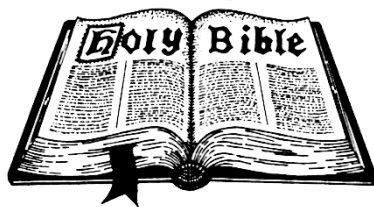


Tenth Annual  
**TRUTH IN LOVE**  
LECTURESHIP

Theme:  
**Choose You  
This Day**  
•• Joshua 24:15 ••



*May 17-21, 2000*

**PAUL SAIN, DIRECTOR**

Hosted By The  
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# INTRODUCTION

**D**ecisions determine destiny! I recall hearing a sermon by this title many years ago. The truth of the three word statement is surely accepted by all. Many of the decisions we face in life are trivial and do not incur benefit or consequence. Other decisions, ones we might call **major**, certainly will determine the course of our years upon this earth and some decisions will even determine our eternal destiny!

Joshua, centuries ago, gathered a large throng of people together and challenged them to make a decision. He spoke of the options before them. They had the “*right*” to make up their own minds. They could choose to follow the gods of their fathers, the gods of the Amorites (in whose land they presently lived) or they could choose to follow Jehovah God. They had the “*freedom*” to follow Jehovah or reject Jehovah.

The great man of God, Joshua, told the people (Josh. 24:15) that he and his house would serve the Lord God. What a powerful affirmation! What a great statement concerning this leader of his family! What a wonderful example he was to the precious ones in his family!

Friends, we are many years removed from the time of the challenge by Joshua ~ yet we likewise can learn (Rom. 15:4) from this event. They had numerous “*gods*” in their lives from which they could select. We have many “*gods*” in our lives from which many choose to serve and worship.

Satan is still alive and active. He is militantly seeking to destroy any and all. He has ministering servants who teach false ideas, attempts to seduce us, endeavors to deceive us and causes us to make bad decisions which could result in our eternal damnation.

In the 10<sup>th</sup> Annual **Truth In Love Lectureship** we will examine several areas in which we regularly

are called upon to make decisions. We will endeavor to present the views (ideas, perversions, and digressions) of man and then present the truth from God's inspired Word. Qualified and faithful men have prepared the manuscripts for this printed volume and will deliver these lessons during the lectures at the East Hill assembly building.

Sincere appreciation is expressed to the East Hill elders who oversee this work and endeavor to hold fast to the faithful Word in a day of change and digression. May we ever ***“Preach the Word”*** (2 Tim. 4:2) until the end of our journey on this earth.

**Paul Sain**  
Lectureship Director

## DEDICATION

**T**he year 2000 is a reality! We continue to work for the Master as fervently as possible. We live in an age of turmoil and change. God's people are ever under pressure and attack. Souls are lost in sin. The gospel is the only power of God to save. The statement uttered almost 2,000 years ago is still so very true, "...*The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few*" (Matt. 9:37).

As we endeavor to work each day faithfully for our Saviour, let us ever be mindful of the many who have made it possible for us to enjoy the rich spiritual benefits and provisions. Many have godly, faithful **parents** who have taught them the saving gospel of Christ. Many of us have been so challenged by righteous **elders** who have demonstrated their love for the Lord and His church by their sacrificial, unselfish and faithful service. Others have greatly benefited from zealous and diligent Bible class **teachers** who have gone about their often thankless works of teaching treasured students the way of the Lord. Most, if not all of us, have benefited from the great lessons from the **preachers** of years past. We have sat at the feet of the faithful proclaimers of truth, such as Gus Nichols, Guy N. Woods, Foy E. Wallace, Franklin Camp, G. K. Wallace, Andrew Connally, Winfred Clark, Bill Jackson, Bobby Duncan, and many others.

In sincere appreciation for the valuable and long-lasting faithful work in the kingdom of God and to the memory of these precious ones, we lovingly dedicate this book.

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***Choose You  
This Day***



***Joshua 24:15***

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# Choose You This Day

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*Joshua 24:15*



Tenth Annual

## **TRUTH IN LOVE**

LECTURESHIP

PAUL SAIN, DIRECTOR

Hosted By The  
**East Hill Church Of Christ**

## Chapter 1

# “Choose You This Day Whom Ye Will Serve...”

*Burt Jones*

A native of Gadsden, AL • Spent most of his life as an Episcopalian • Began his preacher training one week after he obeyed the gospel • Holds a B.S. in Music Education and Masters in Middle Eastern History • A graduate of Memphis School of Preaching • Has held singing workshops and gospel meetings in 32 states • Author of **A Practical Handbook for Singing and Songleaders** • Father of three children.



If you examine the twenty-fourth chapter of Joshua, verses fourteen and fifteen, there will emerge a contextual understanding of the theme of this great lectureship, perhaps in a way not before fully appreciated. In this two-verse passage Joshua stresses the obligation of Israel to Jehovah with the resultant effect that,

And Israel served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that overlived Joshua, and which had known all the works of the Lord, that he had done for Israel (24:31).

Joshua offered a four-point requisite absolutely essential to Israel remaining within the parameters of their duty as God-fearing children.

Joshua, in effect said (1) You must serve Jehovah. You must fear Him. You must serve Him in sincerity. You must serve Him in truth. You must put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River.”

“Choose You This Day Whom Ye Will Serve...”

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(2) You must make the choice. You have this right, this power, this responsibility. You must choose and you must choose NOW.

(3) Consider your alternatives. You can serve the “*gods which your fathers served that were beyond the River,*” or, you can serve the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell; or, you can serve JEHOVAH!

(4) My choice has already been made—“...As for me and my house, **we will serve Jehovah!**”

We will, through the grace of Almighty God, “...*walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil...*” (Eph. 5:15-17).

The fifth chapter of Ephesians indicates that we are to understand “...*what the will of the Lord is*” (v. 17). This desire of our Savior is the great rule of the Christian life; to know and, in the deeper sense, understand it is to walk wisely and to walk surely.

To appreciate, to fully comprehend what the will of the Lord is, we must grasp the idea that,

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding (Prov. 9:10).

The best protection against any evil, whether it be obvious or subtle, is to learn self-control and how to govern our daily affairs as a child of God. Intemperance of any kind will destroy your peace of mind and this absolute lack of moderation will destroy any prospect of heaven.

Someone has said that if the good people in China were to line up two by two and begin walking into the sea, the end of the line would never come. There are over two billion souls in China, even though the government has placed a quota of two children per household. Imagine three times that population number,

approximately six billion, and perhaps you can conceive of the idea that the world population could double by the year 2050!

Now, a man could build an earthly empire which would totally dominate each of these twelve billion potential souls, and yet tragically be eternally condemned.

For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? (Matt. 16:26).

Brethren, we are going out to save a world which does **not want** to be saved. This may describe the way in which we came to Christ. Maybe,

That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ (Eph. 2:12-13).

Choose you this day whom ye will serve. I will **not** yield on matters of faith. I would give years of my life to have five minutes to tell my blessed parents how much I love them—how much I appreciate them instilling integrity and a sense of dignity and honor in their two boys—to simply say “*Thank You!*” And now I ask myself, “*To whom will I be a hero?*” Whom shall I help in influencing precious souls to choose whom they must serve?

As a Christian I can begin preparing others to see the need for placing themselves in the harness of Christian service by establishing a sound foundation.

**1. In the home.** Is your place of residence a filling station where folks, within the thing you call a family, swing by for a fresh change of clothes—a bath—a meal gobbled down before time for another appointment, and maybe, time to drop into bed for a little recharge before the ritual begins again? Or is your place of residence a feeling station, a place built around exhorting one another—built around family devotionals—making time for meals together—making time for family activities—building your weekly schedule around living for and glorifying God? You say, *“Preacher, why don’t you move into the twentieth, almost twenty-first century? There isn’t time these days for those things! It would be nice, but there aren’t enough hours in the day for those things. Not when you have to work until May each year for Uncle Sam!”* But, brethren, have you noticed that we always seem to find time, after too many years have passed, to undo the mess with our children—our marriage—our spirituality? There’s always time found somewhere when you have to get Junior out of jail—or to decide how to deal with your daughter’s unwanted pregnancy, or to awkwardly attempt to get to know your mate—really get to know him/her—after a couple of decades of using the “excuse” of *“trying to make things better for my family than when I was growing up.”*

Solomon said,

Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it (Prov. 22:6).

Now he may stray but he knows standards. We train a child to use a knife and fork. Listen, that is a big difference between what we actually do with our children in the home. We train our children to tie their shoes

when they are six, we do not have to do it again when they are twenty, thirty, forty, fifty, or sixty. It stays with them for life. Why? We trained them to do it over and over again until it became a way of life. This is what he is talking about. People say, "*Well, I have known so and so and they raised their children in the church.*" That does not mean a thing! A lot of people have been raised in the church who turned out to be murderers, heathens, adulterers, fornicators, liars, and everything else, some because they were told instead of trained.

Let's just think about some of the things we teach our children in the home. Think about the responsibility that rests upon you and me. Think about this. If a millstone were hung around my neck and I was cast into the depths of the sea, I would be better off than to offend one of these little ones that believed in me (Luke 17:2). We can do just about what we want with children, because they are clay.

Brethren, I want you to know, we are responsible for guiding our children to choose Christ. Why should we criticize the church? It bothers me when people criticize the church, saying it is failing our young people, when the home has the child first and the most. Then they complain about the church being a failure; the church has never been a failure. I will admit there are a lot of members of the body who have failed, but the church has never been a failure and never will be a failure! It is the perfect, blood-bought institution of Almighty God through His Son, Jesus Christ.

Let me try to illustrate something about lying. David said, "*Remove from me the way of lying: and grant me thy law graciously*" (Psm. 119:29).

A little boy looks out the window and says to his mother, "*Mother, I see Miss Busybody coming down the street.*"



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She responds, *“Well, you may go to the door and tell Miss Busybody I am not home.”* So the little boy goes to the door and he says, *“Miss Busybody, my mother said to tell you she is not home.”* Now the lady goes away all mad, but that is all right, because the little boy did what his mother said. That afternoon the same mother said, *“Now son, I am going off downtown, and those cookies in the jar are for supper. Do not eat them!”* When she came home the cookies were all gone. The evidence was all over the living room furniture, and his face. His mother said, *“Son, you ate those cookies, and I told you not to eat them!”* *“No, I did not, mother! I did not eat a one of those cookies. Not a one of them. I did not eat them.”* She said, *“Now son, I am not going to spank you for eating the cookies, but I am going to spank you for lying.”* Good people, that morning she told him to lie, and that evening she spanked him for lying. We wonder why children are confused.

Maybe this has happened in a home of which you know. Has it? We wonder where a child learns to lie. Daddy says to mother on their income tax, *“Well, we did not give a good percentage to the church, but we are going to claim more off our return as a deduction because the law allows that much.”* Well, now he taught his child to rob the Lord and lie to the government. When we take a percent off our income tax as a gift to the church, and have not given it, we have lied to the government.

God said that we are to love our mothers, our fathers, and we are to love our wives and our husbands. We are not teaching so much of that in the home.

A careful man, I ought to be,  
A little fellow follows me.  
I do not dare to go astray,  
For fear he will go the self-same way.

Not once, can I escape his eye.  
What'ere he sees me do, he tries.  
Like me, he says he's going to be,  
This little chap that follows me.  
He thinks that I am good and fine;  
Believes in every word of mine.  
The false in me, he must not see,  
This little chap who follows me.  
I must remember as I go,  
Through summer sun, and winter snow,  
I'm building for the years to be,  
This little chap that follows me.

Brethren, it is all about choices! What are you teaching your children in your home? And, do you know why we do not visit? We are selfish. It takes time to visit. We want that time for ourselves. We are just that selfish. A child grows up with it in the home, then the child has the same problem. Selfishness is as much a sin as stealing, lying, or anything else. We teach our children this. Then, when the neighbors come and bring their children, and Johnny hides all his toys, or he puts them in a box and sits on them and whacks the other child over the head with something if he tries to get one of them, you say, "*I am so ashamed.*" He is selfish. You are ashamed of it. Well, he heard you when you said, "*Well, we are not going to send Aunt Mary a card, she did not send us one last year.*" Where did he learn it?

We are teaching these things in the home and we are teaching lying and gossip in the home. This is one of the most subtle ways that Satan uses us. To teach a child to lie and to gossip, and to say things about people behind their backs that are not true and that could hurt them. Listen, simply to call attention to your self.

**2. In the church.** Good people, Moses did not draw up architectural sketches of the tabernacle for God to

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approve. God handed down His plans! Today, we try to fashion our own program and seek Divine endorsement instead of seeking first the divine pattern; form... blueprint...mold...the unchanging organization of the church in the first century, in the twenty-first century.

We see dual steeples, stained-glass windows and ornate auditoriums filled with pious artifacts, and we make the connection between those things and Christianity. Listen, those things have nothing to do with holiness, nor obedience. To teach others to see this is a part of our service to Christ.

I want to discuss the church of Christ as we enter the twenty-first century, with no apology—with great love—and with a humble invitation for you to come and be added to His body as were we.

The prophets of God prophesied about the church hundreds of years before the church was established.

And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem (Isa. 2:2-3).

I'm laying a foundation for understanding this basic and fundamental nature of the Lord's church, as we enter the twenty-first century. We have no other choice regarding whom we serve than did those disciples of the long ago.

The church of the New Testament was built by Jesus Christ.

When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven (Matt. 16:13-19).

Brethren, it is so simple to understand. The church is composed of those whom the Lord adds to it. You are not voted into this precious body.

Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved (Acts 2:47).

This was almost twenty centuries ago.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ (Eph. 1:3).

We should notice that this verse does not say that “*all blessings*” are in Christ. There are many blessings outside of Christ. Sometimes we hear a Christian say,

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*“Here is a man who is not a Christian, in fact, he has no respect for Christ, His church, or righteousness in general, yet he prospers. He seems to do as well financially and physically as those who are Christians.”* This Christian misunderstands Ephesians 1:3.

Listen, church, Paul did not say that *“all blessings”* are in Christ. He said, *“all spiritual blessings”* are in Christ.

Can you conceive of man rejecting Christ in view of His mission? *“For the Son of man is not come to destroy men’s lives, but to save them”* (Luke 9:56). The purpose of Jesus coming to this earth was to save man from hell.

Just as Jesus died on the cross, the sinner obeys that form and dies to the love and practice of sin. Just as Jesus was buried, the sinner is buried with his Lord in baptism. Just as Christ was raised from the grave, the sinner is raised from the grave of baptism, with all past sins forgiven and to walk in newness of life. *“Listen, this is beginning to sound pretty good! Well, preacher, how much did this church cost?”* Maybe the Scripture will help.

*“Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it”* (Eph. 5:25). We value things by the price paid for them. Paul tells us that Christ gave His life for the church. How can anyone come to the conclusion that the church is non-essential in view of the fact that Jesus gave His life for it?

How about the creed of the church in the twenty-first century? The word *“creed”* means a brief authoritative formula of belief. What is our authoritative formula? The Bible is our creed book. If a group of people should write a creed book that contains more than the

Bible, it contains too much. If it does not contain as much as the Bible, it does not contain enough. If it contains just exactly what the Bible contains, there is no need for a creed book written by man.

**3. If I could choose any period of history in which to live, I would choose to live now.** Not because these are easy times. Our world is complex and confusing. This is an era of plenty and yet of poverty, of peace and yet of war, of strength without security, of advancement without progress. Charles Dickens opens his splendid novel, **A Tale Of Two Cities**, with a paragraph which, though intended for another day, graphically pictures our modern world:

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times; it was the age of reason, it was the age of foolishness; it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair; we had everything before us, we had nothing before us.

Think of the glorious opportunities before us that no previous generation has known. We are the heirs of the greatest democratic traditions, descendants of the noblest social heritage, benefactors of the highest standard of living, and recipients of the brightest academics enlightenment the world has ever known. We have been exposed to the minds of Shakespeare and Charlemagne; we have learned the lessons of the Magna Charta and the industrial revolution. We have benefited from the theory of relativity and the Salk vaccine. We have learned, if we have looked, that *“man cannot live by bread alone.”*

Ours is a world of inconceivable power. But it is power without sufficient control—thrust without accurate direction. We have already left the launching pad. Whether or not we reach any certain destination will

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depend upon whether we are willing to provide the direction, the guidance, and/or the control. Unto us is given the responsibility of establishing a spiritual foundation steady enough to sustain an atomic world.

We did not choose this time to be born—but God chose us for this time. We did not choose our talents—but God has given us sufficient talents. And now we must choose whether to double them, or bury them. The greatest tragedy of all will be to bury them beneath an avalanche of things.

For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more (Luke 12:48).

Unless we assume the urgency that will drive us to choose Christ and labor in His service, there is grave danger that we will barter our talents on the table of gain and succumb to the pressures to be ordinary.

Dear soul, “*Choose you this day...*”

I regret to say during this premiere lectureship of the brotherhood, and to have these words printed for future generations to see, that, as a nation, we have largely lost confidence in those precepts taught in Holy Writ. We “*Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed...*” (2 Tim. 2:15), and then worship in a manner diametrically opposed to what we just studied. We have become a nation—a world of cynics. The blackest sins, the most outrageous rebellion toward the Word of God, the most atrocious acts that ever stained the pages of New Testament church history lie at our very door. The alarming thing is that we have tolerated such conditions by the change agents for too long. Tolerance is the last virtue of a morally corrupt society.

We stand today upon the ground prepared by others. And as we voice His praises and His message from multiplied masses wings its way to the great throne of heaven itself, let us remember that,

And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord (Josh. 24:15).



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## Chapter 2

# The Bible, Our Authority Vs. The Creeds Of Man

*Wayne Smith*

Wayne is a graduate of the Memphis School of Preaching (1984) • He has received a B.A. from Southern Christian University • He has worked full-time since 1984, in Tennessee and Mississippi • He presently is working with the Adams Avenue church in Lebanon, TN (eight years) • Directs an annual lectureship at Adams Avenue church • Wayne and Dinisha have two children.



**G**od made mankind creatures of volition. Man is free to make choices. Along with every decisive choice comes the consequences of the choice made. Joshua, after teaching the people to fear God, sets forth a multiple choice and asks them to make a decision. Joshua, being the spiritual leader he was, leads the way by manifesting his choice by saying, “*as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord*” (Josh. 24:15). The people could actually choose to serve “*gods that were no gods*” or choose Jehovah, the God of heaven and earth. Unlike some brethren, in order to make his decision, Joshua did not wait to hear the choice of the people first. As one reads of Joshua, he reads about his faithfulness. In Exodus seventeen, as Moses gives Joshua authority over men of war, faithfulness is detected. In chapter twenty-four Joshua ascended with Moses upon the mount. In chapter thirty-two he, along with Moses, condemns the people for their idolatrous practices. Joshua was also one of the twelve sent out as a spy into the land of Canaan.

When the majority feared and replied, “*We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we,*” Joshua responded, “*Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it*” (Num. 13:30).

As the book of Joshua begins, Moses, the great deliverer of Israel, is gone. Joshua becomes his successor. Though at times Joshua stood alone, he stood firm on the word of God! Joshua crossed over the Jordan in the conquest of Canaan just according to God’s plan. He stood between the two great mounts of Gerazim and Ebal and the Scriptures say,

And afterward he read all the words of the law, the blessings and cursings, according to all that is written in the book of the law. There was not a word of all that Moses commanded, which Joshua read not before all the congregation of Israel, with the women, and the little ones, and the strangers that were conversant among them (Josh. 8:34-35).

Joshua was loyal in keeping the word of God, “*according to all that my servant Moses commanded thee.*” Joshua has been instructed to “*be strong and very courageous*” and he did as he was told.

Is this not the need of today? People today must make a choice. Jesus warned,

No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon (Matt. 6:24).

God’s people believe in the exclusive nature of the New Testament, all others has chosen “*gods that are no gods.*” Some have gone about to “*establish their own righteousness*” by the devising of their creeds. The

peerless Paul was concerned for the Jews when he wrote,

Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God (Rom. 10:1-3).

The right choice for man is to have the Bible, the Word of God, as the final authority in matters of religion. In order to distinguish between right and wrong, man must have an authoritative standard. Man is not born knowing the difference. Man must be taught. The Bible is the standard by which man is to be taught. Jesus said,

It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me (John 6:45).

The Church does not have final authority. Neither is man's reasoning power the ultimate authority, but the Bible!

In every aspect of life authority is resented or disregarded. It is not always pleasing to one's self to be obedient to authority. Most want to be independent, self-governing. People have little respect for authority. Whether it be civil authority, parental authority, or the authority of Almighty God. The trend of the day is rebellion, not respect! One can easily detect the spirit of disrespect in crimes across America. The youth of America stand in defiance of the authority of their parents. They detest being told what to do, what to wear,

where to go, and when to return. This spirit of disrespect has gone from homes to schools across the nation. The rebellion continues into the workplace and in all other areas of life. Ultimately this rebellion spills over into the realm of religion.

