the latter have to be terminated, why not the former? Derek's response? Polygamous marriages do not have to be terminated. Boy, did he surprise me! Here is his quote from 3-22-2024 – "Polygamy still exists in our world today. I went to Africa and I had a gentleman who was an evangelist there in Kenya. He said, 'What do I do . . . I have a man who was just converted and he has ten wives. What do I do? Do I tell him he has to get rid of nine of them?' . . . If I tell this man that he has to get rid of nine of his wives, in a culture where that is nearly a death sentence, then there is now nine people that are enemies of Jesus Christ; nine people who will hate Jesus. 'Because of Jesus, I lost my marriage.' Nine groups of kids that were born to those women who, 'because of Jesus, I lost my dad.' Christianity is destroyed through that teaching." Derek is supposed to be a true Christian (baptized "for the remission of sins"), but he decided to defend staying in polygamous marriages when he saw my parallel to divorce and remarriage adultery. At least Derek was consistent; but consistently wrong.

So why can't all believers (who are not just playing games) see the same thing in principle (to all of the above cases), that adulterous marriages (per Matthew 19:9 - "And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery" and its parallels) must be terminated? What is the difference that makes a difference?

"The Renewing of Your Mind"

Jim Mickells | Sellersburg, Indiana, USA

"And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Romans 12:2). As Christians we certainly must be careful we don't allow the world to mold the way we think, which would in turn affect the way we live. Wuest, in his Word Studies, says this about the word "Conformed," "Paul exhorts the saints, "Stop assuming an outward expression which is patterned after this world, an expression which does not come from, nor is representative of what you are in your inner being as a regenerated child of God." One could translate, "Stop masquerading in the habiliments of this world, its mannerisms, speech expressions, styles, habits" (Volume 1, Romans, Chapter 12, p. 206).

Notice James Moffatt's translation of this verse. "Instead of being moulded to this world, have your mind renewed, and so be transformed in nature, able to make out what the will of God is, namely, what is good and acceptable to him and perfect."

The world would like nothing better than to shape the way we think. Many who are worldly minded believe homosexuality is just an alternate lifestyle. Abortion is not murder, but a woman's choice. Adultery is simply having an affair, not sexual immorality which destroys lives and families. Cursing or swearing is not vulgar language, it is just colorful. Lying is simply stretching the truth a little, etc. Yet all these things are sins which will condemn those who practice them (Romans 1:28-32; Galatians 5:19-21; Revelation 21:8), regardless of what the world may say or believe. As we stand in opposition to these iniquities, we're often charged with being filled with hatred, bigoted, or having a holier than thou attitude.

The wise said, "Keep your heart with all diligence, For out of it spring the issues of life" (Proverbs 4:23). It seems apparent the heart spoken of in this verse, which must be guarded at all costs, is the mind. He tells us why we must be diligent in controlling our heart, the issues of life flow from it. Jesus gives a good commentary on this verse when He said, "But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies" (Matthew 15:18-19). Deane and Taswell said, "The fact here stated is that the moral conduct of life, its actions and proceedings, are determined by the condition of the heart. If the heart is pure, the life will be pure; if the heart is corrupt, the life will be corrupt" (The Pulpit Commentary 9:91). Is it any wonder why we must be dedicated to doing all we can to make sure our hearts are pure!

Instead of allowing the world to mold our minds we must be transformed. The word "transformed" is defined as "to change into another form; of believers, Rom. 12:2, "be transformed," the obligation being to undergo a complete change which, under the power of God, will find expression in character and conduct" (Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words. 1171). Some have pointed out we get our English word metamorphosis from this Greek word (*metamorphôô*). God wants us to think differently from the world. Once our minds are changed the way we conduct our lives will change as well.

This transformation involves the "renewing of your mind." Thayer defines the word "renewing" as, "a renewal, renovation, complete change for the better" (Thayer's Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament. 38). How do we renew our minds? This is a process which begins with a study of God's word. Day by day we spend time meditating, contemplating, and searching the Scriptures to see what the Lord has said to us. We make God's thoughts our thoughts, His ideas our ideas, His words our words, His ways our ways, and transformation will naturally follow. The gospel is still God's power unto salvation, but also

has the strength to change the mind, character, and conduct of those who will receive it into their hearts and will produce fruit to the glory of Jehovah (Luke 8:15).

The person who is renewed in mind will not only abstain from the works of the flesh, he will also bear the fruit of Spirit in his life (Galatians 5:22-23). He will love his neighbor as himself (Romans 13:9-10); bear his brother's burden (Galatians 6:2); be busy doing good to all men (Galatians 6:10); and will certainly be "the salt of the earth" and "the light of the world:

(Matthew 5:13-16). One of the things which seems to be sorely lacking among those who claim to be renewed in mind is a zeal for the Lord's cause. Those who allow the word to change them should be evangelistic, constantly looking for and working to create opportunities to share the gospel with those who are lost.

May we never seek the gratification of the flesh by conforming to the standards of the world. Yet rather let us be transformed in heart and mind, seeking always to do what is the good, acceptable, and perfect will of God. By living a transformed life, we can influence others to have a desire to possess what we have spiritually; a happy and contented life filled with joy, peace, and hope. Remember the words of the wise man, "For as he thinks in his heart, so is he" (Proverbs 23:7).

OVERRATING YOU OWN KNOWLEDGE

Greg Gwin | Columbia, Tennessee, USA

In correspondence with a young man about a particular sin - a sin that was directly affecting his life - he wrote: "From extensive study that I've conducted over the course of several years, I do not believe _____ is a sin but rather a matter of judgment..." To which the following response (in part) was sent: "You state that you have studied this subject over 'several years'. So have I. So have many others - for many centuries. This is not a new topic awaiting your discovery." As you might guess, little progress was made in changing the young man's mind.

Please consider some of the implications of his claim:

1) He asserts that he has studied this 'extensively' and leaves the impression that others - especially those who disagree with him - have not studied the subject as thoroughly as he has. This young man has no way of knowing how much or how often others have researched any given topic. This is pretentious pride, and that's a sin, too! (2 Timothy 3:2). The apostle Paul says that a person can be "proud" while "knowing nothing" (1 Timothy 6:4).

2) He seems to suggest that others - including all those who have devoted their whole lives to the study of the Scriptures - have apparently not uncovered the truth that he now possesses. Maybe, but not likely! Lots of true scholars have dug deeply into the Word. Many faithful brethren have diligently searched out the truths of God's revelation. Any notion that we have come across something previously unknown is arrogant and unrealistic.

3) It is quite clear that he has become fully convinced - at least in his own mind - that he has the truth on this subject and that his actions are acceptable to God. But we are warned about the hazards of "deceiving and being deceived" (2 Timothy 3:13). Rationalizing to justify our own conduct is a danger to us all. Be careful!

We hope this young man will rethink this matter. But a basic change of heart is going to have to happen first.

Over the next several articles, we will look at eight principles of Biblical interpretation. We will focus on 1), the importance of word definitions and usage, 2) the exclusive and consistent nature of truth, 3) the primacy of using a literal interpretation, 4) the need to understand verses within their context, 5) the relevancy of historical context, 6) the self-interpreting nature of the Bible, 7) the progressive structure of revelation, and finally 8) the use of accommodative language in the Scriptures.

Definitions and Word Usage

Any effective study of the Bible begins by determining what the words used mean. If we are not using words the same way, we will never understand one another. If we are not using Bible words as God does, we will not understand the Scriptures. Thus, having access to some helpful tools is imperative: English dictionaries, Bible dictionaries, Greek/English lexicon, etc.. All of these are now available online through web sites or are included in some Bible software packages.

Word Tenses

We do not have to be Hebrew and Greek scholars to understand the Scriptures. Yet, it is important to acknowledge the Bible was written in Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic. Dictionaries and lexicons can help us understand the nuance of some words in the original language which may be difficult to capture in our English translations. We'll use 1 John 3:9 as an example:

Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God. (1 John 3:9, **NKJV**)

The phrases “*does not sin*” and “*cannot sin*” can sound daunting. Certainly, the Lord wants us to cease from sin (John 8:11), and John wrote as much, “...*these things I write to you, so that you may not sin...*” (1 John 2:1). Yet in his next sentence, he gave comfort to the child of God who has yielded to temptation, saying, “...*if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father...*” Of course, we must repent and confess our transgression (1 John 1:6-9) to secure the Lord's advocacy.

A literal reading of 1 John 3:9 in the NKJV (and several other English translations) could be wrongly understood to say one who is a Christian is unable to sin. Such could lead one who is struggling with temptation and sin to despair, concluding they really are not nor ever were a child of God. Conversely, it could embolden some to claim that because they are a Christian, any evil done in the body is not accounted to them as sin (a position which some Gnostics of John's day would have taken).