The freedom enjoyed has been brutally abused. Man has exercised his freedom to alter God’s pattern of authority. As children are to be punished for disobeying their parents; as students are to be punished for disrespecting their teachers; as criminals are to be punished for not abiding by the laws of the land; man must be punished for not respecting the authority of the Word of God! The Word of God as the tool, man has the means of measuring every religious doctrine to see whether it be of God or not. The Sanhedrin had instructed the apostles not to preach “*in the name of Jesus.*” Peter reminded them,

Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard (Acts 4:18-20).

As recorded in the next chapter the apostles were again reminded of the command when they replied, “*We ought to obey God rather than men*” (Acts 5:28-29). It is God who has the authority, not man!

Just before His ascension into heaven, Jesus said, “*All authority is given unto me in heaven and on earth*” (Matt. 28:18). This authority was given to Him from the Father. Therefore, Jesus had legislative, executive, and judicial powers. From Jesus, the apostles received delegated authority. Jesus promised,

And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and

whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven (Matt. 16:19).

Anyone with keys has some authority to give entry into some place. The word spoken by Peter and the apostles served as the “keys” to give entrance into the Church. The Word of God serves today as man’s only authority in matters of religion. The division which exists today among the religious world can be attributed to the disrespect and rebellion of men toward the Bible.

### **The Principle Of Authority**

**Principle defined.** There are many who are willing to receive the Bible as the only authority, as long as it agrees with their reasoning power. This individualistic view has contributed greatly to the religious chaos existing today. It is a known fact, before one can be taught the Word of God he must agree it is the sole authority in spiritual matters. When efforts are put forth in saving a soul, the two parties must agree on that which serves as the standard of authority. Without beginning with the proper authority, there can be no valid conclusions. In every aspect of teaching, the beginning of valid conclusions is decided on the basis of authority. Unless one’s faith is based on the authority of God’s Word, his faith is vain. Jesus said of some,

This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men (Matt. 15:8-9).

The religious leaders of Jesus’ day asked an important question, “*By what authority doest thou these things?*” This question needs to receive an answer from

the religious leaders of today. Men are to have authority for what they do in the work and worship of God. When one comes to understand that some of the things practiced in denominationalism are not authorized by the Scriptures, then one understands the cause for the creeds of men. The Word of God is given to all men to guide and govern his practices in spiritual affairs. All must come to know that God has given to man a divine pattern.

There must be doctrine. There is no possible way to carry out the worship and work of the church without authority. The problems of determining what is the authority for the people of God did not start in the 20th century. The question of authority began 6,000 years ago in the Garden of Eden. The apostles dealt with the issue as to whether or not certain requirements of the law of Moses should be bound upon Christians. The apostles taught the Judaizing teachers, with their monistic view, that Jesus has all authority and the Old Law has been “*nailed to the cross*” (Col. 2:14). No little dispute occurred in the Jerusalem church over the idea of circumcision being bound upon Gentile converts (Acts 15). The books of Galatians and Hebrews were written to address the erroneous views of Judaizing teachers and to warn the brethren of the dangers of returning to Judaism.

Upon each one lies the obligation to “*prove all things.*” The Bible is to be the proof! The Bible is the one and only authority. It is the final authoritative Word of God! It is to have the final word. However, for some, this is not sufficient! Paul wrote,

All scripture is given by inspiration of God,  
and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for  
correction, for instruction in righteousness:

That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

Jeremiah cried, “*O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps*” (Jer. 10:23). Peter informs,

According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue (2 Peter 1:3).

There is to be Biblical authority for all done in the Church. In Colossians 3:17 one reads,

And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.

To do “*in the name*” is to act by the authority of the one named! The policeman may cry, “*Stop, in the name of the law.*” He is ordering one to halt by the authority invested in him through the civil authorities. In all man is involved, authority is a must. Try to imagine a world without laws, rules, or regulations.

**Principle demonstrated.** God has never left man without instruction or guidelines. Some, even among the brethren, contend the people of God have no pattern to follow concerning the work and worship of the Church. God has left His people without a pattern! The Hebrew writer wrote,

God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds (Heb. 1:1-2).



Again, Peter wrote,

For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost (2 Peter 1:21).

God has always provided a means for man to come to a knowledge of His Will.

Long ago God commanded Noah to build an ark. God instructed him concerning the specifications of this vessel. God was very clear concerning the materials to be used in the construction of the ark. He was very precise in giving to Noah His expectations concerning the dimensions of the ark. God did not leave Noah without a pattern. And because He gave him a pattern to follow, Noah did not have the liberty to build it his own way! God authorized the building of the ark, the materials of the ark, and the dimensions. The Bible reads, *“Thus did Noah; according to all that God commanded him, so did he”* (Gen. 6:22). Again, for example, Moses was commanded to erect the tabernacle.

And let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them. According to all that I shew thee, after the pattern of the tabernacle, and the pattern of all the instruments thereof, even so shall ye make it....And look that thou make them after their pattern, which was shewed thee in the mount (Exod. 25:8-9, 40).

As man today, Moses had a choice to make. Either he could choose to follow the pattern given by God or devise his own plans. *“Thus did Moses: according to all that the LORD commanded him, so did he”* (Exod. 40:16).

In the New Testament times there was only one church with only one pattern. God’s pattern for His

Church in the 21st century is the Bible, our authority. The Bible is either true or false. If it be from God, it is true. If it is from any other source, then it is from Satan and it is a lie. Paul writing to the Romans wrote, “*yea, let God be true, but every man a liar*” (Rom. 3:4). All of the believers in the creeds of men, seeing they stand in contradiction of the Word of God, must contend that the Bible is not all true. These must believe the Bible is not at all sufficient, else, what is the need for their creeds? God has already “*given all which pertains to life and godliness.*” Man needs no other book to be his guide in spiritual matters. The Word of God is not “*incomplete,*” but is “*complete*” in “*furnishing man unto every good work*” (2 Tim. 3:17).

**Principle disrupted.** Soon after the 1st century, the unity of the Church gave way to division. Oneness became multiplicity, leading to the religious division of modern day. Men began disrupting the unity by setting their own standard of authority. For centuries, digression set in and took its toll on the Church. The Word of God no longer served as the final word. The inventions and innovations of man took center stage in the legislative power of spiritual concerns. As these innovations crept in, the Word of God was savagely altered. The light of truth had been dimmed by the philosophies of the pagans.

### **The Perversion Of Authority**

**Disregard.** There is a growing disregard for the authority of the scriptures. As this writer pointed out earlier, there has been great disrespect for authority in all areas of life. Though many have not come to grasp the idea of authority, all men are under authority (Luke 1:1-10). Respect for authority requires respect for its

principles. There must be respect for the One in authority and serve Him with honesty, integrity, and kindness. This world is drowning in its disobedience and disrespect of God’s Word. Christians are to respect and obey the commands of God. Obedience is a basic tenet of our belief (Eccl. 12:13).

Because of the widespread rebellion among men for the authority belonging to God, men have resorted to their creeds. The denominations of this world have devised creed books to which they may turn to give authority for what they do in matters of faith and practice. Because of a lack of authority for their beliefs in the Word of God, it was by necessity men made alternative arrangements. Unlike the noble Bereans of Acts 17:11, if they cannot find it, they will add it! King Saul, as recorded in 1 Samuel 15 failed to respect the authority of God, seeking rather to please himself. Because of Saul’s rejection of God’s commands, he stood rejected (v. 23).

There continues on the age-long mindset that adhering strictly to the doctrine of God is unimportant. Little regard is paid to the essentiality of the Bible, the authority of God over man. To the Romans it was written,

Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever (Rom. 1:25).

If all people disregarded all areas of authority as the authority of God is disregarded, there would be chaos worldwide.

**Departures.** Paul urged,

Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all

longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables (2 Tim. 4:2-4).

As was true in the days of the kings and the days of Paul, people are *“doing that which is right in their own eyes.”* Men have resorted to something other than the authority of the Word of God. The results is not unity, but division.

Today, the prevalent idea is *“doctrine does not matter.”* This had been a philosophy embraced by man for ages! Does doctrine matter? Is it important? The devil has been deceiving mankind to believe he does not have to listen to all God says for him to do. For instance, Satan told Eve, *“thou shalt not surely die.”* Satan only added one word, but that one word made all the difference. If Eve could only be asked, *“Does doctrine matter?” “Is it important to follow every word of God?”*

As one reads the writings of the peerless Apostle Paul he comes to feel the concern Paul had for the saints everywhere. He fully understood the *“power of Satan”* (Acts 26:18). He issued a warning to the Corinthians lest they *“be beguiled by Satan”* (2 Cor. 11:3). To the young man he wrote, *“For some are already turned aside after Satan”* (1 Tim. 5:15). Indeed, doctrine is important. It is the truth and the truth only, that shall *“set you free”* (John 8:32).

In spite of all these warnings, some continue *“to teach for doctrine the commandments of men”* (Matt. 15:8-9). The Roman Catholic Church believes they have all authority. After all, they claim the church existed before

the word. These have the false idea that had it not been for the church, no one would have the Bible.<sup>1</sup> The Word of God is not from the Catholics but from God! To find the tenets of the Catholic Church just turn to the pages of the Catholic’s creed book. The Catholics have their own Bible. In it there is authority given for such things as “*infallible pope*,” the doctrine of transubstantiation, the doctrine of purgatory, and infant baptism. None of these are found in the inspired Word of God!

The Presbyterians must turn to their “*Confession of faith*” for authority in believing the tenets of John Calvin! The Bible teaches no where that men inherit the Adamic sin, but the creeds of men teach it! The Bible no where teaches that men have nothing to do with their salvation, that God has predetermined who will be lost and who will be saved and man can do nothing about it! However, all one has to do is turn to the pages of **The Westminster Confession of Faith** and he will find it! Bro. Keith Mosher, who left Presbyterianism many years ago wrote:

Man is totally depraved and cannot respond to God, yet is called so to do (Matt. 11:28-30; Rev. 22:17; et al.) according to the creed above. So, God must call one elected before creation to be saved! When asked, “*Is not God unjust in requiring of man in God’s Law what man cannot do?*” the answer given is that God did create man with the ability to obey but man lost that ability in the fall of Adam and Eve. Did Adam and Eve then “*obey*” God and leave the garden? Presbyterianism (i.e., Calvinism) denies man’s self-will and denies clear Bible statements. Man can obey God (1 John 2:3; 5:3; etc.) and must obey God (Heb. 5:8-9).

Presbyterianism sprinkles water on infants

(only the “*elect ones*” of course) and labels the act as “*baptism.*” Baptism is seen by them as not necessary to salvation, but as an outward joining to the church and as a sign of a covenant with grace already accomplished by God. The Bible teaches that baptism is immersion or burial in water in order to receive salvation (Rom. 6:3-4; 1 Peter 3:20-21; Acts 2:38; etc.). Only those who can believe are to be immersed (Mark 16:16). Infants cannot believe. Therefore, are not candidates for baptism.

Presbyterianism teaches that there are only two “*sacraments*” ordained for the church of Christ and that only ordained ministers may dispense them—baptism (sprinkling) and the “*Supper of the Lord.*” All the elect who profess Christ and observe the two sacraments are in fellowship, regardless of other beliefs, for all churches are “*more or less pure.*” The Bible calls for fellowship on the basis of continuing in all the doctrine from Christ (John 8:31-32; 17:17; 2 John 9-11).

If some of the above sounds familiar to members of the churches of Christ, it should. Some of “*our*” preachers have insisted lately that one cannot contribute “*one whit*” to his salvation and that only some “*big F*” doctrines are necessary to fellowship. It is extremely sad to hear from “*our*” pulpits what Calvinism has long taught.<sup>2</sup>

So it is evident, manmade doctrines have crept into the pulpits and classrooms of the church of Christ. This should serve as a warning to the elders who serve in the Lord’s Church! The problem not only exists among denominationalism, but also among the Body of Christ! There are many among the brethren who have “*departed*”

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*from the faith.”* Some of “*our*” own brethren are teaching “*one church is as good as another.*” That is not a truth from the Word of God, but a lie coming forth from the pits of hell! Still others are teaching as long as one is “*sincere, devout, and knowledgeable,*” it matters not what “*church*” he attends. By what authority are these saying these things? Whatever happened to book, chapter, and verse preaching and teaching? What about the idea of “*speaking where the Bible speaks and be silent where the Bible is silent?*”

**Division.** Division was not the intention of our Lord. To see this one only needs to recall the fervent prayer of Jesus when He prayed,

Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me (John 17:20-23).

The church is made one through the Word! The Spirit guided the disciples “*into all truth*” (John 16:13). In His prayer Jesus said, “*Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth*” (John 17:17). It is truth which saves and brings about unity, not division. The apostle Paul by inspiration wrote,

Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions

among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment (1 Cor. 1:10).

These and other vital Scriptures emphasize the importance of unity. Unity is not brought about by an adherence to the various creeds of men, but of the Holy Bible!

God is not pleased with the division. God wants His people to be “*of one mind*” (Phil. 2:5). He desires His people to be united in the “*one body*” (Eph. 4:4). It was the Lord’s prayer and it is the prayer of Christians everywhere that the disciples of Christ “*might be one.*” Is it possible? How is it possible? The answer is there is to be “*no creed, but Christ, no book, but the Bible.*” The basis for unity is in the authority of the Word of God.

### **Plea For Authority**

**Dedicated.** The Church is dedicated to the principle, “*Let us speak where the Bible speaks and be silent where the Bible is silent.*” This principle originated not in the mind of men, but in the mind of God. Peter wrote long before the Restoration Movement, “*If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God*” (1 Peter 4:11). This scripture is applicable in the government, the work, and the worship of the New Testament Church. Bro. Garland Robinson penned these words:

Only when we lay aside the creeds, disciplines and tenets of denominationalism and go back to the New Testament can we be right with the Lord. We must accept God’s “*old paths*” as our rule of faith and practice. Let us go “*back to the Bible.*” The plea is...A RETURN TO NEW TESTAMENT ORGANIZATION.<sup>3</sup>



Man has no authority to add to or take away from the Word of God. As the preachers have said over the years,

If a creed book contains more than the Bible, it contains too much. If it contains less than the Bible, it contains too little. If it is the same as the Bible, then we do not need it, for we already have our Bible.

In the closing remarks of His Word our Lord reminds,

If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book (Rev. 22:18-19).

**Denounce.** To the written Word may all be faithful. May all denounce the doctrines of men which are divisive. Let us get back to Christ! The works of Luther, Calvin, Wesley, Stone, and Campbell must not be followed! Man must go back further than Rome or Constantinople, but all the way to Jerusalem! As Jesus walked among men, He denounced their erroneous ways. He lashed out against the errors of the scribes and Pharisees (Matt. 23). In his renouncing the creeds of men, Alexander Campbell wrote,

But to come to the things to be discarded, we observe that, in the ancient order of things, there were no creeds or compilations of doctrine in abstract terms, nor in other terms than the terms adopted by the Holy Spirit in the New Testament. Therefore all such are to be discarded....He that advocates the necessity of

creeds of human contrivance to the unity of the church unconsciously impeaches the wisdom of God, arraigns the benevolence of the Saviour, and censures the revelation of the Spirit.<sup>4</sup>

Mr. Campbell always stood firmly against the creeds and for the all-sufficiency of the Scriptures. He declared:

Let the Bible be substituted for all human creeds; Facts, for definitions; Things, for words; Faith, for speculation; Unity of faith, for unity of opinion; The Positive Commandments of God, for human legislation and tradition; Piety, for ceremony; Morality, for partisan zeal; The Practice of Religion, for the mere profession of it; and the work is done.<sup>5</sup>

The church calls for all to reject their creeds and to accept the authority of one Book, the Bible!

**Decide.** Joshua instructed the people to make a decision (Josh. 24:15). All people are to make a choice. Which will it be? Would it not be wonderful if they would simply “*receive with meekness the engrafted word which will save the souls of man.*” The church needs now to decide to emphasize the importance of “*seeking the old paths.*” The world needs doctrine, but not just any doctrine will do. The doctrine to be taught is the doctrine which has God for its author and supporter. The Lord has given His Word to His disciples to give the world. Disciples are to decide to deliver it just as the Lord gave it and the world is to decide to receive it in the spirit in which it was given.

Unity and happiness comes to those who respect authority. Salvation is in the church, not in denominations of men, supported only by their human creeds. To choose to follow creeds or traditions of men

is to choose to stand in rejection of God. Rejection of the authority of God results in one’s own rejection come judgment day (John 12:48). Let one and all lift high the inspired Word of God as the authority. Let Christ be the Creed and the Bible, the Book! Austin Taylor said it well in his song:

What e’er you do in word or deed,  
Do all in the name of the Lord.  
Do naught in name of man or creed,  
Do all in the name of the Lord.  
Be not deceived by worldly greed,  
Do all in the name of the Lord.  
The Spirit says “*in word or deed,*”  
Do all in the name of the Lord.<sup>5</sup>

### Endnotes

1 **The New Catholic Encyclopedia** (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1967), p. 387ff.

2 Keith A. Mosher, Sr., “The Doctrine of Christ Versus The Doctrines of Men,” **Bellview Lectures** (Pensacola, FL: Bellview Church of Christ, 1995), p. 243.

3 Garland M. Robinson, “Our Plea...,” **The Banner**, published by Iuka Church of Christ, March 22, 2000; Issue 12.

4 Alexander Campbell, “The Ancient Order of Things,” **The Christian Baptist**, II, pp. 133, 136.

5 Alexander Campbell, “**The Christian System,**” p. 117.

6 Austin Taylor, “Do All In The Name Of The Lord,” **Church Gospel Songs And Hymns**, No. 420.

## Chapter 3

# God's Design For The Home Versus Perversions Of Man

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**T**he title of this study calls for us to consider and identify two things. First, what is God's design for the home? Second, how has man changed and perverted God's design for the home?

### **God Is The Author**

The Biblical record, of the beginning of the history of man, tells us of the establishment of the first marriage and the first home. And from this Divine record, it should be noted and remembered that marriage and the home were by the ordination of God! They did not originate with man and were not designed by man.

Therefore, we understand that the sovereign Lord is the One to whom we look for the design of marriage and the family. God has definite laws and instructions about marriage and the home, and we must obey His laws and follow His instructions if we are to be acceptable

unto Him, and if we are to experience the joy that is found in a Christian family.

So, what is God’s will and plan for marriage? What is the Biblical teaching regarding the husband and wife relationship? What responsibilities has the Lord placed upon those whose marital union produces a child, and what has He required of the child? What is the Divine scheme for the family?

These are some of the questions which I will now seek to answer according to the Holy Bible.

### **God’s Design For The Home**

In that brief account of the creation of the woman for man, to which earlier reference was made, God’s design for the home began to be revealed. That inspired account, in part, tells us:

And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him...And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; And the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man...Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh (Gen. 2:18-24).

This Divinely-inspired historical record teaches us four things regarding our subject at hand:

(1) The first marriage was a heterosexual union. God created a man, and then as a suitable companion for man, He created a woman and brought her unto the man. Obviously, the sacred plan is for a man and woman to be joined together in holy matrimony (Gen. 2:22, 24).

(Later, I shall discuss the perversion of this in the current practice of a homosexual union.)

(2) This Scripture also teaches us that one of the Dively-planned purposes of marriage is companionship (Gen. 2:18). God saw that it was not good for man to be alone and He created a woman to be man's companion. While some people seem to desire and need more than others, companionship is an undeniable need of all of us. And marriage provides the framework for close and intimate companionship. How beautiful it is to watch a husband and wife draw closer and closer to each other as they live together year after year. How heartwarming it is to watch a couple that has been married for many years, as they bask in the sunlight of their lifelong companionship.

(3) Another part of the Divine plan for marriage is indicated in the words, "*Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife...*" From this we learn that it is God's will that a man depart from the family into which he was born and, leaving mother and father, he is to be joined to his wife and begin his own family.

Notice the words "*leave*" and "*cleave*." When married, a man's allegiance undergoes a major shift. The most important person on earth to him is his wife! (And, obviously, the most important person on earth to the married woman is her husband.) This does not mean that the married person has no allegiance to parents, or that parents no longer matter. It simply means that the man or woman who is married is loyal first and foremost to his or her companion in marriage.

(4) "*...and they shall be one flesh.*" These six short words are pregnant with meaning and implication. They refer to the sacred union of the husband and wife, and

that union is multi-faceted. When a man and woman are “*joined*” in holy matrimony, there is to be a union of their hearts, minds, and lives. But, under normal physical conditions, it is God’s will for there to be a sexual union of their bodies.

Sexual intimacy in marriage is honorable and right. It is wholesome. It was planned, authorized, and sanctioned by God. He created us as sexual beings, and one reason for our sexuality is procreation (Gen. 1:28).

However, sexual intimacy in marriage is also intended for the pleasure of a husband and wife. A careful study of 1 Corinthians 7:1-5 will show that sexual activity is for more than procreation because the Divine injunction to the husband and wife in that Scripture is “*defraud ye not one the other*” (i.e., deprive the other of sexual gratification) except by mutual consent and that only for “*a time.*”

Since love “*seeketh not her own*” (1 Cor. 13:5), a husband and wife who truly love each other will find great joy and personal satisfaction in meeting the needs and desires of each other. Each will be unselfish and considerate toward the other.

### **The Teaching Of Jesus About Marriage**

In Matthew 19:3-9, we have a record of an encounter that Jesus had with the Pharisees, as they came unto Him to tempt Him regarding divorce. The Lord not only answered their question about divorce, but He also taught some important truths about marriage.

(1) He taught that God created us “*male and female*” (v. 4). As previously noted (and I repeat it here for emphasis), this teaches us that the heterosexual union is that which God designed and approves.

(2) He taught that a man is to “*leave*” father and mother and “*cleave to his wife*” (v. 5). And the previous discussion of this suffices.

(3) He taught that the husband and wife are “*one flesh*” (v. 5-6). The reader will remember that this was first taught by the Lord God when He brought the first woman to the first man (Gen. 2:18-24).

(4) Jesus commanded, “*What therefore God hath joined together let not man put asunder*” (v. 6). In other words, when God “*joins*” a man and woman together in marriage, God intends for them to stay together. For how long? Until death separates them (Rom. 7:2-3; 1 Cor. 7:39).

(5) “*...from the beginning it was not so...*” When the Pharisees asked why Moses permitted a man to put away his wife, Jesus explained that Moses “*suffered*” (i.e., allowed) them to divorce their wives. Then, he told them that from the beginning (when God designed man and woman to be joined in marriage) divorce was not a part of God’s plan.

What an impressive and heart-warming scene it is when a woman and a man stand before a preacher and take the vows of marriage. But, oh, what a tragedy when a marriage is ended, and the man and woman who were joined by God divorce and go their separate ways. The impact of divorce is profound, if for no other reason, because the souls of those who divorce are at stake. The effect of a divorce is far-reaching, affecting any children involved, both sets of parents, grandparents, friends, co-workers, etc. And, assuming that the couple, now divorced, are Christians, the body of Christ is affected.

The Divine plan for marriage is one man joined to one woman, as husband and wife, for as long as they both shall live! And the vow that we take in our marriage



ceremony is a vow to remain together “*until death do us part.*” This writer wonders if we have neglected teaching that marriage should be understood as a relationship that lasts “*for as long as you both shall live.*” Oh, I know that we have preached a lot and taught a lot about God’s laws and regulations regarding divorce and remarriage, but we may not have given equal time to the importance of keeping a marriage together, and how to achieve that? Have we concentrated on the laws that relate to broken marriages to the neglect of the Divine instructions about marriage “*from the beginning*” (Matt. 19:8)?

(6) Finally, Jesus taught that whoever divorces his wife, except for the cause of fornication, and marries another, commits adultery, and whoever marries her which is divorced, commits adultery also (v. 9). Obviously, the same would be true if the wife were to divorce her husband without the cause of fornication.

These words should be recognized as a Divine law, not as a human law, and to ignore and reject this law is to invite the displeasure and wrath of the Almighty God. Fornication is the only reason for divorce that is acceptable unto God.

One more thought about a marriage that does not last, and this is a thought that I do not find easy to express. But it is the truth and needs to be explicitly stated. Anytime that a marriage ends and divorce takes place, for any reason, someone in that marriage has sinned by not keeping the marriage vow made before God! It may be that both parties have sinned in that way, but at least one has sinned. Even if the scriptural cause of fornication was the reason for the divorce, there is still sin by the one who committed the fornication.

## **Perversions Of Marriage And The Home**

Satan is alive and active in our society, and nowhere is the fruit of his evil work more evident than in the homes of this society. Consider the following items which are a perversion of marriage and the home as God would have it:

### ***(1) Homosexual Unions.***

To begin with, let it be remembered that the Bible clearly and emphatically teaches that homosexual activity is a sin. The Apostle Paul declared it to be a perverse thing when he wrote his epistle to the Roman church. He wrote,

...God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet (Rom. 1:26-27).

I was asked by a homosexual whom I counseled and with whom I studied, *"Who's to say what is natural and unnatural? Maybe it is unnatural to you, but, it is not to me."* I replied, *"God is the one who can, and has, said that it is unnatural."* I read Paul's indictment of homosexual behavior in Romans, and then I read his words in 1 Corinthians 6.

Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor

extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God  
(1 Cor. 6:9-10).

This, dear reader, is the warning of the Lord, as revealed by the Holy Spirit of God, through the Apostle Paul. And, lest there be someone who might not comprehend the words “*effeminate*” or “*abusers of themselves with mankind,*” let it be noted that the New King James Version makes it plain and unmistakable, identifying them as “*homosexuals*” and “*sodomites.*”

The union of two men or two women in a marriage-like relationship is a perversion of God’s Divine design for the male and female. Homosexual behavior is a sin regardless of what “*normalcy*” it has come to have by a large percentage of people in our tolerant and non-judgmental society. Men can attempt to “*validate*” and gain acceptance for same-sex unions by declaring that such unions should be given the same rights and privileges as a heterosexual marriage, but such unions will always be wrong! Lawmakers can even make it legal, it will still be wrong according to the laws of God, who is the ultimate lawmaker!

Before leaving this point, let it be noted on the positive side that homosexual behavior is something that can be forsaken and forgiven. Immediately following Paul’s sobering warning in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, he wrote,

And such **were** some of you: but ye are **washed**, but ye are **sanctified**, but ye are **justified** in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God (emphasis mine, ds).

## **(2) “*Living Together.*”**

Another perversion of God’s design for marriage and the family is the growing practice of just “*living together*” without taking the vows of marriage. Some are

even doing this with the attempted justification that it is financially beneficial.

Regardless of how one might try to explain or justify it, it is a sin to live together and engage in sexual intimacy outside of the bond of marriage. It is not just “*living together*.” It is fornication, and those who are guilty of fornication shall not inherit the kingdom of God (Gal. 5:19-21; 1 Cor. 6:9-10).

The child of God needs to be on guard against the influence of the media regarding this. Many television shows, many songs on the radio, and many movies glamorize such an arrangement and make it appear as something very normal and common. And such can have a negative influence upon the viewer, especially the younger minds who day after day see such portrayed as “*normal*” behavior. This is a “*lust of the flesh*” which can war against the soul (1 Peter 2:11), and should be avoided (1 Thess. 5:22).

### ***(3) Having babies out of wedlock.***

Down through the years, we have all known of unmarried couples who gave into their sexual passions and engaged in sexual intercourse. Sometimes that action resulted in the conception of a baby. And, all of the “*safe sex*” campaigns notwithstanding, such is still taking place. In fact, it is said that nearly 1 out of 4 babies born in America are born out of wedlock (and the insidious practice of abortion probably keeps this statistic from being even higher).

Also, today, the practice of having babies out of wedlock is even being done deliberately. Many young unwed mothers confess that they “*wanted a baby*,” and some older women decide to have a baby even though they are not married because their “*biological clock is winding down*.”

Well, such always has been wrong and it will forever be wrong! First, it is wrong because it includes the act of unlawful sexual intercourse. Second, it is wrong because it adds to a growing problem—children growing up without the presence and influence of a father. In recent years, we have been told that about 40% of children today live in a fatherless home, and that is not the way God designed the home!

Oh, that we would get back to God’s way of doing things, and get married and then have our babies, with the fathers present as the leader of the family (Eph. 6:4; Col. 3:21).

***(4) The feminist movement.***

There are women in our society who make no secret about it. They have no use for men and would eliminate men from their world completely (if they could just figure out how to procreate without men). These feminists, in their call for equality, have made a strong impact upon our world. Now, in the workplace, and in the community, I have no problem with women having equality with men. And there is no difference between the man and woman in Christ (Gal. 3:28); they are equal heirs to the salvation that is found in the blood of Jesus Christ because He died for the female as much as He did the male.

However, the influence of the feminist movement has been detrimental to the way God has designed roles in the home. God has decreed, through the pen of the apostle Paul,

For the husband is the head of the wife, even as christ is the head of the church (Eph. 5:23).

He also commanded,

Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord...Therefore as the

church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing (Eph. 5:22, 24).

Now let it be clearly understood by both the husband and wife that the wife being in subjection to her husband, and the husband being the head of the wife, does not mean that she is inferior to him or that he is more valuable than she is. Neither does it mean that he is more important than she is. Instead, it simply means that, in the home, they have different roles!

That framework for the marriage and the family is the right way because that is the way God designed it and decreed it. Therefore, we conclude that any husband who abdicates from this God-given role is disobedient to God, and any wife who is not in subjection to her husband is disobedient to God.

### ***(5) Having Affairs.***

According to various surveys and polls that have been taken in recent years, over half of the husbands in this country and nearly 40% of the wives admit having “*had an affair.*”

Well, call it what you will, and offer any excuse that you will. When two people engage in sexual intimacy outside of marriage, that is not just an “*affair.*” It is a defilement of the marriage bed (Heb. 13:4). It is a breaking of the marriage vows! Yes, I know it is common (even within the church), but it is still a shame. It is fornication. It is a sin. And there will never be any justification for a husband or wife being sexually unfaithful to his or her marriage companion!

## **Conclusion**

The very foundation and continued existence of a home as God planned and designed it is the sacred

relationship called “*marriage.*”

Marriage was Divinely instituted, and is subject to the rules and regulations that God has set forth in the Bible. God wants our marriages and families to be happy, and they will be happy if and when our marriages and families are governed by the laws of God!

And when every member of the family is governed by the will of God, the greatest result will be that every member of that family will be saved and go to heaven!

## Chapter 4

# God's Role For Man And Woman Versus Man's Perversion

*Mark Reynolds*

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### Introduction

**T**he book of Genesis tells of God's wonderful creation story showing how God spoke all things into existence, and that He was pleased with everything He had made (Gen. 1:31). After creating everything from light to animals, the record tells about the crowning moment in God's creation—when God made man. God saw, however, that it was not good for man to be alone, so He made a help meet for him (Gen. 2:18). The fact that man was the climax of God's creation is evident by the wording of the Genesis account:

And God said, Let us make man in our own image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth (Gen. 1:26).<sup>1</sup>



Other passages further show the importance of the creation of man in the plan of God:

And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul (Gen. 2:7).

From these passages and others that will be noted one begins to understand that man has two parts: (1) Physical, the part that came from the dust, and (2) Spiritual, the part that was made in the image of God.

The physical side of man is an unconditional gift from Him *“in him we live, and move, and have our being...”* (Acts 17:28). The physical part of man may only live a few days in the womb, or may live as long as Methuselah, but the physical life ends for everyone, when man’s eyes close in death (Heb. 9:27). There is another side of man, the spiritual, which continues to live after the physical has ended.

Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the **spirit shall return unto God** who gave it (Eccl. 12:7).

These two parts of man are intricately connected by the fact that the way the spirit lives with the physical on this earth determines where the spirit lives for eternity.

When God created man and woman He gave them certain roles to fill while on this earth in the realm of the physical part of man and in the spiritual. As already stated, the way men and women fill these roles has a bearing on where they will spend eternity. This being the case, it behooves every man and woman to identify the role God has given to each one, and so live to fill that role. It is also necessary, although not enjoyable, to identify the way man has perverted these God-given roles

so as to be able to distinguish between God's role for man/woman versus man's perversion.

## **God's Role For Man Man's Role in the Spiritual Realm**

As one studies the Old Testament, he is impressed with the fact that God, from the beginning, placed the responsibility of seeing to it that the family was provided with spiritual blessings directly upon the man. Under the patriarchal age God spoke to the family through the father or family leader. That God expected man to lead his family under the Patriarchal Age is seen in the order of events in Genesis 2. God made Adam then put him in the Garden of Eden. God then told Adam that he could eat of all the trees of the garden except the tree of knowledge of good and evil. After giving this information to Adam, God made the woman out of the side of man. Then Eve was tempted by Satan to eat of the forbidden tree. She eats and gives some to her husband to eat. Eve was punished along with her husband for eating the fruit that God commanded them not to eat. But one might say, "*how was Eve supposed to know not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil? God told Adam, He never said anything to Eve.*" The fact is, God told Adam and expected him to tell his wife, because he was to be the spiritual leader of his family.

During the law of Moses, it was established that when the man in the family did not care for his family in spiritual matters, he was a delinquent father. Joshua was acting as the spiritual leader in his family when he made the statement to the tribes gathered together at Schechem:

And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord,  
choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether

the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord (Josh. 24:15).

Under the Christian Dispensation, the father is still expected to provide for the spiritual development of his family (Eph. 6:4). No man can consider himself a success, nor is he a success in God’s eyes if he fails to provide for his family spiritually! Well, how does a man lead his family spiritually? Simply put, by word and by deed. If a man does not want his family to drink, he must not drink. If a man does not want his family to use foul language, he must not swear. If a man does not want his family to be half-hearted Christians, he better not be a half-hearted Christian. A father took his little son out to eat. The waiter came for their orders. He asked the little boy what he would like to drink. The child replied, “*I’ll drink what daddy drinks!*”<sup>2</sup> Daddy changed his mind in a hurry. Nothing is quite as powerful as example. A man should never utter the expression, “*Do as I say, and not as I do.*” Men, we have our children as children one time! Let each man do the best he can, spiritually speaking, while he has children as children. In order to develop the spiritual part of the family, a father must first develop his own.

### **Man’s Role in the Physical Realm**

Man is to provide the physical needs for himself and his family.

But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel (1 Tim. 5:8).

A failure to believe in God is bad enough, but it is even worse for one to fail to take care of his family physically. To care for one's family physically goes far beyond going to work, collecting a paycheck and giving it to one's wife. Both women and children need something more than a roof over their heads, food on the table, nice clothes and a fancy car. Love must be the foundation that keeps the home standing. Why must a man work to provide for his family? Because he loves them! Why must a man discipline his children when needed? Because he loves them! Why must a man make a difficult decision that is going to affect his family? Because he loves them! Why must a man make sure that his family is properly sheltered and clothed? Because he loves them! A man does not do all of the above just to show his masculinity, if he is a true man. He does this because of his love for his family! Men, your wife needs to feel your gentle touch! Men, your children need to feel their daddy's loving arms around them often. This does not make you less of a man, but in all actuality, it makes you more of a man! Never forget the physical needs of your family.

### **Man's Perversion**

Unfortunately, most men today have forsaken their God-given role as the spiritual and physical leader. To be a truly great Christian leader in the home, one must be the right kind of man. It is not possible for a man to remove the **notes** that exist in the eyes of his family until he removes the **beam** from his own eye (Matt. 7:4-5). Unless a man studies the Word of God with diligence, he cannot be the spiritual leader God would have him to be. Men, for the most part today, have left the Book! This is the first and greatest perversion today. When the Bible goes unread, the home goes unled!

Further, many men have developed the mentality that *“I am the dictator of this home, and I will rule by intimidation.”* Many times this leads to physical and mental abuse. Each year, an estimated 3 million to 4 million women in the United States are abused by their husbands/boyfriends.<sup>3</sup> One-quarter of all murders in the United States occur within the family. It is now estimated that 45% of all marriages contain physical abuse.<sup>4</sup> There is a vast difference between disciplining out of love, and disciplining to show one’s power. The individual, who needs to show his manhood by striking one weaker than him, is not following his God-given role.

On the other hand, many men have gone to the opposite extreme, and have let their wives rule the home. When men allow their wives and children to walk all over them, they have stepped out of their God-given roles. Many are the men who use their wives as an excuse for missing the services of the church. It usually goes something like this: *“I wanted to come, but my wife did not feel like it tonight.”* Or, *“My wife did not want to keep the children out too late, they have school in the morning.”* The individual in this illustration needs to remember that HE is the spiritual leader of that family, and that HE is responsible for their spiritual growth. He has the right as the leader to say, *“Honey we are going to services tonight, and the children will get in bed just as soon as we get home.”* Not only is this his right, but it is his duty! This is not done as the dictator described above, but is done out of his true love for his family:

Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it (Eph. 5:24-25).

Still further, many today expect men to be sexually immoral. Men are even excused by their wives for marital infidelity: *“After all, men will be men.”* A man that understands his God-given role will not fall prey to this perversion. Like the ancient Job they have made a covenant with their eyes lest they look lustfully upon another woman (Job 31:1).<sup>5</sup> A godly man will flee anything and everything that has fornication or adultery linked with it (1 Cor. 6:13-20).<sup>6</sup>

Even further, man has perverted the thinking about what makes a man. Many believe that men today cannot show any type of emotion if they wish to be manly. Tears, to many men, are a sign of weakness. This is not God’s thinking, but is man’s perversion. How can a man rear a family, one of the greatest responsibilities ever, without shedding tears? Jesus Christ, the greatest man Who ever lived often shed tears! This does not mean that one needs to cry over every little thing that happens in life, but it does mean that when it is needed, a man can cry and still be a man. Foy L. Smith when writing about rearing children, and the tragic loss of his son put it this way: *“There have been times when I felt like I would have died if I could not have cried.”*<sup>7</sup>

## **God’s Role For Woman**

### **Woman’s Role in the Spiritual Realm**

Although it is the case that the woman is commanded by God not to usurp authority over the man (1 Tim. 2:12), it is not the case that men cannot learn wonderful things from the woman. The woman has a vital role in the spiritual growth of all those with whom she is involved. Abraham Lincoln once said, *“All that I am, or can be, I owe to my angel mother.”* John Gray said, *“The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world.”* How

is it possible for a woman to be submissive, yet make such a strong impact on the world? If a woman understands and follows her God-given role, not only will she ensure her own salvation, but will lead many others to Christ.

One of the greatest influences a woman can have on those she loves, and on the entire world is in the home. A home is not a Christian home unless the father and mother follow the roles God has given them. Hannah realized the influence of a mother as she prayed for a son, and promised that if given a son she would dedicate him to the work of the Lord (1 Sam. 1:11). Hannah kept her promise and granted Samuel unto the Lord (1 Sam. 1:28). Samuel went on to do wonderful things for the Lord. Where did it start? With the mother in the home. It has been said, “*Behind every good man, there is a great woman.*” It would be better said, “*Behind every good man, there are at least two great women, his wife and his mother.*” Good mothers are a must if there is to be a good home! Godly women should realize that their work as a homemaker and home keeper is the greatest work in the world.

Women can also have a profound influence outside of the home. There is probably no way to tell how many men are preaching today, because of the foundation that was laid by their female Sunday school teachers. Great will be the reward of those godly women who teach Bible classes, and who teach in personal work. In addition to Sunday school classes, women have the responsibility to teach the younger women (Titus 2:3-5). In our public schools there are good women who do not shirk to teach their students the morals, virtues and manners that are exemplified in God’s Word. Further, women have a special opportunity to mold and guide the direction of school

affairs if they take an active part in Parent-Teacher associations and other organizations of the schools. Ladies, do you want the school that your children attend to have strong principles on which to run the school? Then become involved to make it that way.

A woman was calling on a friend whose children entered into the room. The caller said, evidently with no thought of the meaning of her words, *"Oh, I'd give my life to have two children like yours,"* to which the mother replied with soberness, *"That is exactly what it costs."* Women, you may not be able to win the world to Christ, but you can do the best that you possibly can with the little children God has given you. After all, you and their daddy are the only world they know for the first few years.

### **A Woman's Role in the Physical Realm**

The woman is uniquely equipped to serve in the physical realm of life for herself, and for her family. This writer has observed an amazing phenomenon when it comes to his children. When children want to play and *"roughhouse,"* they go to their daddy. When children are injured or tired, they run for mommy. Mothers have a unique ability to console their children. It is amazing what one kiss from a mother's lips on a cut can do for a child. It is astounding what the words, *"It's okay, mommy's here"* can do for a frightened little boy or girl. This world is reaping the consequences of mothers who are too busy to do these things.

Further, God has made women with the ability not only to bear children, but also to nourish them from their own bodies after the child's birth. There is a bond formed here that is beautiful, and priceless. Then, as the child grows, the mother has the privilege of making sure he has the right food to keep his body strong and growing.



Why did God make the woman able to do these things? It is because she has the patience, and the special touch to do these things better than anyone else. The woman is the queen of the home, and the man needs to realize this. The man may provide the money necessary to buy the house, and may even build the house himself, but it is the woman who makes the house a home.

### **Man’s Perversion**

First, it needs to be said that it is not a sin for a woman to work outside of the home if there is a genuine **need**. However, man today has made it seem it is a sin for a woman not to work outside of the home. Perhaps the following statistics will show this. In 1978, for the first time, the majority of mothers were in the labor market rather than at home.<sup>8</sup> What a heartbreaking decade! In 1972, the murder of babies was legalized, and then in 1978 more mothers worked outside of the home rather than being keepers of the home. The percentage of single mothers has risen almost 10% since 1975, making single mother families more than one-quarter of all families with children in 1996.<sup>9</sup> Sixty-seven percent of the mothers who work have full-time jobs of 35 hours or more per week.<sup>10</sup> Estimates from studies in the 1960’s and 1970’s revealed that women, in the work force, worked roughly fifteen hours longer each week than men. **This adds up to an extra month of 24 hour days per year, or an extra year of 24 hour days over a 12 year period!**<sup>11</sup> Ladies, it is not a sin for you to stay at home, rear your children, and keep the home. In fact, it is the will of God:

To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed (Titus 2:5).