A detailed study of the wording of the text reveals John used the linear present tense, which speaks of an ongoing or uninterrupted action. **Robertson's Word Pictures** describes the “*does not sin*” clause by saying, “*The child of God does not have the habit of sin,*” which obviously is a bit wordier than “does not sin.” One translation renders the text,

No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God. (1 John 3:9, **ESV**)

The apostle's point is not that Christians are impervious to temptation, but to stress that the child of God walks in the light “*as He is in the light*” (1 John 1:5, 7). And therefore our walk, our manner of life, is to not sin. And if we stumble and sin, there is forgiveness available (1 John 1:9; 2:1).

Distinct Word Meanings

Sometimes one English word is used to translation different Greek words. We have a single word “*love*” in English which is used in translation for more multiple Greek words. By far, the most common Greek word for love is *agape* or some derivative of it. *Agape* is an active dispassionate love, not necessarily void of

affection, yet not based in emotion. It is the love which God has for us (John 3:16; 1 John 4:10). It is the love we are to have for our enemies (Matthew 5:44). It is the love of 1 Corinthians 13:1-8. Our English translations also render the Greek *phileo* as “love,” but the use of the Greek word is different from *agape*. In defining *phileo*, Mounce used “affection” three times, along with words like “fond ... delight ... cherish.” This word is used about the religious leaders’ desire for attention (Matthew 6:5; 23:6). It is used about affection for human relations (Matthew 10:37). In fact, it is even translated as “kiss” in Matthew 26:48, a sign of affection being used by Judas as he betrayed Jesus. *Phileo* is also used in various compound words which translate into English as “lover of hospitality” (*philoxenos*), “lover of what is good” (*philagathos*), “brotherly love” (*philadelphia*), “love as brothers” (*philadelphus*), “love their husbands” (*philandros*), “love their children” (*philateknos*), “love of money” (*philarguria*), “lovers of themselves” (*philautos*), “lovers of pleasure” (*philedonos*), etc..

Consider our Lord’s conversation with Peter at the Sea of Galilee in John 21.

15 So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, ‘Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?’ He said to Him, ‘Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.’ He said to him, ‘Feed My lambs.’ 16 He said to him again a second time, “Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?” He said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.” He said to him, “Tend My sheep.” 17 He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?” Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, “Do you love Me?” And he said to Him, “Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.” Jesus said to him, “Feed My sheep. (John 21:15-17, NKJV)

Reading in English, we would never know that Peter is using a different word for “love” than Jesus. The Lord’s question is this: Peter, do you *agape* Me? Peter, will do you have a dutiful love, willing to do good because it is right. Recall, Peter formerly claimed such devotion to the Lord that he was willing to die with Him, but when the opportunity was available to demonstrate his love, he denied even knowing Jesus. Peter did not respond by affirming *agape* for the Lord, but *phileo*, an affectionate and tender love between brothers or friends. *Phileo* is good, but it is a weaker word than *agape*. Perhaps Peter used this word to display humility; perhaps it reveals the self-doubt in him because of his former conduct. Again, in verse 16 Jesus asked if Peter had *agape*; and Peter responded with *phileo*. Then in verse 17, Jesus asked Peter, “do you *phileo* Me?” McGarvey comments:

In his third question, Jesus drops the agapao and takes Peter’s own word--phileo: as if he said, “Peter, are you even sure that you have a high regard for me?” Peter, as we have seen, had professed the most unparalleled devotion for the Master, but when the Lord now asks him if he has that devotion, he humbly describes his love as of a far weaker order--a mere instinctive affection or strong attachment, but nothing approaching adoration. It grieved Peter to have the Lord thus apparently doubt that he had even a tender regard for him, and he appealed to Christ himself as a searcher of hearts to bear witness that, poor and meager as his love was, it was at least as intense as he had represented it to be. (The Fourfold Gospel, McGarvey)

It is doubtful that Peter’s love for the Lord had dwindled. I suspect a few things combined for Peter’s use of *phileo* rather than *agape*. His former arrogance placed him in an awful position. Perhaps he was being much more cautious with his words and displaying humility. Maybe embarrassment played a role: how could he claim *agape* when he had failed to stand for Jesus? It may be doubt; was he unsure and unassuming about the standing of his relationship to Jesus? How could the Lord forgive such an egregious act of faithlessness? Knowing the difference in Greek words used in the text opens a deeper layer and hopefully better appreciation for the conversation.