Another perversion of man is the idea that daycare facilities can rear a child in place of the mother. Again, not everything about daycare is wrong. But, the idea that it can take the place of parenting in the home is wrong. A daycare worker will feed your child, will put a bandage on a cut, and will even wipe a runny nose. The daycare may take care of most of the physical needs of a child, but it can never provide what a mother can spiritually and physically for her child. It will not be long, young mothers, when all you and your husband will have left are empty rooms, dusty toys and precious memories. Ask yourself one of the most important questions that you could ever ask—*“Must I work outside of the home while our children are small?”*

Yet another perversion of man is the idea that women are above men, and that women must hate men in order to be treated equally. This perversion is commonly called **feminism**. Listen to some of the better-known feminists in their own words describing how they feel about men.

I knew in the moment when the pain was the greatest...that there is no God known to man that cares about children or about women. And that the God of woman is autonomy (Alice Walker).

Sophie Tucker said this:

From birth to 18 a girl needs good parents.  
From 18 to 35, she needs good looks. From 35 to 55, good personality. From 55 on, she needs good cash. I'm saving my money.

Another well-known feminist/songwriter seems to even carry resentment for the greatest man Who ever lived.

Muhammad my friend it's time to tell the world  
we both know it was a girl back in Bethlehem

and on that fateful day when she was crucified she wore Shiseido Red and we drank tea by her side (Tori Amos, ‘Muhammad My Friend’).

On the other hand, however, is the perversion that places women inferior to men. There is an Arab proverb that says, “*A man loves first his son, then his camel, and then his wife.*” An Islamic proverb says, “*A Woman’s Heaven is Under the Feet of Her Husband.*” This type of attitude is every bit as sinful as feminism! The men who wrote these proverbs may not have been married, but one thing is for certain—they had a mother! How dare a man treat a woman like that!

The Word of God will take care of these perversions. God does not place women above or beneath men. When God saw that it was not good for man to be alone, he made a woman from a rib out of the side of man. God did not use a bone from the bottom of Adam’s foot to make woman, nor did He use something from Adam’s head. God used a rib from the side of Adam. This is where the woman and man belong—side by side! Yes, the man is the leader both physically and spiritually, but that does not make the woman any less important. The woman is to be the keeper of the home, but that does not make the man any less important. God’s Word will take care of any perversion of man.

### **Conclusion**

When men and women fill their God-given roles, their lives will be complete; the home will be a better place in which to live; the church will be a better place in which to bring God glory; the community will be improved; and the world will see the benefits. What an important topic to contemplate! It affects everyone. How well are you, dear reader, filling your God-given role as

a man/woman? How are the perversions of the world affecting you?

As a preacher, I have been by the side of many people as they have left this life for eternity. I have heard many regrets uttered in final breaths. Yet, I have never heard one make a statement such as this: *“If only I could have worked a few more hours of overtime each week, I could have had a fancier car.”* Nor has one said, *“Why did I waste so much time with my wife and children!”* I have heard, however, regrets in this manner: *“Why did I not spend more time being the father to my children that I should have been?”* Some haunting words to a dying man or woman are, *“Daddy, will you play with me?”* *“NO, I do not have the time!”* *“Mommy, will you read me a bedtime story?”* *“NO, I am too tired.”*

Friend, you have one chance to fill the physical and spiritual role that God has given you to fill. After this opportunity is gone, it can never be attained again. Noah tried his best to warn others of the coming doom, but only his family listened. If only each family were this successful!

## Endnotes

1 **The Holy Bible, King James Version**, (Iowa Falls, IA.: World Bible Publishers, 1973). All references are to this version unless otherwise stated.

2 Foy L. Smith in **The Spiritual Sword** ed. Thomas B. Warren, Ph.D., (Memphis, TN.: Getwell Road Church of Christ, 1984), 11.

3 2000 Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research, via the Internet.

4 Ibid.

5 Robert R. Taylor, Jr. in **The Spiritual Sword** ed. Thomas B. Warren, Ph.D., (Memphis, TN.: Getwell Road Church of Christ, 1984), 6.

6 Ibid.

7 Foy L. Smith, in **The Spiritual Sword**, 6.

8 “Working Women, Salaries, and Pay Equity,” Via the internet. [amazoncastle.com/feminism.htm](http://amazoncastle.com/feminism.htm).

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

## Chapter 5

# God's Law On Marriage Versus Man's Digressive Actions

*Stan Stevenson*

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**T**he subject of marriage is one of the most important that one can consider. Volumes of material have been produced on the subject in books, lectures, periodicals and sermons. Yet, the problems of today's society failing to adhere to God's will for marriage persists.

Whether or not one marries, and who one chooses for a mate if they marry are decisions that will affect the degree of happiness in this life of all involved, and their home in eternity. One sobering thought is that in our culture the decision of marriage is often made at such a young age. Though the degree of maturity differs according to the individual, still the decision to marry is made at a time in one's life when there is so much yet to be learned. Who among us can say they really knew what marriage was about when we were in our teenage years, or even for a time after. May we have had

wonderful role models in our own parents, yet each marriage is faced with its own peculiar problems.

The subject of marriage and divorce and the issues connected with it is one that involves our emotions. One would be hard pressed to find a single family that has not been touched by divorce. If not our parents, or our children, then certainly there are other relatives that have been through the divorce courts of the land. Hence, it can be difficult to be objective in our decisions. Fortunately, God has given us a great deal of help through His word.

### **The Divine Decree**

In the case of marriage, as with any other subject, we must be guided by God’s word. It should not surprise us that we have to face questions about marriage. Jesus was confronted about the issue of divorce (Matt. 19:3-12; Mark 10:2-12) and Paul was asked some questions concerning marriage by the brethren at Corinth (1 Cor. 7). When Jesus was asked about the legitimacy of putting away one’s wife, He answered,

For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh (Matt. 19:5)?

In the days of Jesus, there were differing schools of thought concerning putting away one’s wife. Two prominent teachers, Shammai and Hillel, and their disciples were at the height of the controversy. Both schools of thought appealed to the same verse, Deuteronomy 24:1, to support their view. Moses said,

When a man hath taken a wife, and married her, and it come to pass that she find no favour in his eyes, because he hath found some uncleanness in her: then let him write her a

bill of divorcement, and give it in her hand,  
and send her out of his house.

Shammai focused on the word “*uncleanness*” and taught that divorce could only be obtained for some indecent, immoral act, such as adultery. Hillel focused on the word “*thing*” and justified a divorce for any cause. If she became unattractive to him, if she did not cook as he liked, the husband was free, according to Hillel, to put her away. Just as in our own day, so in the days of Jesus, people struggled with the issue of marriage and divorce. But, notice that Jesus went back beyond any ideas of men and started with the original decree from God concerning marriage. God made them male and female, for each other. We well remember the appraisal God made as He surveyed the creation, “*It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him*” (Gen. 2:18). Further, the text reveals that when God made the woman, she was intended to be for the man. They were made for each other. Just as God made water to quench man’s thirst; just as He made the light for the eye; so He made man and woman for each other. God intended that the union between one man and one woman be for life. This is seen in the words “*leave father and mother and cleave unto his wife.*” Two key words are “*leave*” and “*cleave.*” To “*leave*” is “*to leave behind*” as Moses left Egypt (Heb. 11:27);

To forsake, leave to one’s self a person or thing,  
by ceasing to care for it, to abandon, leave in  
the lurch.<sup>1</sup>

It is not that one ceases to care at all for one’s parents, but that a new relationship has begun that supersedes the one with our parents. The word “*cleave*” means “*to glue together, to join together, to bind.*”<sup>2</sup> God intended



that a man and a woman leave their parents behind and begin a new relationship together that is to last a lifetime. In Matthew 19:6, Jesus added the words,

Wherefore they are no more twain, but one  
flesh. What therefore God hath joined together,  
let not man put asunder.

God is the one who does the joining together. God provided the marriage relationship and God has protected that relationship by the strongest of ties which only death is to break.

The Pharisees saw the force of Jesus’ statement and asked, “*Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away*” (Matt. 19:7). If it is God’s intent that marriage last until death separates, how did divorce enter the picture? They said, “...*Moses commanded...*,” but Jesus pointed out,

Moses because of the hardness of your hearts  
suffered you to put away your wives: but  
from the beginning it was not so (Matt.  
19:8).

Divorce was not in the original plan of God for marriage. It was added because of the hardness of the hearts of Israel. Much like the Bible’s instructions on how to treat slaves, the instructions on divorce regulated what was already being done. Jesus upheld God’s original intent for marriage. He refused to be drawn into the discussion concerning which school of thought in His day was the correct one. Then, He added,

...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 (Matt.  
19:9).

Whatever the schools of thought may have been, Jesus sets forth the only exception, other than the death of a mate, for the termination of the marriage bond. The “*exceptive clause*” has the force of saying that all people who put away their mates and remarry are guilty of adultery. The only exceptions are those who put away their mates because the mate was guilty of fornication. This ought to impress upon us the seriousness of the marriage relationship. It is a lifelong commitment that is to be honored in every way. It also stresses the seriousness of the sins of fornication. Of all the things that husbands and wives might do to each other, the only thing that will allow one to divorce and to contract another marriage without being guilty of adultery is fornication on the part of one’s mate.

### **The Destructive Departures**

That people have departed from God’s original decree for marriage is no surprise. We do not read very far in the scriptures until we find one who departed from God’s will.

And Lamech took unto him two wives: the name of the one was Adah, and the name of the other Zillah (Gen. 4:19).

The Old Testament closes with God appealing to the people to honor their marriage covenant.

Yet ye say, Wherefore? Because the LORD hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt treacherously: yet is she thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant...Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth (Mal. 2:14-15).

We have already seen that Jesus had to deal with the problem during His life on earth. Paul addressed questions raised by the brethren at Corinth concerning marriage and divorce (1 Cor. 7).

In our own day we have had to face the perplexing problems of marriage and divorce. James O. Baird’s book, **And I Say Unto You...**<sup>3</sup> lists eight positions taken on the subject of marriage and divorce. No names are given of those who advocate such views, but the different views are put forth and answered. They run the gamut of extremes. On one end of the extremes are those who say no divorce and remarriage for any cause, for death is the only thing that can end the marriage. On the other end are those who say one can divorce for any cause and remarry without sin.

There have been those who have advocated that when a divorce occurs, for a cause other than fornication, and a remarriage follows, those so married may remain married without further sin.<sup>4</sup>

Still others have maintained that the fornicator who has been put away, may remarry without being guilty of adultery.<sup>5</sup>

Yet another view, based on 1 Corinthians 7:15, is that the deserted saint may remarry without being guilty of adultery.<sup>6</sup>

Also, from 1 Corinthians 7, is the view that one should remain in whatever marriage arrangement they are in at the time of becoming a Christian.<sup>7</sup> In part, this view is based on the mistaken belief that at the time one becomes a Christian all past sins are forgiven, and one can then continue in their current marriage. However, this ignores the prerequisite of repentance in becoming a Christian. If the marriage is unscriptural before becoming a Christian, I cannot repent, be baptized,

then continue to live in an unscriptural marriage.

Another view that would remove the force of Jesus' words is to say that those who are not Christians are not under the covenant, thus not amenable to the laws of Christ, including marriage, divorce and remarriage.<sup>8</sup>

All of these positions have been around for some time. They have been set forth and defended by very capable men. But, they have been answered by equally capable men in defense of the truth.

In more recent times, two additional departures have gained acceptance and popularity. One is the doctrine that "*adultery*" is not a sexual sin but one of merely breaking one's covenant.<sup>9</sup> Though this idea has been around for some time, it has gained popularity in relatively recent times. The view says that one commits adultery by breaking one's marriage vows. In order to be right with God, one need merely repent, determine not to break such vows again, and then one can remarry without penalty. But, the assumption that "*adultery*" is only covenant breaking is without support from the scriptures. In Leviticus 20:10, we find,

And the man that committeth adultery with another man's wife, even he that committeth adultery with his neighbour's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death.

In this case, adultery was something one did with another man's wife. When God foretold of the Babylonian captivity for Judah, Jeremiah said,

Because they have committed villany in Israel, and have committed adultery with their neighbours' wives, and have spoken lying words in my name, which I have not

commanded them; even I know, and am a witness, saith the Lord (Jer. 29:23).

Again, we note that the adultery spoken of was something done “*with their neighbors’ wives.*” Ezekiel wrote,

Thou hast built thy high place at every head of the way, and hast made thy beauty to be abhorred, and hast opened thy feet to every one that passed by, and multiplied thy whoredoms....But as a wife that committeth adultery, which taketh strangers instead of her husband (Ezek. 16:25, 32).

Though speaking figuratively of Israel, the sexual overtones are clear. A wife commits adultery by lying with someone other than her husband. In John 8, a woman was brought to Jesus by the scribes and Pharisees (v. 3). They reported to Jesus that she “...*was taken in adultery, in the very act*” (v. 4). The clear indication is that she was caught in the sexual relationship and not merely repudiating her marriage vows. The idea that says adultery is only covenant breaking argues from the figurative use of adultery and ignores the literal use.

Another departure, not yet seen in the church, is the honoring of homosexual marriages. It is difficult to see how one who respects the Bible can uphold such. But, it would not be surprising to hear some brother or sister, or to hear of a congregation in the future that would defend such, using the same arguments set forth by the worldly minded. Certainly, if one does not respect God’s original law concerning the marriage between a man and a woman, it would not be too difficult a jump to ignore what God says concerning homosexual relationships. No doubt it will all be done in the name

of love for those involved. Homosexuality may be condemned on the basis of its being “unnatural.” But, from God’s perspective, it is just as “unnatural” for one to have another sexually that is not their mate.

### **A Devout Decision**

We began by considering God’s original law concerning marriage. Much more could be written concerning God’s will and man’s digressive departures on this subject. However, each one must choose which direction will be taken. Because our emotions are so often involved, it can be a challenge to remain objective and to remain obedient to God’s will. Some have compromised because of loved one’s that have become involved in unscriptural marriage arrangements. Joshua issued the plea for the children of Israel,

Now therefore fear the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in truth: and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the Lord. And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord (Josh. 24:14-15).

When Jesus had finished answering the Pharisees concerning the giving of a divorce, even His disciples recognized the seriousness of what Jesus had said, “*His disciples say unto him, If the case of the man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry*” (Matt. 19:10). Marriage is a privilege and a blessing. It is not a right nor is it an obligation. God has granted us the blessing of having

mates with whom our hearts and lives can be blended, with whom we might bear and rear children. The joys of a Christian home cannot be measured. But, God has given us the blessing and He has given us regulations for marriage, and for divorce. Our primary aim should not be to get married, but to live a life pleasing to God. Jesus answered His disciples by saying,

All men cannot receive this saying, save they to whom it is given. For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother's womb: and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it (Matt. 19:11-12).

If one is able to scripturally marry another, God’s blessing rests upon such, as should ours. But, if one is not able to scripturally marry, a profitable life of service may yet be rendered in the Lord’s cause. Paul, in advising some to remain unmarried at a time of distress in the church (1 Cor. 7:26), says,

But I would have you without carefulness. He that is unmarried careth for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord: But he that is married careth for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife (1 Cor. 7:32-33).

There have been great servants that have rendered much for the cause of Christ who were without mates. Likewise, there have been great servants who have had families. The greatness of the service was not determined by the family, or the lack of one, but by the heart that had set its affections on serving and pleasing God.

Only when we accept God's will and do it, will we be able to help others to do the same. We do not help those in unscriptural marriages by lowering the standard. We only compound their problems by giving them a false hope. The standard must be held high, with love and compassion, calling all to live up to its noble aims. This is what Jesus did during His life, and it is what we must do if we would truly be His disciples.

May God bless us as we strive to learn, to do, and to teach His will on this all important subject. May we, our children and our grandchildren learn the lessons that will enable us to avoid so much of the misery and suffering that comes when we ignore, neglect, or reject God's will for our lives. And, may we then be able to realize the joys of the abundant life Jesus came to give (John 10:10).

### Endnotes

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## Chapter 6

# Spiritual Versus Fleshly (Carnal)

*Jimmy Clark*



Jimmy has been preaching for over twenty years ~ He presently preaches for the Bethel Church in Athens, Alabama, for fifteen years ~ He received his formal education at Freed Hardeman and Southern Christian University ~ Jimmy has worked in various evangelistic campaigns (Thailand, Australia, Mississippi, and others) ~ Jimmy's parents were the late Winfred and Polly Clark ~ Jimmy and Pam have three children.

**E**ver since the day that the serpent challenged the truth of God's word concerning the trees of the garden of Eden (cf. Gen. 3:1), mankind has had to deal with the fact that there is a choice between following that which is spiritual verses that which is fleshly or carnal. Since sin entered into the world, there has been a constant war between those two philosophies. Paul wrote to the Galatian brethren,

This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would (Gal. 5:16-17).

Paul knew from personal experience the difficulty of living in a fleshly body and yet striving to live by spiritual principles. He wrote to the Corinthians,

But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have

preached to others, I myself should be a castaway (1 Cor. 9:27).

Again, Paul wrote to the Roman brethren,

For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members (Rom. 7:22-23).

The spirit of man may indeed be willing, yet it will always be true that *“the flesh is weak”* (Matt. 26:41).

Man must come to understand himself and the world about him in order to make the proper choice between that which is spiritual verses that which is carnal. The sad truth about the world is that most will not make the proper choice regardless of the facts which are available through the Word of God (cf. Matt. 7:13-14). All who would be spiritual in their thinking and life must do so with no encouragement from the world. Furthermore, the world will despise and hate those who do walk after righteousness sake (cf. Matt. 5:10-12). There are many examples in both the Old and New Testaments concerning some who chose the way of the flesh and those who chose the way of spiritual things. This material will cover a broad overview of principles in the Scriptures and persons from the Scriptures to help an honest student of the Scriptures see the proper choice in the matter.

### **The Nature Of Man**

James wrote of God, man, and sin,

Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But

every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death (James 1:13-15).

Mankind has always struggled with the subjects of the nature and character of God, the nature of man, and the nature of sin. A perverted belief in any one of those areas creates untold problems for spiritual living and eternal bliss. The Holy Spirit through James made it perfectly clear that man's sins are due to man's irresponsibility in facing temptation and that such temptations are not from the "*Father of lights*" (James 1:17). It is important for any serious student of the Bible and of spiritual matters to look at the creation of man in the beginning. Such gives great insights concerning the nature of man from the beginning.

The Holy Spirit through Moses revealed,

And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them (Gen. 1:26-27).

No other creature on earth is given such distinction. Such should elevate the thinking of man concerning humanity to be more than just flesh and bone. The Holy Spirit through Moses revealed further in the book,

And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the

breath of life; and man became a living soul  
(Gen. 2:7).

This passage reveals to the honest student of the text that man has a quality about him that is tied to the dust of the earth. However, the chapter before it shows that man has a quality about him that is tied to the Godhead of heaven. Since man is earthly in body and heavenly in spirit, then he should live according to his Maker.

It is clear that man is more than just flesh. Solomon wrote of the two natures of man,

Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it (Eccl. 12:7).

Jesus said to His disciples,

And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell (Matt. 10:28).

James wrote of the two natures of man as an illustration concerning faith's inactivity, *“For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also”* (James 2:26). Jesus said of three men whose bodies were buried in the cave at Machpelah (cf. Gen. 49:31; 50:13),

But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living (Matt. 22:31-32).

Luke records in the book of Acts,

Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas: this woman was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did. And it came to pass in those days, that she was sick, and died: whom when they had washed, they laid her in an upper chamber...Then Peter arose and went with them. When he was come, they brought him into the upper chamber: and all the widows stood by him weeping, and shewing the coats and garments which Dorcas made, while she was with them. But Peter put them all forth, and kneeled down, and prayed; and turning him to the body said, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes: and when she saw Peter, she sat up (Acts 9:36-37, 39-40).

Before Dorcas was brought back to life by the Holy Spirit's power through Peter, the body of Dorcas was in that upper chamber in Joppa. The phrase, "*while she was with them*" (Acts 9:39) indicates that Dorcas was no longer there though her body was still in their presence. It was that same Peter who saw Moses and Elijah speaking to the Lord on the mountain (cf. Matt. 17:1-4). The text of the Bible states of the end of Moses' life on earth,

So Moses the servant of the Lord died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the Lord. And he buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, over against Bethpeor: but no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day (Deut. 34:5-6).

It is clear from these passages that the body of Moses was in a valley over the Jordan, but the person of Moses was on that high mountain speaking to the Lord. Such

details show the nature of man to be more important than just flesh.

A further look at the beginning of creation shows an additional principle of the nature of man. Moses recorded,

And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die (Gen. 2:16-17).

The Lord God did not create man to live purely by Divine programming without choice. Man was created as a being with the power to choose. Though man was in a fleshly body, he was not sinful simply because he was in the flesh. Sin came as a result of choice. Solomon stated of mankind,

Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions (Eccl. 7:29).

Having that observation in mind, consider the words where Solomon stated, *“For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not”* (Eccl. 7:20). Since it is the case that man is more than flesh and that he has been given the right to choose, consider now the principles of walking by the flesh verses by the Spirit’s teaching.