Digging Into Transliterations

There is a difference between translation and transliteration. Translation is the act or process of “rendering

from one language into another” (**m-w.com**). Recently I taught an online class with several brethren from India. I do not speak Telugu, and so a brother had to translate for me. He took what I said in English and restated it in Telugu. To do so, the translator spoke words in the Telegu tongue which correspond to the words I used in English. The translator is charged with the responsibility of faithfully rendering the words of one language into the words of another language. Translation makes it possible to understand what was originally stated in a language in our own tongue.

Our English Bibles have been translated from the Hebrew Old Testament and Greek New Testament. I cannot read Hebrew or Greek, and so I must rely upon the translation and use the various tools available to gain a better understanding of the words used in a text. However, occasionally we find where a word was not translated from the ancient languages, but instead, was transliterated. Merriam-Webster defines transliteration as “...to represent or spell in the characters of another alphabet...” (**m-w.com**). Another source says, “...to change (letters, words, etc.) into corresponding characters of another alphabet or language...” (**dictionary.com**).

As an example, our English word “baptize” is not a translation, but a transliteration. Of course, the Greek alphabet is different from our English alphabet. The Greek word is βαπτίζω. When the Greek letters are changed to comparable letters in English, we get *baptizo*, which was then written as “baptize” in English versions of the Bible. It is a transliteration. Had it been translated, it would read “immerse,” or “submerge,” or “overwhelm,” or “dip” (**Strong, Thayer, Mounce**). Had it been translated rather than transliterated, perhaps there wouldn’t be folks who insist pouring a bit of water over someone or flicking water at someone is “baptism.”

Our English word “angel” is also a transliteration. It is from the Greek ἄγγελος. Many believe an angel to be a spirit being and depending on how influenced one is by artistic renditions, a winged spirit being, dressed in white, with a halo, and typically female. **Thayer, Strong, and Mounce** all define the Greek *aggelos* as “a messenger.” Under the heading “Angel,” the **ISBE** says,

The word angel is applied in Scripture to an order of supernatural or heavenly beings whose business it is to act as God's messengers to men, and as agents who carry out His will. Both in Hebrew and Greek the word is applied to human messengers...
(“Angel,” **International Standard Bible Encyclopedia**)

Angels can be heavenly beings, but they can also be human beings. *Aggelos* is simply a messenger, whether supernatural or human. Of the 185 times *aggelos* appears in the New Testament, all but 7 are translated “angel.” Each of those instances, it is obvious the messenger must be human (Matthew 11:10; Mark 1:2; Luke 7:24, 27; Luke 9:52; James 2:25) or in one instance, is a “messenger of Satan” (2 Corinthians 12:7).

But let’s consider Galatians 3:19. It reads:

What purpose then does the law serve? It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator. (NKJV)

Who are the angels of this text? Did the people of Israel have heavenly spirit beings teaching them? Or is this more logically the priests who instructed the people from the Law which had been given through the mediator, Moses? The transliteration of *aggelos* needlessly confuses what should be a simple text to comprehend.

Consider also Revelation 1:20, which speaks of the “...seven stars...” in the Lord’s right hand, which He identified as “...the seven angels of the churches...” Do all churches have an angel specifically appointed over them? As we continue in chapters 2 and 3, we find the seven letters to the seven churches, and in

the address of each, we read, *"To the angel of the church of _____"* (2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14). Did the Lord address each of these letters to spirit beings in heaven or might it be that He addressed them to the messengers who were at each of the churches, who then would declare the message to the brethren?

More times than not, the references to *aggelos* in the New Testament are spirit beings, angels as we would understand the word. But being diligent to study the words used in the Bible is important and will help us to understand better the written word before us.

Next time, we will continue looking at principles for Bible interpretation, and specifically the nature of truth.

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The God of Peace

Michael D. Hickox | Olney, Illinois, USA

While most people desire peace, the majority look for it in all the wrong places. In John 14:27, Jesus told His disciples, "Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you; not as the world gives, I give to you. Don't let your heart be troubled, neither let it be fearful." Several passages refer to God as the "God of peace" (Romans 15:33; 16:20; 2 Corinthians 13:11; Philippians 4:9; 1 Thessalonians 5:23; Hebrews 13:20). One of the names attributed to Jesus is "Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6). It is clear that God offers peace that far surpasses anything the world can offer. Though God deserves the glory for this peace, it's not attained by us without pursuit. 2 Corinthians 13:11 and Philippians 4:9 both teach requirements that must be met for the God of peace to be with us.