### **The Notions Of The Carnal Mind**

There is a clear distinction both in attitude and action between genuine spirituality and carnality. The standards for living simply by fleshly pursuits take ever increasing steps away from what God says. The fleshly

mind has its own desires to be foremost. This principle can be vividly seen in various Biblical examples.

One distinction of carnality is in the elevation of human wisdom while rejecting Holy and Divine wisdom. Jeremiah said of the nation of Israel in its depraved condition,

Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid, be ye very desolate, saith the Lord. For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water (Jer. 2:12-13).

Satan knew that the woman would have to reject what God said for her life in order to get her to yield to the temptation of eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The serpent said,

Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil (Gen. 3:4-5).

The serpent first attacked what God said and then substituted a lie for the truth. The choice of which to believe and follow was left to the woman. Moses recorded of her,

And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat (Gen. 3:6).

The Lord said later to Adam,

Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which



I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life (Gen. 3:17).

The woman heeded the words of the serpent and the man heeded the words of his wife. Human wisdom prevailed in the mind of Adam above the clear words of the Lord God.

One of the great warnings of the Bible from beginning to end is to be faithful to what God has said.

Now therefore hearken, O Israel, unto the statutes and unto the judgments, which I teach you, for to do them, that ye may live, and go in and possess the land which the Lord God of your fathers giveth you. Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you (Deut. 4:1-2).

Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest (Josh. 1:7).

For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book (Rev. 22:18-19).

Jesus Himself said,

Whosoever cometh to me, and heareth my sayings, and doeth them, I will shew you to whom he is like: He is like a man which built an house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock: and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it: for it was founded upon a rock. But he that heareth, and doeth not, is like a man that without a foundation built an house upon the earth; against which the stream did beat vehemently, and immediately it fell; and the ruin of that house was great (Luke 6:47-49).

Another distinction of carnality is that of choice, based upon lust and passion, versus looking objectively, based upon the precepts of God. The children of Israel who had just been delivered from the Egyptians should have known that God would take care of them and keep the promise He had made to their fathers. Nevertheless, the text reads,

So Moses brought Israel from the Red sea, and they went out into the wilderness of Shur; and they went three days in the wilderness, and found no water. And when they came to Marah, they could not drink of the waters of Marah, for they were bitter: therefore the name of it was called Marah. And the people murmured against Moses, saying, What shall we drink? (Exod. 15:22-24).

There was only a short time from their celebrating the victory over the Egyptians to their complaining about the water. When God gave them good water to drink (Exod. 15:25, 27), the text records further,

And they took their journey from Elim, and all the congregation of the children of Israel came unto the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after their departing out of the land of Egypt. And the whole congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness: And the children of Israel said unto them, Would to God we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the flesh pots, and when we did eat bread to the full; for ye have brought us forth into this wilderness, to kill this whole assembly with hunger (Exod. 16:1-3).

The account of that adult generation is filled with carnality. Moses later explains to their children,

And thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no. And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live (Deut. 8:2-3).

One of that younger generation who still had trouble with carnality is Achan. Passion and lust controlled his heart and thinking. The instructions concerning Jericho had clearly been stated,

And ye, in any wise keep yourselves from the accursed thing, lest ye make yourselves

accursed, when ye take of the accursed thing, and make the camp of Israel a curse, and trouble it. But all the silver, and gold, and vessels of brass and iron, are consecrated unto the Lord: they shall come into the treasury of the Lord (Josh. 6:18-19).

Nevertheless, the text states of Achan,

But the children of Israel committed a trespass in the accursed thing: for Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took of the accursed thing: and the anger of the Lord was kindled against the children of Israel (Josh. 7:1).

When Joshua later confronts Achan about his sin, Achan states,

Indeed I have sinned against the Lord God of Israel, and thus and thus have I done: When I saw among the spoils a goodly Babylonish garment, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels weight, then I coveted them, and took them; and, behold, they are hid in the earth in the midst of my tent, and the silver under it (Josh. 7:20-21).

Fleshly thinking prevailed in his mind over proper faith in God.

King David had a problem with the flesh as recorded by the text.

And it came to pass in an eveningtide, that David arose from off his bed, and walked upon the roof of the king's house: and from the roof he saw a woman washing herself; and the woman was very beautiful to look upon (2 Sam. 11:2).

Lust got the best of David on that night in spite of the fact that David knew the commandments, “*Thou shalt not commit adultery*” (Exod. 20:14) and “*Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s wife*” (Exod. 20:17). Even some of the strongest examples of the faithful had trouble with the flesh.

Another distinction of carnality is promoting the will of man over the will of God. Pride has always been and will always be a snare to mankind. John wrote of the nature of worldliness,

For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world (1 John 2:16).

Power and physical strength can inflate the minds of men.

Samson is an example of one who had great opportunity to do good for the people of God. However, the length of material about him gives more of an account of fleshly thinking and carnal ways until he gets his physical eyesight taken away from him. When Samson finally yielded to Delilah’s pursuit to find wherein his strength lay, the text states,

And she made him sleep upon her knees; and she called for a man, and she caused him to shave off the seven locks of his head; and she began to afflict him, and his strength went from him. And she said, The Philistines be upon thee, Samson. And he awoke out of his sleep, and said, **I will** (emphasis mine, J.C.) go out as at other times before, and shake myself. And he wist not that the Lord was departed from him (Judges 16:19-20).

It was Samson's will to go forth as before, but he had spurned the will of the Lord and was therefore taken captive. Carnality deceives the mind to think that what man wants is best for him and will produce no ill effects.

King Saul was at one time a very humble man serving the Lord. However, his heart turned toward himself and not toward doing the will of the Lord. One account of Saul's fleshly minded thinking is seen in his dealings with the Amalekites.

Samuel said to Saul,

Thus saith the Lord of hosts, I remember that which Amalek did to Israel, how he laid wait for him in the way, when he came up from Egypt. Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass (1 Sam. 15:2-3).

The text then states of Saul's actions,

And Saul smote the Amalekites from Havilah until thou comest to Shur, that is over against Egypt. And he took Agag the king of the Amalekites alive, and utterly destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword. But Saul and the people spared Agag, and the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, and of the fatlings, and the lambs, and all that was good, and **would not** (emphasis mine, J.C.) utterly destroy them: but every thing that was vile and refuse, that they destroyed utterly (1 Sam. 15:7-9).

The will of man was substituted for the will of the Lord. Samuel gives the accurate picture of the lack of obedience.

Wherefore then didst thou not obey the voice of the Lord , but didst fly upon the spoil, and didst evil in the sight of the Lord? (1 Sam. 15:19).

When Saul seeks to justify himself in his partial obedience, Samuel firmly states,

Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, he hath also rejected thee from being king (1 Sam. 15:22-23).

One can clearly see from these principles and examples the folly of the notions of the carnal mind.

### **The Necessity Of Being Spiritually Minded**

Paul sought to show both the greatness of being spiritually minded and the ruin of being carnally minded in the eighth chapter of Romans. He wrote,

For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace (Rom. 8:5-6).

Again,

Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall

live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God (Rom. 8:12-14).

Today, the spiritually minded child of God holds fast to the words of the Holy Spirit as recorded in divine revelation. Even as David said of the Holy Spirit's words through him, "*Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path*" (Psm. 119:105). There is no understanding apart from the Word of God.

I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy testimonies are my meditation (Psm. 119:99).

There is no peace apart from the Word of God.

Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them (Psm. 119:165).

Comfort comes through the Holy Spirit's inspired written Word.

For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words (1 Thess. 4:15-18).

These and many more benefits are found through the means of appreciating and applying the word of the Lord



to one’s own thinking and life. However, there must be an elimination of the fleshly mind in order for the spiritual mind to benefit. This is seen clearly with the congregation at Corinth.

Paul wrote of the Corinthians,

And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ...For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men? (1 Cor. 3:1, 3).

One only has to look at the various problems in this congregation to see the necessity of being spiritually minded. The congregation was not just divided, but segmented into more than two factions (cf. 1 Cor. 1:12). To have eliminated one faction would only have been a partial solution. Fornication was also present with the congregation (1 Cor. 5:1). Unable to handle the smallest of disputes to the point of taking such before unbelievers was also a problem (1 Cor. 6:6). Questions about marriage during “the present distress” (1 Cor. 7:26) and eating meats offered to idols (1I Cor. 8:1) were difficult matters for them. Matters of the customs of the day (1 Cor. 11:16) created problems for them. A lack of genuine concern and love for the less fortunate of the congregation was also evident (1 Cor. 11:20-21, 33-34). A lack of understanding and abuse of various spiritual gifts created great problems (1 Cor. 12, 14). Denying the truth about the resurrection of the dead was present (1 Cor. 15:12). Genuine love of the brethren was clearly absent and thus the need for that subject to be discussed (1 Cor. 13; 16:14). It is very difficult for people who were “*called to be saints*” (1 Cor. 1:2) to demonstrate that quality when carnality is their manner. The Second

Corinthian letter gives some indication of their move from a carnal mind to a more spiritual one (cf. 2 Cor. 7:11-16). Corinth had much potential, even as the Lord said to Paul,

Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city (Acts 18:9-10).

The potential did not mean that carnality would not be a problem.

Today, the brotherhood still faces the problem of worldliness with all its aspects. Paul knew that for the church to succeed in the world, it must be *“transformed by the renewing of your mind”* (Rom. 12:2). The desires of man must center upon the love of the Lord and the desire for His return. *“If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha”* (1 Cor. 16:22). The eyes of the church must look beyond this world.

While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal. For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens (2 Cor. 4:18-5:1).

The pride of the church must rest upon the cross. Paul said of himself,

But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world (Gal. 6:14).

“Spiritual Versus Fleshly (Carnal)”

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When the focus of the child of God is away from self and centered upon the example of the Lord’s life of sacrifice and service, then will the spiritual mind win out over the carnal.

## Chapter 7

# Creation Versus Evolution

*Curtis A. Cates*



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**T**he theme “*Choose You This Day Whom Ye Will Serve...*” (Josh. 24:15) is critically important in our generation, as it has been for all time and in every place. It has vital implications for time and eternity. Of course, on the other hand, if the general theory (hypothesis, rather) of evolution is correct, choosing whom one will serve is not at all important. You see, man is a responsible being only if he is created in the image of the God of the Bible and only if there is an absolute standard of morality, ethics, and spirituality. Otherwise, he is but a graduate beast (a little higher than the apes), but a skin-sack of chemicals, and but molecules in motion. Thus it is that we study the vital subject “*Creation vs. Evolution.*”

### **The Question Of Origins**

There are but two alternative beliefs as to how the universe, the solar system, earth and its teeming life forms came about. One is supernatural creationism, and

the other is natural creationism; there is not another alternative. The cosmos exists; that fact nobody can successfully deny. Planet Earth teems with life, from the complex one-celled animals and plants to the indescribably complex higher forms of animals and plants, and ultimately to mankind—who is drastically superior to animal-kind. Mankind is but a little lower than angels. Human life is sacred; men and women, boys and girls, males and females born and unborn are made in the image of God—if God exists. If God exists, man has an immortal soul and is subject to the Creator. On the other hand, if God were not to exist and, thus, if evolution were to be true, then human life would not be sacred, we would be animals with no immortal souls, and we would be subject to no absolute, objective standard. The theme of this lectureship would be moot, since there would be no divine Beings, nothing sacred, no supreme standard, and no ultimate accountability. Mankind would be adrift at sea with no sail, chart, compass, or home port.

### **Supernatural Creationism**

Make no mistake, the author holds that God created the heaven, the earth, the sea, and all that in them is in six twenty-four hour, solar days (Gen. 1:1-2:3; Exod. 20:9-11). And, God created mankind as male and female at the “*beginning of the creation*” (Matt. 19:4; Mark 10:6). Genesis chapter one states that God created from nothing, and all life was created fully grown with the capability of bringing forth offspring “*after its kind,*” whether plant, animal, or human being. And, make no mistake, the author believes that the Bible is historically true when it affirms that this was a world-wide flood as recorded in Genesis 6-8. Supernatural, or supranatural,

is defined as having to do with an order of existence beyond the physical universe, transcending nature, higher than the natural in kind and degree. And, the creation was miraculous, over and above, higher than the natural and the laws of nature.

### **Natural Creationism**

The only other alternative is that nature created itself from nothing. And, did dead matter (which the second law of thermodynamics proves not to have been eternal) suddenly galvanize into life and activity? Such violates the law of biogenesis. Did the complex amoeba, or some such one-celled organism, evolve into the increasingly complex forms of life? Or, on the other hand, is the Bible correct when it affirms that (in six twenty-four hour, solar days) God created the heavens, the earth, the sea, and all life within them, to bring forth after its own kind (Gen. 1:1-2:3; Exod. 20:9-11)? Did God create mankind as male and female at the beginning (Matt. 19:4), the *“beginning of the creation”* (Mark 10:6)?

Man cannot have it both ways! Some have foolishly affirmed that the Bible tells man **who** created but not **how** God created—theistic evolution, which shall be demonstrated to be neither scientific nor Biblical. Those false teachers question the accuracy of Genesis 1-11, accusing much of the Bible to be myth, fables, and legends—that no such early book could be accurate in its history. One needs to realize that those believing in naturalistic origins do not need but rather rule out supernatural creation—and the very existence of God Himself! It is either supernatural creation, or it is evolution; one **rules out** the other. It is heresy to deny the literal account of Genesis 1:11!

What are some insurmountable problems with

theistic evolution, in addition to its violating true science? Such an averment makes the days of Genesis One long eons of time. Questions: If this is not history, where in God’s Word does true history start? Was Adam the first man (Rom. 4:14)? Was he the first to die (1 Cor. 15:21-22)? Was Adam created first, then Eve (1 Tim. 2:13)? Was Eve the first to sin, then Adam (1 Tim. 2:14)? How does the male existing before the female fit organic evolutionary theory? Or did Paul write pseudo-history, myth? Did God create them male and female at the beginning of creation? If not, Christ was deceived. What terms could Moses by inspiration have employed to show that those were twenty-four hour days, other than what he did use? He used adjectives designating a specific day—first day, second day, six days, etc. Note also the use of light and dark, evening and morning, etc. Do you believe the Lord was in the tomb three literal days and rose the third literal day? Why? Explain the difference in terminology, if there is one. If the days of Genesis One are not literal, explain the analogy used by Moses in Exodus 20:9-11. Did some Israelites shout to Moses, *“Do you not know that one day to God is as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day?”* They knew what Moses said, wrote, and what he meant!

There are other contradictions with theistic evolution. Does evolution teach, as Genesis One, that the earth preceded the sun, that the life began on earth (rather than in the water)? How did the plants survive through the eon-long, frigid night until the sun came into existence, or the yucca plant reproduce millions of years before the existence of the yucca moth? How can continuing evolutionary processes (demanded by this theory) harmonize with the fact that God **finished** His work (Psm. 33:6-9)? If Genesis 1:26-27; 2:7 is myth, who

can prove that man has now advanced to the place where he has an immortal soul; might he not simply be an advanced ape still lacking a soul? When did the real Old Testament persons begin (Matt. 1; Luke 3), if Adam was not real? Was Jude writing real history, "*And to these also Enoch, the seventh from Adam*" (Jude 14)? Was Abraham real? Was Jesus real? Let the theistic evolutionist prove it! What need do we have for the atonement? This theory denies that Genesis 3 (the sin of Adam and Eve) took place. What misery! What folly, all to continue one's marriage to the unscientific evolutionary hypothesis and to the unscientific geologic timetable.

### **"Science" Is Not Infallible**

So-called science has proven itself to err even in the realm of the physical (the only place where it is able to function). Science is very young—only 400 years old. This century's "*discoveries*" will be tested and accepted or rejected by the next century's scientists. Countless errors will be uncovered. The Bible has been tested for 4,000 years, and no contradictions have been discovered within itself, or with true science, or with history, etc. Does any scientist project the same for science books being penned today? Scientists make mistakes, though some scientists wish to claim otherwise. They are human, too, seeing what they want to see, like the rest of us. They have their prejudices, also. Many examples could be cited. Science books are already out of date before they come from the press; the Bible is perpetually up to date. Science errs when it claims to rule in the area of the metaphysical. No scientist could prove God not to exist. Science operates only in the empirical realm, being strictly a collection of absolute knowledge, gained only



by observation of those who have training and verified by demonstration. That which cannot be observed and verified is not science. Since the empirical operates only at present time, the origin of the universe, of the solar system and of life is outside the field of science. When scientists enter the realm of origins, they are speculating and have become philosophers—not scientists. They have departed their field and scope of expertise. True science has limits. No matter how honest he may be and no matter how convicted he may be that man evolved, he still can be wrong, in fact, is wrong, as shall be shown.

Evolutionists err when they try to show that the issue is the data, or “*evidence*.” The difference is in the **interpretation** of the data. An evolutionist might say to Biblical creationist, “*Here is my scientific **evidence** for evolution. Now, weigh all this evidence against your **faith**.*” The impression he is trying to leave may be that he has evidence, whereas the Christian has mere guesswork, wishful thinking, and assumptions—that creation has no evidence behind it, only a blind leap in the dark. Evidence on the table in a jury trial is approached by the attorney for the prosecution and by the attorney for the defense. Each attorney looks at the **same** evidence, but from two different points of view, different ways of explaining the same evidence. It is not your versus my evidence, but rather which is the reasonable interpretation of the evidence—evolution, or creation?

This chapter will look at the evidence in the area of science and show that creation is the only valid interpretation, evolution is not! What are the areas of “*evidence*” used by the evolutionists to try to hold up their hypothesis? Is their interpretation of the facts of science (the evidence) valid?

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## Does Comparative Anatomy And Morphology Support Evolution?

One of the “*strongest*” arguments used by evolutionists relates to comparing the similarities and differences in plants and animals. First, what is the **evidence**? The evidence is easily seen. All animals and plants are composed of cellular materials (organized in cells), or protoplasm. Organisms often have similar systems (circulatory, nervous, skeletal, excretory, endocrine, digestive, reproductive, etc.); they breathe the same air, eat the same food, walk on the same earth, et al. Various animals, for example, have similar limbs, with which a bat or bird flies, a whale swims, a cat walks, a chimpanzee swings from trees, or a person turns a steering wheel. Embryos are similar in appearance in the early stages, whether of fish, salamander, chicken, pig, cat, or human being. This is the evidence—what does it mean? What position on origins does it support?

The evolutionary **interpretation** is that structural similarity “*proves*” kinship. The animals which show greater similarity in structure would be closer kin than those of less similarity, e.g. man would be of greater, more recent kinship to an ape than to a dog. From the similarity of embryos to the similarity of advanced structure, the hypothesis is that each organism evolved in increasing complexity from a single-celled, original organism. Has their interpretation been proven, has evidence been found in a fossil record? If it has been, they would not still be desperately looking for the “*missing link!*” Might there be another interpretation? Indeed!

As in all the other areas of argument by the evolutionist, there is a different interpretation which (unlike the evolutionary hypothesis) harmonizes with the

facts of science. First, the evidence **is** that living organisms have similarities. We can show that by the cells which compose all living organisms (whether plant or animal), which all have the same number of building blocks, twenty-two amino acids, which make up the proteins in all living matter and enable growth and repair of tissue to occur. Those same cells all contain deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA, which is the blueprints of the organism) in the nuclei.

Must one interpret the cellular evidence as proof that all life came through evolutionary descent over a billion or more years from a common ancestor? All life came from a **common Designer!** First, the design of four legs for many animals is very practical, just as four wheels are practical on automobiles (considering the law of gravity, etc.). Second, the various uses of the forearms of vertebrates fit the purposes in each animal; no evidence of intermediate designs/animals exists. Third, all organisms inhabit the same environment, eat the same food, breathe the same air, have to overcome the same law of gravity, etc. One would expect certain animals to have similar skeletal systems (including backbones), digestive systems, lungs, et al. Fourth, a divine plan is also evidenced when one thinks of the experimentation with antibodies, inoculation, heart-lung machines, etc., etc.—better to use animals for those tests than man. Fifth, did the marvelous food chain come about by marvelous accident? All life depends upon other life, because of the common building blocks. This was by design, the only way life could exist. Without other plants and animals, what would man eat? Rocks? Notice the chain: plants absorb minerals and nutrients, animals eat the plants, man eats plants and animals. Human beings digest food, breaking down and using the same

nucleic acids/proteins as that making up the cells of plants and animals. Is that not a logical, reasonable interpretation of the evidence? It is not their (evolutionists') data versus our "faith;" it is rather, which interpretation is demanded by/fits the evidence? The world has an amazingly unified plan, created and executed by the all-powerful, all-wise Creator.

### **Does Limited Change Within The Major Groups Of Animals Support Evolution?**

A fundamental argument used by Darwin (and which is used today) was that limited change, or variations, within the various major groups proves that unlimited change between the groups takes place. No one would deny that there are variations, or changes, within certain limits. This change is termed "*microevolution*," in an attempt to indicate to the unsuspecting that evolution actually occurs (I do not use this term except to show the lack of wisdom in using it).