Pursuing peace first demands receiving the peace with God He offers through Christ (Romans 5:1). Salvation involves "crossing the bridge" Jesus built from spiritual death (separation from God) to spiritual life (fellowship with Him). Those reconciled to God, having harmony with Him restored, are able to enjoy the peace that only He can provide.

Those at peace with God learn the need to pursue peace with others. Jesus taught, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God" (Matthew 5:9). Peace must never be pursued at the expense of truth (Matthew 10:34-39), but as Romans 12:18 exhorts, "If it is possible, as much as it is up to you, be at peace with all men."

This provides a peace when mistreated by others that can't be attained by the "get-even" mindset of the world (cf. verses 17-21).

God's children are able to have a special peace with one another through Jesus. In Ephesians 2:14, Christ is referred to as "our peace." The context stresses the peace Christians of a Jewish background are able to have with those of a Gentile background.

The more general principle seen is that all Christians are able to have fellowship with one another,

regardless of wealth, background, ethnicity, and the like. While the world tends to use these things to divide people, God shows us that Christians make up one big family, with each child having equal inheritance from the Father.

This inheritance is connected to what is probably focused on the most when speaking about the Christian's peace: peace within that surpasses all understanding (Philippians 4:7).

This inner tranquility is longed for by most everyone but received by relatively few. Philippians 4:6-9 shows that the peace that surpasses understanding is a by-product of living to please God, casting those cares outside of our control on Him, and trusting Him that things will ultimately (eternally) be OK as long as we serve Him.

Verse 8 shows the importance of thinking on the beautiful things His Word teaches and promotes. Part of this is the knowledge that those who are at peace with Him have the greatest safety and security a person can have.

In the midst of the chaos and divisiveness of the society we live in, it's a great comfort to know that the peace of Christ can rule in our hearts (Colossians 3:15). As Jesus said, "I have told you these things, that in me you may have peace. In the world you have trouble; but cheer up! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

The Parable of the Mustard Seed

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In Mark 4:30-32, Jesus said:

"How shall we picture the kingdom of God, or by what parable shall we present it? It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the soil, though it is smaller than all the seeds that are upon the soil yet when it is sown, it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and forms large branches; so that the birds of the air can nest under its shade."

What is Jesus talking about when He speaks this parable? It's one of many of Jesus' shorter parables that one can read in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Is He referring to Heaven? Is He referring to the setting up of His kingdom on earth, which premillennialists believe failed when Jesus was on earth? To understand what Jesus is talking about, let's read Mark 1:14-15:

"Now after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.' The kingdom of God was supposed to come soon. This is the meaning of the phrase 'at hand.'"

However, Revelation 1:6 states, "and He has made us to be a kingdom." Thus, John was writing to churches (Revelation 1:4).

Since the term "kingdom of God" often refers to the church, what is the parable talking about? Earlier in the same chapter, Jesus said that the seed is the word of God (Mark 4:14). Since the seed is the word of God, this parable is talking about how the word of God is used to plant the kingdom/church. Paul used these words in 1 Corinthians 3:6, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God caused the growth." What was it Paul planted? It was the word of God! Only by planting the word of God will the kingdom sprout forth. Man thinks he can plant the seeds of entertainment, social meals, and recreational activities and produce the kingdom that way. The problem is, that's like planting wheat and hoping for corn to grow!

Brethren, Jesus spoke of how His kingdom would grow large based on His seed – the word of God! Let's use the seed God gave us to spread God's word, not the seeds of man's think so!

Teaching Each Other in Song

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

"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).

I remember an old couple from over forty years ago. Neither could read a note of music. They sat about halfway back on the far left side in a congregation of over 200 members. He sang like a bull frog and as loud as one and added a unique little lift at the end of a note. She was shrill. A music teacher would shudder. I miss them. They were a godly, dedicated old couple who could teach and praise in song. I hope we can sing together in heaven.

One way all Christians regardless of education or talent can both teach each other and praise the Lord is in our congregational singing. Yes, we praise God in our singing. A hymn is "a song of praise to God" (Mounce. 1297). But the apostle specifically calls our worship in song "teaching."

Surely we understand we are to teach the truth rather than error. The Lord plainly, forcefully condemns false teachers (2 Peter 2:1-2). We must speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15). It is just as important that we teach the truth in our songs as it is in our sermons and classes.

Often songs become popular among brethren, not because they teach the truth, but because gifted, trained singers enjoy the music. They do little, if any, teaching of the truth.