Numerous instances of limited change are observable. Examples would include Darwin's finches, horses, moths, fruit flies, giraffes; indeed, every living organism is unique in some way (some would affirm that identical twins are the exception). The evolutionist takes a giant leap, postulating that limited variation proves that all plants and animals evolved from a single, early living organism. The atheist pictures their case in what is termed the "*phylogenetic tree*," or tree of life, in which is charted (like a family tree) the progression (organic evolution) from protozoa, to metazoa, to coelenterates, to invertebrates, to vertebrates, to mammals, to man. To prove their assumptions would be simple—produce the evidence in the fossil record and demonstrate it as in process today; the evidence is

absolutely, totally lacking! The dotted lines at the beginning and between the major groups of animals shown in many phylogenetic charts are tacit admission that scientific/paleontological evidence of evolution does not exist. The necessity, for example, is to prove that one-celled animals evolved into multi-cellular, worms into fish, amphibians into reptiles, et al.; where is evidence that reptiles became horses, that apes became man? Limited change in dogs, or horses, or human beings do not prove unlimited changes required in the evolutionary “*line of descent*” or “*common ancestry*.”

### **Does Genetics Support Evolution?**

Related to the above discussion on limited change is the modus operandi, the mechanism or means by which unlimited change took/takes place, according to the evolutionist. One cannot prove evolution until a mechanism is proven; genetics is claimed by some evolutionists to be that mechanism. What is the evidence?

The DNA, the genetic blueprint of any living organism, can be changed, mutated in a number of ways, whether by chemicals, radiation, ultraviolet light, or drastic change in temperature. However, only limited change has been demonstrated or has been shown to have occurred. Using the peppered moth and its chances of survival (before versus after the industrial revolution, Manchester, England), whether dark or more pale in color, evolutionary theory has tried to assert that through natural selection, animals develop (evolve) variations which increase the organism’s ability to survive and thus evolve into higher and higher life forms. But, the moths were **still** moths! The argument by Darwin and by today’s evolutionist is, given enough time, anything can

happen. That is no more true than given enough time, I can jump the Grand Canyon. What has modern day breeding processes proven (genetics)? It is just as the Bible teaches—limited change within the major “*kinds*” (each one composed of those animals or plants which can breed with each and reproduce their own kind), not unlimited change (from one major group, or kind, to another—evolution).

If unlimited change were possible, it certainly would have been proven/demonstrated with the **drosophila melanogaster**, or common fruit fly (also known as the vinegar fly). Used in virtually every book in support of evolution, it seems, the breeding, gestation period of the fruit fly (T. H. Morgan experimented extensively on the fruit fly, 1910, and it is a common experience in scientific study today) is a couple of weeks, with hundreds of offspring (since 1910, the equivalent of hundreds of thousands, even millions of years of supposed mammal “*evolution*”). The poor flies have been bombarded by every imaginable means of speeding up the mutation process (about 20 times the normal rate has been achieved), causing them to go from normal eye to bar eye to reniform eye to absence of eye, from normal wings to notched wings to curbed wings to no wings, from normal to abnormal abdomen, from normal to deformed bristles, etc. But, what are they still? Fruit flies. Not **ONE** of them has ever turned into a grasshopper or honey bee.

There is limited change **only!** God placed a great gulf between the major groups of animals, which science affirms. Geneticists have discovered several important things. Bring about the changes by breeding and mutating animals or plants, move the gene pool in one or another direction, but nature at some point brings the changes to a halt. Animals and plants which man

has highly bred are much weaker than the wild variety; they cannot compete, thus struggle for survival in nature (the mutated flies attempting to survive with the wild flies are too weak). The question is asked, are not new breeds of corn, etc., superior to the wild? Remember that the issue is its benefit to the crop or to the animal, to its ability to cope in nature, not its benefit to mankind. Rather than leading to higher, more complex forms such changes eventuate in the organisms' becoming sterile or else snapping back to the original status. Limited change is evidence of a Designer, God's plan.

### **Conclusion**

Space ran out before the supposed “*evidence*” for evolution could be examined from such areas as mutations, fossils, embryology, radiometric dating, ape-man, etc. The evidence is just as deadly against evolution and just as powerful for creation as that discussed in this material. Examination of these areas must be left for another time.

One does not have to be an ignoramus to be a Christian, a Biblical creationist. It is also clear that creationists are not automatically ignorant in areas of science, as some evolutionists aver. The creationist has nothing to fear. You can trust your Bible!

## Chapter 8

# The Church Versus Denominationalism

*Cliff Goodwin*

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**I**n many ways this topic treats the most pivotal choice presented to the “*would-be*” Christian in the twenty-first century America. From the moment one decides in his mind that he wants to be a follower of Christ, he is confronted, yea bombarded, with a multiplicity of churches. American “*Christendom*” is replete with various denominations—each believing, teaching, and practicing differently. Yet amid such a collage of confusion the one true church of the New Testament still exists. Yes, even here on American soil the would-be disciple can be a member of the same church wherein Peter, Paul, and John were members nearly twenty centuries ago. In many ways, however, the seeking soul today faces difficulty that was not encountered by those in the first century. In the centuries following that powerful Pentecost (Acts 2), Satan has been very successful in counterfeiting the Lord’s church. He has swindled millions of souls into accepting manmade institutions and organizations in place of the church of



Christ. The true choice (the true church) has thus been clouded with many other false choices. Yet, thankfully, there is still a choice! A seeking soul can choose from any number of denominations, or through careful searching and study, he can choose the Lord’s church. This is both a simple and serious choice—one in which that individual’s eternity hangs in the balance. One may consider the following story as an illustration of this weighty choice.

A loving father purchased matching gifts for his four sons. The gifts were of inestimable value, and the father acquired them at a costly price. He sacrificially purchased the gifts because he knew they would bring exceeding joy to his sons’ lives; he wanted his sons to have them. Because he would be away when the gifts arrived, the father left very detailed instructions for his sons in a little booklet. These instructions would provide essential information pertaining to the use and enjoyment of the gifts. The sons were called together and shown the instruction booklet before the father’s departure. They were told they could open their gifts as soon as they arrived; however, they were commanded not to use the gifts until the instructions had been carefully read. Even then, the sons were ordered to use their gifts only in accordance with the instructions.

Time passed and one day, in the father’s absence, the gifts arrived. The sons leaped with excitement and anticipation as they began opening the crates. Father was right—the gifts were amazing! The sons could not believe their eyes as they pulled their matching gifts from their packages. The gifts were everything their father had touted them to be and more. As the joyful disbelief slowly began to subside, the eldest son reminded his brothers that they all needed to read the instruction

booklet and then follow it as their father had commanded. The youngest brother exclaimed,

I'm not going to read the booklet, for I see already how I can use my gift. A gift like this is far too wonderful to delay its use with reading!

With these words the youngest brother immediately went out with his new gift.

The next youngest son watched as his brother went out and then said, "*I will read the instructions just as father commanded.*" He sat down and read the instructions in just a few minutes' time. However, upon reading the booklet this son thought within himself, "*I have read my father's instructions, but I really believe in my heart I can put my gift to a better use.*" So he laid the booklet aside and went out, using his gift as he saw fit.

The second oldest brother then read the instructions but was deeply grieved by them. He and a friend had often dreamed of obtaining a gift such as this, and they had already plotted together concerning its future use. The problem was their preconceived plans were not in harmony with the instructions the father had left. This son was pained at the thought of disobeying his father, but he ultimately decided to remain faithful to the plans he and a friend had made. He went out to find his friend, and they used the gift as they had previously intended.

The eldest son was very disappointed with his brothers, and he warned them concerning their disobedience. He, too, had read the instruction booklet, but he did so with the determination of heart to do his father's will. When opening his gift the eldest brother immediately recognized the great price that his father must have paid. He loved his father with all his heart

and didn't want to bring hurt or disappointment to him in any way. Thus, he used his gift just as the father had instructed, and he reaped the fullest possible joy from it. In fact, the eldest son received more joy and benefit from his gift than all his brothers combined. Whereas the others had disobeyed, the oldest brother used his gift according to the wishes of him who knew best.

When the father returned from his journey, he was both saddened and enraged that three of his sons had disobeyed and dishonored him. Their refusal to use the gifts according to his instructions showed great ingratitude on their part—ingratitude when these gifts had cost him so much! He punished those three sons sorely and even disinherited them, but the eldest son was praised and exalted as the only future heir.

In these four sons one sees illustrated a world of people confronted with a choice: the church or denominationalism. The heavenly Father gave mankind the most precious and valuable gift of all—His only begotten Son (John 3:16; 2 Cor. 9:15). With this gift, however, the Father also sent written instructions (2 Cor. 5:18-19; cf. 1 Tim. 3:14-15). These instructions, the New Testament, reveal that Jesus Christ built the church as the only realm of salvation (Acts 2:47; Eph. 5:23). He only built one church (Matt. 16:18; Eph. 1:22-23; 4:4), and in it each faithful member enjoys the remission of sins and the hope of eternal life (Col. 1:13-14; Titus 1:2). Therefore, one can choose either the church he reads about on the pages of the Bible or any of the number of denominations.

Those who choose the Lord's church over denominationalism are represented by the obedient son. They read carefully the Father's will and carry it out in their daily lives (cf. Matt. 7:24-27). They are genuinely

grateful for the gift given them at awful cost, and their gratitude is manifested in submission to God's pattern set forth in the New Testament (cf. Eph. 5:3-4). On the other hand, those who choose denominationalism are represented by the three disobedient sons. Like the youngest son, some are in denominationalism simply because they are not careful to read and follow the instructions given by God in the Bible. These do not know spiritual truth and are apparently content not knowing it—they simply take for granted that what they are doing is right, or at least, **all right** (cf. Rom. 10:1-3). Others are like the next youngest son. They have read the Bible and even noticed some dissimilarity between what it says and what their denomination practices. Nonetheless, they convince themselves that what they are practicing is good in itself and thus rationalize passages of scripture to fit their beliefs and lifestyle. In a very real sense they are self-deceived (James 1:22-24). Still others are like the second oldest son. Deep in their heart, somewhere, they probably know that denominationalism is contrary to God's will. They have possibly reached this conclusion themselves in personal study or perhaps someone else has shown them this fact in a Bible study together. Nonetheless, in spite of such knowledge they have let another person influence them to choose the denominational path. Maybe such a stumbling block is a mother or father, or even a child or spouse (cf. Luke 14:26). There are even some cases in which individuals have been reared in the Lord's church, only to marry a non-Christian spouse who is eventually successful in pulling away the child of God into denominationalism. Such is a sad day indeed.

The sum of these matters is this: God gave mankind His Son along with instructions as to how one must

follow Him. All mankind has the choice of either choosing the Bible and the church of the Bible or else some other contrary path. Many disobey God in choosing denominational “*churches*” which are neither found in the Bible nor are following **the entire** Bible. Such a choice may be made for any number of reasons, but none of them will be acceptable before God (2 Thess. 1:6-9). On the other hand, there are a few who choose the Lord’s church and submit their will to that of the Father (Matt. 7:13-14; cf. 5:3).

### **Denominationalism Does Not Fit The New Testament Pattern**

The New Testament was sealed and dedicated with the blood of Christ (Matt. 26:28; Heb. 13:20). It is His law (Gal. 6:2), and by His words will all mankind living after the cross be judged (John 12:48). Hence, the New Testament is the rule, or standard, according to which one must walk in order to be pleasing unto God (cf. Phil. 3:16-17; Gal. 6:16). In truth, it is the Christian’s pattern. All beliefs, doctrines, and practices pertaining to one’s relationship with God must concord with the New Testament. Any concept that cannot be substantiated on the pages of God’s word must be discarded and refused, and this criterion is the downfall of denominationalism. Denominationalism as it is known and practiced today is in direct contradiction to that which is taught in the covenant of Christ. One who considers the following will see the truth of these statements.

Inherent in the word “*denomination*” is the idea of division. Fractions are a common way of expressing divisions, or divided portions, and the bottom number in a fraction is termed the “*denominator*.” The

denominator expresses the total number of parts provided in a division. For example, if a person receives 1/4 of a pie, he has received one piece out of four equal divisions. Four is the denominator in this fraction; the whole pie was divided into four portions. Similarly, denominationalism seeks to divide the body of Christ into various sects. In fact, denominationalism could be defined in layman's terms as follows:

Denominationalism is the belief that God's children, Christians, are scattered throughout various groups, sects, or organizations (denominations) under the labeling of various names and practices various doctrines.

The above concept is why one sometimes hears statements like, "*There are saved people in every church,*" or "*It doesn't matter which church you are a member of.*" Those who say such things have conceived the body of Christ (the body of the saved, Eph. 5:23) as being divided among and scattered throughout various manmade churches known commonly as denominations. Nonetheless, division among God's children, the saved, is openly condemned on the pages of the New Testament (1 Cor. 1:10-13). Hence, denominationalism is **not** congruent with New Testament teaching.

By dividing the above definition into three parts and then analyzing each part in light of scripture, one will see demonstrated that denominationalism is contrary to the Word of God and therefore sinful (1 John 3:4). First,

Denominationalism is the belief that God's children, Christians, are scattered throughout various groups, sects, or organizations (denominations).

One must compare this assertion with the following inspired words of Paul,

Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you (1 Cor. 1:10-11).

Needless to say, if God’s children are found throughout varying groups, sects, and organizations, they are divided. But Paul wrote, “*that there be no divisions among you.*” If there ever were a time in which God’s children needed to be in two or more separate organizations, it would have been during the first century. When the church was but in her infancy, the Lord was reconciling both Jew and Gentile unto God in one body (Eph. 2:16). These two groups were starkly different, possessed entirely different histories, and were separated by much prejudice. Yet the Lord only established one church in which **all** men would be made the children of God and thus brothers and sisters to each other (1 Cor. 12:13; Rom. 3:23; 8:14-17; cf. 1 Tim. 5:1-2). If God did not intend that His children be divided in the first century among separate groups and organizations, as the scriptures show He did not, then there is still no scriptural justification today for any organizational division whatsoever between supposed “*Christians.*”

Second, there is the matter of “...*under the labeling of various names.*” Paul treats this subject in inspired fashion.

Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul? (1 Cor. 1:12-13).

Apollos, Cephas (Paul), and Peter were three faithful men and great servants of God in the first century church. In fact, two of these men were apostles of the Lord Himself, wielding all the rights and powers of apostleship (cf. Matt. 19:28), but none of these men had the authority to place their names on any disciples that they made. Paul was well aware of this fact and pointed out to the Corinthians that neither he nor Apollos had been responsible for the divisions present in that congregation (1 Cor. 3:5-6; 4:6-7). Apparently the Corinthians had taken it upon themselves to divide into cliques, some identifying with Paul, some with Apollos, and others with Cephas. In the passage quoted above, inspiration is condemning this spirit and this practice. The spirit is seen to be a contentious one (1 Cor. 1:11), and the subsequent practice is none other than the wearing of various names. One who considers this matter soberly and seriously will quickly realize that if it were wrong for Christians to wear the names of inspired men in the first century, then it is certainly wrong for “*Christians*” to wear the names of any other men in subsequent centuries!

Third, what about “*...and practicing various doctrines?*” At this point one sees that all three tenants of denominationalism as it is known in the modern religious world are refuted in 1 Corinthians 1:10-13. Paul wrote,

...that ye all speak the same thing...that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.



The world today speaks of doctrine's unimportance, but the Bible knows nothing of it (2 Tim. 3:16-17). The world today says that there is room for diversity in matters of doctrine, but the scriptures never speak a word of this sort (Rom. 16:17). The world today seeks to separate Christ from His doctrine, the “*Man, not the Plan*” syndrome, but the word of truth depicts both as being joined together (John 12:48). The denominational world must come to realize that doctrine is important! The pen of John wrote that one's relationship (fellowship) with both God and Christ depended on whether or not that individual abided in the true doctrine (2 John 9), and it later referred to efforts of spreading any other doctrine as “*evil deeds*” (2 John 11). There is no room for diversity in doctrine among God's people, and why should there be? God gave mankind only one Bible. He gave only one Savior. All who come unto the Father will come through the Savior (John 14:6), and all who understand the will of the Lord will understand it alike (Eph. 5:17). If there are diversities in understanding among people, then there is certainly some misunderstanding! God's word has one message for one and for all—He is not the author of confusion (1 Cor. 14:33). Often all that needs to be done to achieve an understanding of Christ's doctrine and to share common ground with God's children is to lay aside preconceived ideas, prejudices, etc., and to diligently study the word (2 Tim. 2:15).

If denominationalism had been God's mode for the church in the first century the apostle Paul would not have been able to teach as he did. Paul wrote of his own practices, “...of my ways which be in Christ, **as I teach everywhere in every church,**” (1 Cor. 4:17, emphasis mine CG). Because Christ had one church and one

doctrine, Paul was able, yea compelled, to preach the same doctrine everywhere he went. What was truth for one congregation was truth for the next; what was amenable to one was amenable to the next. And so it is today. But if one could imagine denominationalism as being condoned by God, he could then envision something completely paradoxical. He would see Paul traveling to denomination X in Asia and preaching one doctrine there, then traveling to denomination Y in Europe and preaching a divergent doctrine there, only then to travel to denomination Z in Palestine and preach a third doctrine there contradictory to both former doctrines! Such would make a farce of truth and thus a farce of the Word of God (John 17:17). Yet this is exactly what those are doing today in the denominational world. By claiming to believe the Bible as spiritual truth and then asserting that the Bible condones doctrinal and organizational division, denominationalists make a farce out of the Bible and out of God.

### **The “*Invisible Church*” Concept Is Foreign To The New Testament**

Proponents of denominationalism go a step further in attempting to uphold their doctrine. They often assert that when the Bible speaks of the church, and especially when the Bible speaks of the church in such a way as to emphasize its singularity, that it is speaking of the “*invisible church*.” Oddly enough, the term “*invisible church*” is not found one time in the entire Bible. And so another red flag comes up, warning one to beware of denominationalism and its perils.

Further examination of this “*invisible church*” concept is warranted. As best the author can infer, the “*invisible church*” seems to be supposedly comprised of

all the saved throughout all the denominations. One might say that the “*invisible church*” is the “*cream off the top of all the denominations!*” This would make the “*invisible church*” God’s **real** church.

As one can probably see already, there are some serious scriptural problems with this doctrine. One, denominations and denominationalism are not warranted by scripture nor condoned by God. Therefore, any structure of doctrine that incorporates denominations or denominationalism into God’s plan is a faulty structure. Two, the saved souls of humanity need not to be further classed into some “*invisible church.*” The saved souls of humanity **are** the church!

Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved (Acts 2:47).

For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body (Eph. 5:23).

In the former passage above, Luke records that the Lord was adding the saved to the church. If the Lord Himself adds the saved to the church, how many saved does that leave outside of the church? None—unless the Lord is found to be a respecter of persons, who does for some saved what He will not do for all the saved. Obviously, the scriptures show such not to be the case. In the latter passage above, Paul writes that the Lord is the Savior of the body. Elsewhere in the Ephesian epistle, Paul had already shown that the church is the body and the body is the church (Eph. 1:22-23). The terms are interchangeable; they are one and the same. And so in being the Savior of the body, the Lord is the Savior of the church. If the Lord is the Savior of the church, how

many will be saved outside of the church? None, for to be outside of the body is to be outside of Christ—there can be no separation between the body and the Head (Col. 1:18). To be outside of Christ is to be lost, for all spiritual blessings are found only in Christ, including salvation (Eph. 1:3; 2 Tim. 2:10).

There is a third problem with the “*invisible church*” concept. Because the “*invisible church*” is supposedly the totality of the saved, it would be, in essence, God’s **real** church. But God’s real church is seen plainly on the pages of the New Testament, as it was seen plainly in the world of the first century. Yet everyone knows that anything seen plainly is hardly **invisible**! God purposed the church from all eternity (Eph. 3:10-11), but He never purposed an **invisible** church. Christ promised He would build His church (Matt. 16:18), but He never promised to build an **invisible** church. In fact, invisibility is just the opposite of what God wants His children to be. Christ taught:

Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven (Matt. 5:14-16).

In light there is visibility; there is sight. Christ compared His people to light. Through His people the world could **see** good works and thus glorify the heavenly Father. This sounds like anything but an “*invisible church*.”

When the church was established on Pentecost, as recorded in Acts 2, it had both a visible and audible beginning. The masses present on that occasion heard

the apostles speak in the native tongues of the crowd (Acts 2:6-8), and as the church continued in the apostles’ doctrine the public witnessed wonders and signs done by the apostles (Acts 2:41-43). Throughout the book of Acts the church is in the public eye. In Acts 5 the church was gathered in one accord in Solomon’s porch (Acts 5:12), and the apostles taught publicly in the temple (Acts 5:17-21). In Acts 8 Philip the evangelist preached the gospel in Samaria and performed various miracles among the people (Acts 8:5-8). Example after example could be drawn from the book of Acts showing that God’s real church in the first century was anything but **invisible**. It was in the public eye, it was recognizable (Acts 4:13), and it was distinctive (Acts 9:1-2). God has never had, nor will He ever have, an “*invisible church*.”

### **Attitudes At The Heart Of Denominationalism**

Actions or practices that are contrary to the will of God find their roots in a heart problem. One has well said, “*Behind every action, there is an attitude.*” Our Lord Himself taught:

And he said, That which cometh out of the man, that defileth the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: All these evil things come from within, and defile the man (Mark 7:20-23).

The practice of denominationalism is sinful, but this sinful practice can be traced back to a sinful state of the heart, the inward man. Perhaps the heart involved is ignorant of the truth (Rom. 10:3). But God has provided

His word for all (Titus 2:11ff), and ignorance is no longer an excuse (Acts 17:30). It is each soul's individual responsibility to seek for God diligently (Heb. 11:6), as he searches the scriptures honestly (Acts 17:11). When men are negligent in seeking and finding the truth that God has made available they bear their own condemnation (cf. John 5:39; 2 Peter 3:5). In this way, many in denominationalism are **willingly ignorant**.

An attitude that appears to be prevalent in the denominational world is the lack of respect for authority. No denomination would have ever been formed, no creed would have ever been written, no extra-Biblical practice would have ever been introduced, if men had only realized that authority in religion belongs solely to Christ (Matt. 28:18, ASV). Paul wrote,

And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him (Col. 3:17).

He was striking at the heart of authority. To do things in the name of Christ is to do those things with Christ's authority. Any religious practice, therefore, which cannot be substantiated with Biblical authority must be abandoned at once! If this one Biblical principle began tomorrow to be upheld by the entire religious world, then denominationalism would die overnight.

Another attitude seemingly common in denominationalism is that of self-sufficiency. Those in denominationalism often say words to the effect, "*Well, that is my belief and I have the right to believe it!*" One may have a Constitutional right in the United States to such a belief, but God has never given man the **right** to believe anything false. He has only given man a choice. There is an air of self-sufficiency when one defends his

belief on the grounds that such is **his** belief. Jeremiah understood in the long ago that man was dependent upon God for moral and spiritual direction (Jer. 10:23). Many in denominationalism seem content to remain there because they have chosen their belief for themselves, when in actuality their belief is erroneous and not what God would have them to believe. Man is completely unable to chart his own spiritual course. He needs God’s direction through His inspired word (Psm. 119:104-105). Only when one has laid aside self-sufficiency and turned solely to God’s word for his direction will he be released from the bondage of denominationalism.

A lack of reverential awe and fear also seems to be lacking in the practice of denominationalism. To the author, the idea of joining a manmade “*church*,” setting out to perform extra-Biblical practices in the name of religion, and following to any extent a human document as a guide or standard is terrifying. “*It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*” (Heb. 10:31). So much presumption is involved in denominationalism. People presuming that God will accept this, or that He will tolerate that. Where is godly fear? Where is the “*taking seriously*” of what one does before God? The author shudders at the thought of such presumption. The Hebrews writer penned:

Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: For our God is a consuming fire (Heb. 12:28-29).

Acceptable service unto God is rendered with both reverence and godly fear. Man must remember who God is and his place before Him. God is in charge; God is

Almighty. God has the power to save and the power to damn (Matt. 10:28). Man must take God seriously, and he must take God's rules (His Word) seriously. God surely does.

### **Conclusion**

In the religious world today man is confronted with a choice: the church versus denominationalism. All eternity hangs in the balance as this choice is contemplated and made. Man's redemption was purchased at awful cost, and gratitude would dictate that man accept it on God's terms. The church of Christ is God's terms; denominationalism is man's terms. Nowhere in the Bible can justification be found for denominationalism. Therefore, neither can hope be found for the same. People do not face an endless eternity with a hopeless practice.



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## Chapter 9

# Church Growth: God's Ways Versus Man's Innovation

*Stan Stevenson*

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**C**hurch growth is an important topic and one about which we should be interested. The Lord wants the church to grow spiritually. The spiritual gifts that were given to the early church furnished them with the things Christians needed so that they might grow.

And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in

love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love (Eph. 4:11-16).

Several terms in these verses set forth the intent of God for the church to grow. “*Perfecting*,” “*edifying*,” “*grow up*,” “*maketh increase*,” all indicate that God wants the church to grow spiritually.

But, the Lord also wants the church to grow numerically. Since, the church is made up of those who are saved (Acts 2:47), and God wants all to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4), then God wants the church to increase in number. The Great Commission is an indication that God wants the church to grow numerically. And, it gives us the initiative to go out and endeavor to increase the numerical size of the church. It is thrilling to pick up the New Testament and read of the establishment of the church in Acts 2, and the growth of the early church. It is just as thrilling to read bulletins and news letters that tell today of public responses to the gospel. It is a joy to look around in our congregations and see men and women grow and develop in their Christian character; to see them become leaders and set examples of faithfulness. Church growth is an integral part of every faithful congregation. Without growth, a congregation will surely die.

### **We Have An Admirable Goal**

The subject assigned is surely one of interest to all of God’s faithful children. We want the church to grow, both spiritually and physically. Gospel meetings,

Lectureships and Vacation Bible Schools are designed to help the church grow in every way. There may be some who are content to maintain the “*status quo*.” But, those congregations cannot long survive. Physical death of members alone will take its toll on those congregations until they eventually vanish. Unless we are growing, we cannot hope to survive in our communities. How many churches are there that are but a memory that were once thriving, full of activity? Many factors can cause such, in spite of the best efforts of a congregation. Deaths, families moving away, the decline of a community or neighborhood all contribute to churches failing to grow and eventually dying. But, we must not lose our desire for growth. The church at Thessalonica was established and lived in very challenging circumstances. Considering how Paul was forced to leave Thessalonica by the Jews (Acts 17:5-10), one would not expect a great deal of success in their environment. Yet, Paul desired that they might grow.

And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you (1 Thess. 3:12).

Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more (1 Thess. 4:1).

When Paul wrote the second epistle to Thessalonica, a short time later, he could say,

We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth (2 Thess. 1:3).

Interestingly, the growth that is spoken of is the spiritual growth of the Christian character and conduct. While we want to see numerical growth, we must first make sure that we are developing the character that will be pleasing to God. If not, we will not be in a position to help others come to Christ and live as they should. The aim should be to so live as to please God.

Paul wrote,

Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him (2 Cor. 5:9).

We should let numerical growth be a natural by-product of living lives that are pleasing to God. Let us first make it our aim to grow spiritually.

### **Some Have Adopted Gimmicks**

As a result of making numerical growth the primary aim, some have resorted to all kinds of schemes and programs to attract greater numbers. There is nothing wrong with the church having programs of work, but we should make sure the motivation is to please God and not merely to draw crowds. In a book entitled, **Ashamed Of The Gospel**, John MacArthur, Jr., writes,

Traditional methodology—most notably preaching—is being discarded or downplayed in favor of newer means, such as drama, dance, comedy, variety, side-shows histrionics, pop-psychology, and other entertainment forms. The new methods supposedly are more “*effective*”—that is they draw a bigger crowd. And since for many the chief criterion for gauging the success of a church has become attendance figures, whatever pulls in the most

people is accepted, without critical analysis, as good.<sup>1</sup>

Later, in the same book, he writes,

Provide non-Christians with an agreeable, inoffensive environment. Give them freedom, tolerance, and anonymity. Always be positive and benevolent. If you must have a sermon, keep it brief and amusing. Don't be preachy or authoritative. Above all, keep everyone entertained. Churches following this pattern will see numerical growth, we're assured; those that ignore it are doomed to decline.<sup>2</sup>

Some congregations have bought into this ideology. We find them promoting such things as dramatic performances, choirs, quartets, “*come-as-you-are*” assemblies for those who are uncomfortable in an assembly with those who are “*dressed up*.” “*Contemporary*” worship services are promoted to draw crowds who are uncomfortable with “*traditional*” worship services. There is nothing inherently wrong with contemporary songs and services. After all, every old song in our song books was at one time a contemporary song. But, is this being done because it improves our worship to God? Is it done because it is a better way of expressing our worship to God? Or, is it done merely to appeal to a greater number of people? Some congregations are resorting to worldly activities to draw crowds. Last January, a congregation advertised their evening worship as a “*Super Bowl Party*.” They brought in a giant screen TV so everyone could watch the game. During commercials they sang hymns. A devotional was conducted at half time of the big game. Without doubt, no one left saying they didn't get anything out of that service. But, was God really honored by such? Another

congregation, a few years ago, advertised a mini-carnival on their parking lot. They promoted the idea of coming to the Sunday evening service and then staying so the kids could ride the elephant. There is nothing wrong with Christians getting together to watch a ball game, or to attend a carnival. But, is this the work of the church? Do people attend such services to honor God, or to play and be entertained? Have brethren ceased to believe in the power of the gospel to convert the honest and good hearts of people? And, where do we draw the line and say, “*Enough.*” How do we take worldly minded people that we have drawn to the assemblies with gimmicks and tell them we can’t do more of the same thing we have been doing?

### **We Must Apply The Gospel**

If anyone is ever converted, it will take the gospel to do so. Romans 1:16 is still good scripture.

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

Jesus told the parable of the sower going forth to sow the seed.

And he spake many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold, a sower went forth to sow; And when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up: Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth: And when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. And some fell among thorns;

and the thorns sprung up, and choked them: But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear. (Matthew 13:3-9).

Jesus was able to describe every person who hears the gospel in the four soils of the parable. The work of the sower was (and is) extremely important. But, the sower was not responsible for cultivating the soils so that they might receive the seed. It was not his responsibility to plow the wayside soil, that it might receive the seed; to remove the rock from the stony soil; nor to clear the thorns and briars from the thorny ground. The word found reception and produced fruit in the "*honest and good heart*" (Matt. 13:8). The question might be raised, "*How did the sower find the soil in which to sow the seed?*" Notice, "*...a sower went forth to sow...*" (Matt. 13:3). Christianity is still a religion of going out and seeking the lost.

Jesus did not use gimmicks to try to draw great crowds. Though great multitudes followed Him, He did not use some kind of artificial, contrived scheme to gain followers. The miracles that He performed gave evidence that the words being spoken were from Heaven, and not the mere words of a man (Heb. 2:1-4; 1 Thess. 2:13). Those miracles were a natural part of His life and an outgrowth of His compassion and desire to help others. More than once, He would charge those who benefited from His power, to tell no one about what had occurred (Matt. 8:4; Mark 9:9; Luke 8:56). When Jesus had fed a multitude with bread and fish (John 6), He knew some were following Him because of the meal and the prospects of being fed again (John 6:26). He let all know that to be His disciple one must be willing to "*...eat the*



*flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his blood...*” (John 6:53). One wonders if those using gimmicks today, let the crowds drawn by such know of the high expectations God has for their lives. Jesus did not try to run people away, but neither would He use some artificial means of drawing people to Himself. John MacArthur wrote, “...churches zealous to attract the unchurched have baptized virtually every form of amusement.”<sup>3</sup> But, when such occurs, what does a congregation really gain. Those who are attracted by such are not spiritually minded people. Is it any wonder that congregations that adopt gimmicks to draw crowds are also among those who compromise others aspects of the truth. Jesus wanted people to be His disciples. His cry for Jerusalem shows the desire He had for them.

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not (Matt. 23:37).

Jesus did not operate on the mistaken notion that the ends justifies the means.

What then can we legitimately use to attract people to the church? In the New Testament, we find people are drawn to the church as the early Christians lived the Christian life before them. The conduct and the character of those early Christians was the drawing power for the church.

And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed

were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved (Acts 2:42-47).

The beauty and simplicity of the lives of faithful children of God is the best recommendation for the gospel. Paul told Timothy,

Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee (1 Tim. 4:16).

The faithful child of God wants the church to grow spiritually and in number. No doubt, this desire to see people become members of the body of Christ has led to some of the practices designed to draw crowds. The prevailing thought is to get them to our buildings and we will have the opportunity to teach them and see them obey the gospel. The problem is that the kind of people being drawn are coming because of the gimmicks and games. And, in order to keep the numbers up, compromises on the conditions of salvation and on the requirements for faithful Christian living are taking place. It is not the beauty of the Christian life, or the keen interest to learn more about the truth that is being emphasized. It is the food and the fun being offered. We must accept the fact that not everyone will be saved. Not everyone will want to be saved. The gospel appeals to those of “...*honest and good hearts*” (Matt. 13:8). When

these are converted, they will not demand more fun and food to stay with the church. They will stay because they love God and God’s people. The food and fun may occur, but these are added benefits of being with those who are of *“like precious faith”* (2 Peter 1:1). May their tribe increase.

### Endnotes

1 John F. MacArthur, **Ashamed of the Gospel: When the Church Becomes Like the World** (Crossway Books, 1993), preface xiii.

2 Ibid., p. 45.

3 John F. MacArthur, **Our Sufficiency in Christ** (Word Publishers, 1993).

## Chapter 10

# Balance Versus Extremism

*Neal Pollard*

Neal is a native of Mississippi • He received his formal education at Faulkner University and Freed-Hardeman University (Graduate work) • Preaching since 1987 • Local work in Alabama and Virginia • Has been with the Cold Harbor Road church in Mechanicsville, Virginia since 1994 • Neal and Kathleen have three sons.



**M**ore than in past generations, polarization and extremism is hurting the Lord's church. More than that, it is making heaven weep! Some congregations have become denominational in tenor. For some, change seems the ultimate goal, and anything traditionally associated with churches of Christ must be discarded. Other congregations seem lethargic and lifeless, lacking evangelistic fervor and seemingly active only in the practice of hypercriticism. They often carry the attitude that the truly faithful are extremely few. They are characterized by suspicion and sourness. Then, there are congregations who seem to relish their place in the "*in between*," whose preaching is a non-distinct, felt-needs approach to the eclipsing of Bible fundamentals. With these, there seems to exist the misconception that balance means caving in to all pressures.

## **The Presence Of Extremism**

Specific issues have awakened some extreme positions among God’s people. First, views about the Holy Spirit have reached extreme proportions. “*Change agent*” brethren allude to a direct and miraculous operation of the Holy Spirit today who overtakes the will of individuals and causes conversion apart from the Word of God. “*Circle drawing*” brethren, in reaction, have diminished His identity almost to the point of portraying Him as an “*it*” or existing only through the Word. Further, brethren holding the non-miraculous, but literal, indwelling are felt by some to be in sinful error.

Second, there is the issue of fellowship. To the change agent, the limits of fellowship are rapidly disappearing. Anyone professing faith in Christ, despite gross doctrinal error, is a brother in Christ. Circle-drawing brethren, on the other end, preach absolute guilt by association. To them, “*sound*” means “*in my circle;*” consequently, few gospel preachers and congregations are seen as truly sound.

Then, there is the issue of versions. The circle-drawer arbitrarily and exclusively binds the King James and American Standard Versions as the only accurate, faithful versions. Even the use or reference to New King James, New American Standard, or weaker, modern versions is an automatic indication of liberalism. At the other end of the spectrum, change agents seem intent to accept any and every version (except maybe the King James or American Standard versions). An all-accepting, non-critical attitude is taken here.

Many other issues are emerging on our spiritual landscape. There is a strong pulling to the left and to the right of biblical center on a myriad of issues. All the while, the challenge to evangelize is growing harder,

apostacy is as prevalent as ever, individual family problems are growing epidemically in congregations, motivation to do church work is, in too many instances, waning, and Satan is as hard at work in the world as ever. If ever the church did not need the distracting presence of extremism, it is in this present generation.

### **The Plague Of Extremism**

Extremists are impudent in attitude. They exhibit brash arrogance, ridicule, scoff, and belittle those who question them. Is this the attitude Christ commands? One has failed to speak the truth in love when either element is missing.

Extremists are impotent in evangelism. Whether opening the door of fellowship too wide or exhausting the precious commodity of time in a never-ending hunt for false teachers, extremists have lost sight of the soul-winning identity of the early church. Lost souls get lost from the view of extremists.

Extremists are ignorant in fundamentals. The hobby horse is endlessly ridden, and both extremes have a stable full of them. The soap box is constantly mounted. Pet peeves and grinding axes create spiritual noise pollution in congregations where extremists are allowed a voice. The net result is years pass without necessary, fundamental doctrines being taught. The church may know how to grind the extreme axes, but their swords are dull on fundamental doctrines.

Extremists are irritants in action. Truth agitates and irritates hearts hardened by sin. The early church irritated many simply by preaching God's truth (Acts 17:5-6; 19:29; 21:35; 28:22; et al). By contrast, extremists inflame and instigate trouble (1 Tim. 6:4). They seem

forever embroiled in some controversy.

Extremists are insignificant in purpose. They “*major in the minors.*” Every sermon and article is always about “*the same old thing.*” They strain at spiritual gnats and “*have omitted the weightier matters*” (Matt. 23:23).

Extremists are encouraged by insufficient leadership. Some of God’s best servants are elders. God will grant those who serve well a special reward (1 Peter 5:4). But, where elders fail to properly shepherd, extremism is simply awaiting the opportunity to be born. Faithful elders stop the mouths of extremists (cf. Titus 1:10-11).

### **The Prevention Of Extremism**

To appreciate the harm of extremism is to see the need to be balanced. How can the plague of extremism be prevented or eliminated from among congregations of God’s people? Consider the following suggestions.

Discuss issues honestly and patiently. That does not mean tolerating extremism. It means interacting like a loving family rather than a dysfunctional family.

See the issue, not the personalities, as central. When discussing whether or not something is scriptural, keep the “*something*” the focus. Hurt feelings and personal attacks only dig deeper trenches and draw tighter battle lines.

Get the facts of the situation. Extremism is fueled by prejudice. A lot of gossip has been passed off for facts, and gossip is sin (2 Cor. 12:20). A good policy to follow is, “*Substantiate before you propogate and then only carefully and prayerfully.*”

Think for yourself! Christians are to be disciples of Christ, not followers of men (cf. 1 Cor. 11:1). Extremists draw disciples after themselves (cf. Acts 20:30). How

*“Brethren So ‘N So”* believes needs to be kept out of the bottom line on biblical matters, no matter how magnetic or *“powerful”* they may seem.

Open the book! This, by itself, would help to kill extremism and rekindle a sound, balanced approach to brotherhood matters and brethren. The church should be guided by light rather than heat.

### **Conclusion**

Extremism begets extremism. Circle-drawers have overreacted to the real threat of liberalism in the church. Conversely, how many have fallen into or deeper into the change agent camp because of ugly attitudes and unfair tactics by circle-drawing brethren. If the question be, *“How can the church begin to heal her internal injuries?”* The answer must be, *“By a return to balanced (biblical) Christianity!”* Christ left the church the responsibilities of conversion, confirmation, and charity. It cannot meet those challenges when biting and devouring itself. God says to neither add unto or diminish ought from the Word of God (cf. Deut. 4:2). All other ground is sinking sand!



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## Chapter 11

# Acceptable Worship Versus Unauthorized Worship

*Dave Miller*



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**S**ince the beginning of human history, God has always required we humans to engage in worship toward Him. What does the Bible say regarding acceptable worship? What is God's will on the matter? Does God require strict conformity to worship instructions? Does the New Testament contain laws or commands pertaining to worship?

The New Testament begins and ends with worship. In Matthew 4:10, Jesus told Satan, "*You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.*" In Revelation 22:9, the angel admonished John to "*worship God.*" At least four kinds of worship are alluded to in the New Testament: (1) ignorant worship (Acts 17:23); (2) vain worship (Matt. 15:9); (3) will worship (Col. 2:23); and (4) spiritual worship (Rom. 12:2; John 4:24).

Inherent in each of these kinds of worship is the principle of authority. Worship is either right or wrong

depending upon God’s will. The only right worship is that which is authorized by God. Jesus emphasized the necessity of uniformity and conformity for all worshippers in John 4:23-24.

But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.

Correct worship necessarily possesses the proper **audience**—God. John 4:23—“*true worshippers shall worship the Father*”; “*for the Father seeks such to worship Him.*” In Ephesians 5:19-20, worship in song is directed “*to the Lord*” and “*giving thanks*” is “*unto God.*”

Correct worship also possesses the proper attitude by being conducted “*in spirit.*” This phrase refers to the disposition of the heart and mind. The worshipper must genuinely engage his spirit in the worship activity. He must be mentally and emotionally involved. He must have a humble, attentive mindset. Both Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 say singing must be done “*in your heart.*” 1 Corinthians 14:15 says, “*I will sing with the spirit and...with the understanding.*” The Psalmist said, “*I was glad when they said to me, Let us go into the house of the Lord*” (Psm. 122:1). We are to worship God “*acceptably with reverence and godly fear (awe)*” (Heb. 12:28).

Once we have the correct actions in place for worship, where the real effort comes in is in keeping our heart and mind focused on what we are doing. Worship “*in spirit*” takes work—real effort! It takes mental and physical preparation. Unfortunately, the current climate

in the church tends to treat worship as a time for entertaining the worshipper and catering to the worshipper's wants. Consequently, worshipper's have lost the deep, reverent mindset that approaches the worship assembly with a strong sense of respect and cautious intention to please God.

This lax attitude is especially evident in the change that has come over many congregations with regard to dress. Much of the casual clothing worn in local church assemblies is a direct manifestation of a casual attitude toward worship. Worshipers are wearing casual clothing that they would not think of wearing for a wedding, a funeral, the theater or even jury duty. Dress in current American culture is generally more casual than preceding generations in keeping with the breakdown of discipline and self-control. Dress unquestionably reflects attitude and can also create attitude. Just ask the military!