It's been years since I was in an audience which attempted "The New Song." The congregation must have gifted singers for all four parts, it's usually sung fast, and there are repetitions which require expert musical skill. My memory is getting thrown off the carousel and trying to get back on when it came back around. Those who couldn't read music were just left out. I don't know that the song teaches any error; I don't know that it teaches most people anything!

Some songs teach outright falsehood. "Jesus Is Coming Soon" teaches that the imminent appearance of the Lord is certain and even implies we have signs of that coming. Not even Jesus Himself knows the time of His coming (Mark 13:31-33), and the so-called "signs of the times" were fulfilled in the generation to which the Master spoke (Matthew 24:29-34).

I believe it was 1973 when I heard the late David Watts debate a premillennialist. The false teacher affirmed "Jesus will return in this generation." Brother Watts masterfully answered his false doctrine.

When we sing "Jesus Is Coming Soon" we teach the very same error the false teacher defended in debate. False doctrine is false whether preached or sung.

On the other hand, we can be too picky about the wording of songs. Some people argue for poetic license. I prefer to say that poetry - and the wording of songs and hymns is poetic - is filled with figures of speech. The hymn "I Know Whom I Have Believed" states in the last line, "Nor if I'll walk the vale with Him or 'meet Him in the air.'" The editors of the old song book Sacred Selections, changed this to "Nor will I walk the vale with Him." Certainly we won't literally walk a valley on earth with the Lord, but he'll bring the departed saints with Him when He comes, and saints alive at the time will be changed and caught up to meet Him (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). But almost assuredly the writer of the hymn figuratively referenced going through the valley of death with the Lord (cf. Psalm 23:4).

But to be edified by such poetry in song, we must understand the figures. The song "Night with Ebon Pinion" has particularly complex figures.

"Night with ebon pinion,

Brooded o'er the vale."

What in the world does that mean? "Ebon" abbreviates "ebony," jet black. A "pinion" is a wing. Black winged night. Of course "vale" is valley." So was it a dark night when the Master was betrayed? I don't know physically, but spiritually it was the darkest of all nights! Was he in a valley? No, he was on the Mount of Olives. But he went through the valley of sorrow.

Brother Lowell Blasingame taught a series of classes in Grenada, Mississippi on the meaning of the songs we sing. Not a bad idea. Knowing Lowell, I'm sure the class was filled with Scripture.

Some of the old hymns we've known since childhood beautifully express divine truth and poignantly touch the hearts of those of us who have grown old. It's been years since I joined with a congregation in singing "O Why Not Tonight." That song brings back the pleasant memories of worshiping in little white frame meeting houses on gravel roads in rural Arkansas.

But there are also excellent newer songs that we would do well to learn, since they too express profound, scriptural truths. "Thank You, Lord, For Homes" is an excellent sermon in song on the family as God ordained it. "Abiding Things" touchingly teaches the essence of First Corinthians 13:13. The lyrics of both songs were written by the late Huey Hartsell, and the music of both was by the late R.J. Stevens, two men who served their generation well all the way to the end.

Our song service when we assemble to worship is of sufficient importance that the last thing the Master did before He went to the garden to be betrayed was to sing a hymn with His disciples (Matthew 26:30; Mark 14:26).

"Do All in the Name of the Lord" was written in 1916 by Austin Taylor of Uvalde, Texas (my mother's birth place and birth year). Of course it's based on Colossians 3:17. Brother Taylor was leading singing for Foy E. Wallace, Sr., who preached a sermon based on Colossians 3:17. There was no song at the time to express the fundamental truth of that passage. Brother Wallace asked Brother Taylor to write such a song, and thus we have "Do All in the Name of the Lord."

When my dad passed away in 1987, we had congregational singing at his funeral. The only request I made was that we sing, "Do All in the Name of the Lord." It captured the essence of my dad's life as a preacher and defender of truth, and it faithfully, poetically expounds Colossians 3:17.

Teach one another in songs, hymns, and spiritual songs. Teach each other the truth.

Work Cited

Mounce's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words.

Search the Scriptures

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I suffer a lot. I'm an avid Arkansas Razorback fan, and the Razorbacks, whether it's football, basketball, or baseball, have a way of letting their fans down. Others in the congregation are Texas Aggie fans or Missouri Tigers fans. Several couldn't care less. And that's all well and good. It has nothing to do with our soul's salvation.

But with Jesus you cannot be neutral. He Himself declared, "Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters" (Luke 11:23).

I propose to prove that **Jesus' fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies concerning the Christ proves He is the Christ the Son of God.**

Proposition Explained

Beginning in Genesis 3:15, the Old Testament writers foretold the coming of the “Anointed,” (in the Hebrew language “mashiyach,” i.e., “Messiah,” cf. Psalm 2:2; Daniel 9:25-26) who would be the Savior of His people (cf. Isaiah 53:11). Jesus of Nazareth and His apostles, claimed He is that Messiah, the Savior of the world (Matthew 11:27-30; Acts 13:38-39).

He claims to be uniquely the Son of God (John 1:1-3, 14). Jesus appealed to fulfilled prophecy to sustain His claims (John 5:39; Luke 24:44), and His apostles did the same (Acts 3:18; 10:43; 17:2-3; Romans 16:25-26; 2 Peter 1:16-21; Revelation 19:10).

Old Testament scholars assert there are about 300 Old Testament prophecies about Messiah fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth. If this is true, His claims are emphatically sustained. The odds against His fulfillment of these prophecies being accidental are overwhelming. If an “all points bulletin” gave 300 characteristics of a felon, and a suspect met all 300, who would deny he is the one the police are looking for?

Characteristics of Messianic Prophecy

Mormons claim Joseph Smith made inspired prophecies that prove his inspiration. The official web site of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (i.e., Mormons) claims that Smith’s prediction in 1832 of a great American Civil War proves His inspiration. But even as early as the Founding Fathers of the eighteenth century there was fear of civil war over the issue of slavery. Anyone who followed public affairs foresaw the Civil War.

For predictive prophecy to have value as evidence, it must meet certain characteristics.

1. The events must be beyond the power of men to foresee.
2. It must be demonstrated that the prediction was written long before the event.
3. The prediction must be undeniably applicable to the event.
4. The language of the prediction must be unambiguous and unmistakable.
5. Every prophecy or part of prophecy must be fulfilled; no mistakes are allowed (Deuteronomy 18:20-22).

The Evidence: Christ in Prophecy

Let’s examine a few examples of the evidence.

- **Christ had to be born of the proper lineage**, i.e., of Abraham (Genesis 12:3; 22:18), Judah (Genesis 49:10), and David (2 Samuel 7:12-13; Psalm 89:19-45). Jesus of Nazareth was indeed descended from these very progenitors (Matthew 1:1-16). By the way, surely we can agree that no one chooses his lineage. This fulfillment could not be faked.
- **He had to be born in the proper obscure village**, Bethlehem (Micah 5:2). And this prophecy was written by Micah about seven centuries before Jesus was born. Even though Jesus’ parents lived in Nazareth in Galilee (Luke 1:26-32), He was born in Bethlehem in Judea (Matthew 2:1-6). I think we will also agree that no one chooses the place of his birth.
- **Even Jesus’ birth of a virgin, the only such birth in history, was a matter of fulfilled prophecy** (Genesis 3:15; Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:18-23; Galatians 4:4).
- **The prophets foretold a forerunner** to prepare the way for Messiah (Malachi 3:1; Isaiah 40:3-5), and John fulfilled that role (Mark 1:2-4).
- **His Triumphant Entry into Jerusalem** fulfilled prophecy (Zechariah 9:9; Matthew 21:1-11).
- **Isaiah prophesied Messiah’s rejection by the Jews’** seven centuries before it occurred (Isaiah 53:1-3; Matthew 27:22-23).
- **The Betrayal** (Zechariah 11:12-13; Matthew 26:14-16; 27:3-8), **Crucifixion** (Psalm 22:1,6-8,16-18; Matthew 27:39-46; John 19:23-24, 31-34), **Burial** (Isaiah 53:9; Matthew 27:57-60; John 19:38-42), and **Resurrection** (Psalm 16:10; Acts 2:29-32; 13:34-37) of Christ were all prophesied centuries before.

- **The prophets foretold the general time of Messiah's kingdom.** It was to come during the time of the fourth world (world of the Jews) kingdom from the time of Daniel in the sixth century B.C. (Daniel 2:36-45). That, of course is the Roman Empire (Babylonian, Persian, Grecian, Roman), which is when Christ came and established His kingdom (Luke 2:1; 3:1, 21; 9:2).

Conclusion

How can any reasonable honest person examine all this evidence from prophecy - and I haven't given it all - and not believe Jesus is the Christ the Son of God? Will you believe Him and obey Him? "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

Introduction to Deuteronomy

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Author

Moses is the author of the book of Deuteronomy (1:1-5). Chapter 34 was probably appended by Joshua after the death of Moses.

Name

The name "Deuteronomy" means **second law** and is taken from the Septuagint (Greek) translation of 17:18.

The Law

The term "**law**" ("**torah**") (4:44) is the comprehensive word for the **code of law comprising God's covenant with Israel**, the heart of which was the Ten Commandments spoken directly to the people by the Lord on Mt. Sinai, written by the finger of God on the two tablets of stone, and preserved in the Ark of the Covenant within the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle. Law has four characteristics: it is the **expressed and binding will of the ruler** (Nehemiah 9:13-14), it is a **rule of action** (Romans 2:13), it is the **standard of judgment** (James 2:9,12), and **it requires obedience** (Luke 6:46).

Four terms are used descriptively of parts or aspects of the law in Deuteronomy: "**statutes**," meaning things prescribed or enacted by law; "**judgments**," i.e., rights, whether public or private, all that each could claim as his due, and all that he was bound to render to God or to his fellow men as their due; "**testimonies**," i.e., ordinances attested and confirmed by God; and "**commandments**," that is, charges laid upon men as the expression of divine will and which demand obedience.

The law is also called a "**covenant**." This term means a divine ordinance, with signs and pledges on God's part, promises for Israel's obedience, penalties for disobedience, and ordinances for Israel to accept.

Theme

The theme of Deuteronomy is **obedience** (30:1-3,8-20). The book is a series of exhortations by Moses to Israel, delivered in the plains of Moab just before his death (1:1-3), in view of the fact he would not be able to lead them into the land of Canaan, to obey the law of the Lord in the land of Canaan. The old generation had died in the wilderness, the region east of the Jordan River had been conquered, and Moses was 120 years young (34:7) and had led Israel through the wilderness for 40 years (1:3). He must die, and Joshua was to take his place. Moses, the servant of the Lord, delivered a series of stirring farewell addresses to the new generation. The great deliverer-lawgiver-prophet presented **three reasons for obedience: History**, God's past goodness to Israel; **Law**, the goodness of God's law; and **Prophecy**, God's promised goodness to them for obedience.

Lessons

God demanded that Israel obey His law. They could not plead that they were unable to do so, for Moses

assured them the law was not impossible to obey (30:11-14). But, for Israel to obey God's law, they had to keep all His commandments always (30:2,8; 31:12), keep them carefully (5:32; 15:5), keep them diligently (11:13,22), and keep them with all their hearts and souls (11:13; 26:16; 30:2,10; 32:46). But Israel did not so keep God's law (1:19-46; 9:4-24). Thus, the Lord was just in condemning them (27:11-26; 28:15-68).

These truths in principle apply to the law of Christ but with one crucial difference (18:18-19; Acts 3:19-26). As Israel, we are able to obey all God's law (1 Corinthians 10:13; 1 John 5:3), but we do not always do so, i.e., we sometimes sin (Romans 3:9,23; 1 John 1:8,10). Thus, God is just in condemning us (Romans 6:23; 8:3). The critical difference is that the animal sacrifices of the law of Moses could not take away the guilt of sin (Hebrews 10:1-4), whereas the sacrifice of Christ perfectly cleanses the inner man of the taint of iniquity (Hebrews 9:13-14; 10:12-17).

Outline

I. Introduction - 1:1-5

II. Moses' Last Sermons - chapters 1 - 30

A. First Sermon: Historical - 1:6 - 4:43

(Exhortations to Obedience Based on God's Past Goodness to Israel - 4:36-40)

B. Second Sermon: Legal - 4:44 - 26:19

(Exhortations to Obedience Based on Review of God's Law Delivered at Horeb - 5:1-3; 6:4-7; 7:11; 26:16-19)

C. Third Sermon: Prophetic - chapters 27 - 30

(Exhortations to Obedience Based on Blessings for Obedience and Cursings for Disobedience - 27:1; 28:1-2,15)

1. This is the renewal with a new generation of the covenant made at Horeb. - 29:1,9-13

2. Because Israel disobeyed God, the cursings for disobedience (28:15-68) became the history of Israel written in advance and constitute an amazing, faith building series of prophecies.

III. Moses' Last Days - chapters 31 - 34

A. Moses' Charge to Joshua - chapter 31

B. The Song of Moses - chapter 32

C. Moses' Blessing of Israel - chapter 33

D. Moses' Death on Mt. Nebo - chapter 34

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