In addition to the proper audience and the proper attitude, correct worship requires the proper actions. Worship must be "*in truth*." For example, 1 Corinthians 14:40 says actions in the worship assembly must be done "*decently and in order*" while Hebrews 12:28 says worship must be done "*acceptably*." The current assault on worship includes an attempt to dodge the clear import of the expression "*in truth*." Some say that worshipping "*in truth*" does not refer to worshipping according to divine instruction. It is argued that the phrase "*in spirit and in truth*" is simply a Hebraism meaning to worship sincerely and devotedly. It seems that there is no end to those who search diligently for "*some new thing*" (Acts 17:21) with which to hamper a simple understanding of the truth.

What do Greek authorities have to say about this matter? Thayer cites John 4:23 as an example of "*truth*"

being used objectively to refer to “*What is true in any matter under consideration.*” Specifically, according to Thayer, “*in truth*” in this passage means “*as accords with the divine nature.*” Among other passages, he cites Matthew 22:16 and Colossians 1:16 as comparable uses in which the meaning is unmistakably that which is scripturally accurate, divinely authorized and objectively correct.<sup>1</sup>

Arndt and Gingrich list the use of “*truth*” in John 4:23ff under the meaning “*the content of Christianity as the absolute truth.*” Its use parallels the use in John 17:17—“*God’s word is truth,*” John 16:13—“*The Spirit leads into truth,*” and John 3:21—“*he does the truth.*”<sup>2</sup> Hence, again, worshipping “*in truth*” refers to worshipping according to the instructions of God.

Rudolph Bultmann’s article on “*aletheia*” in Kittel treats the matter so as to coincide with Thayer as well as Arndt and Gingrich. He notes that “*truth*” in John 8:32 refers to “*not knowledge generally, but the knowledge of revelation.*” He states, “*We are to understand (John 4:23ff)...along the same lines.*” Elaborating on this point, he notes:

...such worship can take place only as determined by the revelation accomplished in Jesus (v. 25f), and consequently as determined by the Revealer who is the only way of access to God.<sup>3</sup>

So “*truth*” entails revelation which entails right doctrine.

A.C. Thiselton, in Colin Brown’s **Dictionary of New Testament Theology**, states:

Those who worship God in spirit and in truth (4:23,24) are not those who worship in sincerity and inwardness. The Samaritans are not criticized for lacking sincerity. True worship is

that which accords with reality, which men grasp on the basis of revelation.<sup>4</sup>

### God's View Of This Matter

Of course our understanding of God's view of this matter is not dependent upon Greek scholars. God has always required that man approach him "*in truth*," i.e., according to the divine directives which He revealed to man. The only worship that has ever been acceptable to God has been that worship which has been undertaken with (1) a proper attitude, frame of mind, and disposition conducive to spirituality, and (2) faithfulness to the specific items which God pinpointed as the proper external acts to be performed. God has never accepted one without the other. He has always required both.

The following chart illustrates how God has always required these two facets of response to His will: the right action with the right attitude. Notice the following chart of scriptures:

<b><u>PASSAGE</u></b>	<b><u>ATTITUDE</u></b>	<b><u>ACTION</u></b>
John 4:24	spirit	truth
Josh. 24:14	sincerity	truth
Eccl. 12:13	fear God	keep commands
Acts 10:35	fear Him	work righteous
James 2:17	faith	works
1 John 3:18	word & tongue	deed & truth
Deut. 10:12-13	fear/love—heart	walk/ways
Rom. 1:9	with my spirit	in the gospel

To emphasize one dimension of obedience over the other is to hamper one's acceptance by God. Bible history is

replete with instances of those who possessed one without the other and were unacceptable to God. The Pharisees (Matt. 23:3), Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:2-4), and the people of Amos’ day (Amos 5:21-24) engaged in the external forms, but were unacceptable because of their insincerity. Paul (Acts 22:3; 23:1), Cornelius (Acts 10:1-2), and Uzzah (2 Sam. 6:6) all demonstrated genuine motives, but were unacceptable to God because of their failure to observe the right forms.

Think for a moment of the many people in biblical history who failed to approach God “*in truth.*” They approached God—but did so without sufficient attention to complying with the details and guidelines which God had articulated. Adam and Eve, regardless of the condition of their attitude, were condemned by God for the external act of eating the forbidden fruit (Gen. 2:17; 3:11). Likewise, Nadab and Abihu (Lev. 10:1-3), the Sabbath breaker (Num. 15:32-36), Moses (Num. 20:11,12), Achan (Josh. 7), Saul (1 Sam. 13:13,14; 15:19-23), Uzzah (2 Sam. 6:1-7; 1 Chron. 15:12,13), King Uzziah (2 Chron. 26:16-18), and Ezra’s contemporaries (Ezra 10)—all experienced the displeasure of God for their deviation from divine directions.

God has not changed in His insistence upon man’s loving obedience to His instructions (John 14:15; 15:14; 1 John 5:3). The Old Testament was written, among other reasons, in order for Christians to learn from the example of those who departed from God’s way (Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:11). New Testament faith, the kind of faith that Christians must possess if they wish to be pleasing and acceptable to God, is obedient trust—trust that conforms to God’s will (Heb. 11; James 2:14-26).

The psalmist understood that God’s truth consisted of God’s written words (cf. Psm. 119:30, 43, 142, 151,

160). So did Jesus when He said, “*Your word is truth,*” and declared that the basis of judgment would be the words which He spoke (John 17:17; 12:47, 48). Worshipping God “*in truth*” is equivalent to “*doing truth,*” which entails “*deeds*” or external actions which are prescribed by God (John 3:19-21; cf. loving “*in truth*” in 1 John 3:18). When Jesus taught the way of God “*in truth*” (Matt. 22:16), He related information that accurately represented God’s will. When the Colossians heard “*the word of the truth of the gospel*” (Col. 1:5), they heard the specific tenets, doctrines, requirements, and teachings to which they had to conform their lives.

### **Current Worship Tendencies**

Much of the change being promoted among churches of Christ these days centers on worship, especially the Sunday morning worship assembly of the church. These changes include the following areas: church music (mechanical instruments, solos, choirs, praise teams), lifting up hands, handclapping (both as accompaniment to singing and as applause), drama, female leadership, observing religious holidays, dedicating babies, changing the emblems of the Lord’s Supper or partaking on some day other than Sunday, Sunday night cluster groups and childrens’ worship, a change in preaching style (i.e., “*felt needs*” vs. book, chapter and verse), and offering “*contemporary*” worship services.

Some churches of Christ are operating on the basis of inappropriate, unbiblical objectives and goals in worship. Some churches have “*worship committees*” or “*praise teams*” who apparently have no clue what their real responsibility is: to plan and structure worship so that the focus is on God—not the worshipper. In keeping with the tone and tenor of our entertainment crazed



culture, some in the church feel that worship ought to be entertaining—though they may not come out and describe their sentiments in this way. They go to great lengths to stimulate the tastes and desires of the audience—which is a tacit admission that the focus is on the people. Can you imagine first century Christians going to such lengths to stimulate the crowd? Can you imagine them manipulating the lighting in the catacomb? Or perhaps placing a choir group behind a rock so that their singing could echo through the death chamber in an eery, chilling fashion?

Folks, can't we see that entertaining ourselves, satisfying our own needs, reviving our interest to escape our own boredom, and attempting to attract others with these man-made lures—are all simply unbiblical, cheap, inferior substitutes for simple, unpretentious, meaningful, spiritual worship? I fear we have spent too much time in the brotherhood trying to sound good to ourselves instead of sounding good to God, i.e., focusing on Him and His wishes. Sounding good to God has nothing to do with the way we sound since, if the externals are in place, God looks on the heart (1 Sam. 16:7).

Instead of attempting to renovate worship for our own benefit, what we need to do is cultivate our appetites for pure, New Testament worship. When I was a child, I didn't enjoy the worship assembly. Do you remember your mother insisting that you eat your vegetables? Her rationale was (1) they're good for you and (2) you must learn to like them. Our culture is losing all of these sage bits of wisdom and insightful truths about life and human existence and moral value. Like virtually everything of value in life, one must grow, cultivate and develop one's involvement in life's activities.

Very few worthwhile endeavors in this world come

naturally. You've got to work, sweat and suffer if your activity is going to be worth anything. Moving forward from childhood, both physical and spiritual appetites have to be matured. The individual must be taught (even made) to stick with it. You have to keep eating carrots and spinach to learn to like them. The unpleasantness is worthwhile because vegetables enable the body to receive proper nutrients and nourishment.

So it is in the spiritual realm. We need to stick with the simple worship behaviors dictated in Scripture. We need to learn to like them—because they're good for us. If we resist them, and look for new and exciting ways to worship, we are merely showing the same immaturity, the same childish rebellion that children show toward physical foods. In fact, the innovations that are causing such a stir in the brotherhood are equivalent to the candy and soda that children prefer over eating their vegetables. To change the metaphor, they are pacifiers that spiritual infants need to keep them content.<sup>5</sup> In biblical terminology, they are "*will worship*" (Col. 2:23).

We are living at a time in which change, discontent, and restlessness are rampant. People tire very easily of the "*same old thing*" and quickly look for a replacement. This phenomenon is true of the cars we drive, the mates we marry, and the houses we live in. But Christians ought not to be so susceptible to cultural currents and human inclinations. We need to "*keep our wits about us.*" People who divorce their mates when things become a little difficult, people who jump from one house to another or one car to another or one job to another, have an attitude problem. They have an internal maturity problem that does not go away after they make a change in their external surroundings.

So it is in the church. If worship has become boring

and unmeaningful to a member, so much so that he feels the need to change churches or “*enhance*” and liven up the worship assembly with theatrics, he has a spiritual, internal problem—a heart problem. His restless discontent is more of a reflection of his own spiritual condition than the status of the worship assembly. Blue Bell ice cream, Coca-Cola, and Big Macs all share in common the fact that you want them to stay the same. You expect them to taste the same—every single time you take a bite!

Repetitiveness and sameness are, therefore, not inherently bad. God has enjoined repetition and lack of change in many areas and expects us to keep it that way. Your mate expects the same! Shame on the man who puts away the wife of his youth because she is getting old and she’s the same woman he married twenty or thirty years ago. Likewise, shame on the Christian who puts away the simple worship of the New Testament church because it’s the same old thing. Just because an action is the same and predictable, that action need not necessarily be boring. That depends upon the attitude of the individual.

When we came up out of the waters of baptism and sang “*O Happy Day*” or “*Tis’ so sweet to trust in Jesus, just in simple faith to plunge me ‘neath the healing, cleansing flood*”—were we thrilled and excited? Who has changed? Manipulating external gadgets and gimmickry will not revive a genuine, heartfelt attitude of worship. We must change our own heart—melt it, soften it, prick it (Psm. 34:18; 51:17; Joel 2:13; Acts 2:37). We have a heart problem and it’s up to us to change that heart (i.e., repent).

Our worship toward God ought to be like His mercies and compassions toward us—“*they are new every morning*” (Lam. 3:23). If we want our needs met, if we really want

to achieve personal contentment and satisfaction, the only bonifide, surefire way to do so is to conform to God's will.

### Conclusion

The voices of antinomianism are gradually growing louder. Worship has come under the attack of the change agents.<sup>6</sup> We must not fall prey to these voices and succumb to the perennial problem of humankind: resistance to the instructions of God and an attempt to soften and obscure the clear call from God to render obedience to His directions. God's instructions regarding acceptable worship are simple and easily understandable. God help us to worship Him out of hearts that are filled with sincerity and earnestness. Likewise, may God help us to worship Him in accordance with His revealed will!<sup>7</sup>

### Endnotes

1 Joseph H. Thayer, **A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament**, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1977), p. 220.

2 William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, **A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament**, (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 35.

3 Gerhard Kittel, ed., **Theological Dictionary of the New Testament**, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964), pp. 246-247.

4 Colin Brown, ed., **The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology**, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), Vol. 3, p. 891.

5 This childish inclination to refurbish worship by elevating emotion to an inordinate status is seen in the practice of addressing God in prayer as "Daddy." See the author's **Piloting the Strait**, pp. 189-191 for a discussion.

6 e.g., Lynn Anderson, ed., **In Search of Wonder** (West Monroe, LA: Howard Publishing Co., 1995).

7 The lecture was taken largely from the author’s book **Piloting the Strait**.

## Chapter 12

# Bible Fellowship Versus Fellowshiping Anyone

*Burt Jones*

A native of Gadsden, AL • Spent most of his life as an Episcopalian • Began his preacher training one week after he obeyed the gospel • Holds a B.S. in Music Education and Masters in Middle Eastern History • A graduate of Memphis School of Preaching • Has held singing workshops and gospel meetings in 32 states • Author of **A Practical Handbook for Singing and Songleaders** • Father of three children.



I am very appreciative of your attendance. I know people have come from many, many miles to be with us through this series. Some of you have driven maybe two or three hours before you came here. We appreciate it and we believe that the Lord is glad as well.

I know today that I must say a word to the East Hill elders about this lectureship. Last night I was so excited to get started that if I had waited thirty more minutes, I would have exploded. I could not have waited much longer. But I want to express my appreciation from a number of standpoints. The membership of the congregation especially should stand behind their elders and uphold their hands and pray for them daily that their faith fail not. And you sister congregations, preachers and fellow elders, let them understand throughout the services how you feel and continue to pray for them even after it is over.

Today we are going to discuss Bible Fellowship Versus Fellowshiping Anyone! In John 17:14-23 you

have the following reading:

I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth. As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth. Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.

Again, in 1 Corinthians 1:10, the apostle Paul gives this commandment for unity:

Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.

Growing up in the Episcopal church with lots of friends in the Lord's church, any mature child of God knows from these passages that God teaches that we

should be one. Fellowship in Christ is taught by God. Bible fellowship is commanded by Jesus Himself. Fellowship in mind and in purpose and in word is explicitly stated by the apostle Paul. A man that enjoys religious controversy in the brotherhood is a man who is void of the spirit of Christ, but any man who refuses to defend the truth upon which Bible fellowship rests is divisive. He himself contributes to the lack of fellowship and therefore fails under the condemnation of God. The church of my fathers, the Episcopal church, is considering a merger with the Lutheran church. Roman Catholicism speaks almost weekly in the papers somewhere in the world and has something to say about getting in step with today's Christian! Why, even our own brethren feel very strongly that the Roman Catholic Church is making concessions never made before. All over the United States of America, almost weekly in every major magazine there is something that has to do with the fact that protestantism is shaky, that men are crying out against the established order. Men are doing something to try and get together and form some type of union in religion. From the standpoint of turning back to God, focusing attention upon the Bible, from the desire that is found in many hearts looking to God in order to be one, the child of God can simply say, "*Thank the Lord.*" We desire fellowship. We pray for fellowship. And, brethren, we are the only ones in the world who understand enough about Bible fellowship to truly work for it! For the Bible that God has given us not only says we should be one, but it explicitly tells us how to be one as we will notice later in our lesson. This fellowship in matters of faith is of God. This attitude of unrest and fervor and furor, that is going across the world, can be used of God or it can be used, very definitely, of Satan himself. The use to which the children of God put it, the use of which



they make of it, will determine whether it is good or bad for the body of Christ. Perhaps never before, in all the world's history has so much been said and written on the responsibility of attempting to bring people together in some sort of religious union. The New Testament not only teaches this, but the New Testament teaches *how* it can be achieved. Therefore, from that standpoint, every child of God who understands what is happening can say “*Thank God*” and may it continue to grow better and may God enable us to take advantage of the situation. Every twenty-four hours you get a brand new chance to follow our Lord's New Testament blueprint for Bible fellowship.

If there is one fundamental danger which ties every other one together, it is this one—**the danger of being deceived by appearances**. Today, if there is any power that the devil has in this world, it is the power of deception. The book of Revelation says that he is the “*deceiver of the whole world.*” The Bible teaches in 2 Corinthians eleven that the devil is deceitful, that he is able to fashion himself into a minister of righteousness and that his disciples are able to put forth themselves as ministers of righteousness. The power to deceive is one of the greatest powers that evil has. The ecumenical movement is supposed to stand for—oneness—a united front to all the world. It does not!

There is no basic search for a Bible basis for fellowship in any denomination. The evidence of this is that since our friends in the Christian Church “*restructured,*” as they say, they now say, “*We have given up the last vestige of appeal of the restoration movement and we have taken our place among the denominations of our day.*” They understand it even if some of the brethren in Christ do not! They understand that they have given up the last shred and the last vestige of

truth that the restoration movement has, as far as they are concerned. There is no reason for all this ecumenical idea except that they have failed as denominations and they are grasping at straws in the wind to give them something to prop up the man-made structure which is actually doomed for destruction. As Jesus said in Matthew 15:13,

But he answered and said, Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up.

Leave them alone. They are blind guides and if the blind lead the blind both shall fall into the pit. This is the legacy they bring into the twenty-first century.

But, good people, this is not all. They say further that there is union and that union is literally opposed to unity. Well, if union is opposed to unity, that is what we have been saying all along. You can have a loose union—that is what you have when you say, “*Do you believe that there is one supreme being and he is God?*” to a Hindu. And he may bow his head and say, “*Yes.*” You can say that you are one with a Mohammedan because he believes in one supreme being even though it is not the God of the Bible, but is this the kind of unity that God teaches—that a man just recognizes a supreme architect in the universe? And even if a man says, “*Yes, Christ died for my sins.*” Is that all it takes for me to be one with you? How can this be Bible fellowship?

Recently, as I conducted a singing school west of the Mississippi, I heard of an elder in the same town, an elder in a congregation (as his preacher preached for the First Christian Church) praying, and in his prayer he repeatedly thanked God for the fellowship that they were enjoying with the First Christian Church that

night. Was he talking about the fellowship of instrumental music which he categorically repudiated at least a hundred years ago? What was in his mind? Or was it simply the desire of the human heart for fellowship? I dare say that is the truth of the matter. There could not possibly be oneness in Christ where there is a basic difference over matters of faith. When you have found that point, you can camp on it, good people. John 17 teaches there is no room for diversity of belief in matters of faith. Unity is based on a **human** desire for fellowship. It is based on a oneness in Christ. And there are no exceptions! Again, it is based on an acceptance of God’s will (1 John 1:7-8). This passage says,

If we walk in the light even as he is in the light then we will have fellowship one with another.

It follows that if a brother is walking in darkness he does not have my fellowship and I don’t want any of his. That is the problem. There are those today that say the lines of fellowship cannot be drawn, that you cannot become dogmatic. If you do, you don’t have the spirit of Christ. John had the spirit of Christ and he said that before a man can have fellowship with a child of God and before he can have fellowship with Jesus Christ, that man must be in the light even as Jesus is in the light, and brethren, all you need to decide is what constitutes light. Religious error is not the light! It has not the light; it cannot and never will have it! Oneness in Christ—the faith comes first—the Christ—the principles of induction into Christ are essential before we can have fellowship in Christ. He has to exist. The plan of salvation had to be here. It must be conformed to, otherwise we are not one in Christ.

No faith exists where the word of God has not already gone! The Bible teaches in Romans 10:17 that *“faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God.”* There is no life of trust, there is no basis for truth without the word of God. Tonight when a man leaves that word, when he preaches opinion as law, when he preaches law as opinion, that man has left the truth of God; therefore, he has severed the bonds of fellowship. The only way that Biblical faith can come is as we obtain a unity in Christ based on a knowledge of what God has commanded and what we have obeyed. The writer says in Ephesians 4:13,

Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:

How are we going to find it? It's found only in Jesus Christ circumscribed by the words of the New Testament. All the desires for humanitarian reasons for fellowship, or the sentimental feelings that denominationalists have, do not change what God's word has said. There is no doubt that these are decent and honorable souls, but misguided.

There can be no Bible fellowship until men unite on the God-breathed scriptures. Now here is one of the problems of the ecumenical movement. Those folks do not even believe the Bible is *“God-breathed.”* By *“God-breathed”* I mean inspired, the verbally inspired words, and I am not talking about sentence inspiration, and I'm not talking about phrase inspiration; I am talking about **word for word inspiration**, and if that is not clear enough, you need more help than I can give you at this time! The truth of the matter is, when a man does not believe that the Bible is the verbally inspired

word of God, he has no basis for fellowship as far as oneness in Christ is concerned. It takes the word of God, God-breathed, for us to unite upon and we must rely upon it. Otherwise your opinion is as good as mine, mine is as good as his and neither of them are worth a dime. The God-breathed scriptures are the real problem in all the ecumenical movement. Why, you cannot find these religious leaders in these churches accepting that. They repudiate the God-breathed scriptures. How in the world can children of God who believe that these are the words of the Spirit (1 Cor. 2:13), which are in reality the words of God (1 Thess. 2:13), possibly fellowship with people who do not believe these are “*God-breathed?*” This, of course, means that this is our **only** guide in religion. The denominational world has virtually every kind of guide that you can imagine. The Presbyterians still sprinkle their babies; the Methodists still have communion bi-yearly and the Roman Catholics still have their Pope and he is not going to share that authority with anyone under heaven and never shall. What I am saying is simply that in spite of all the talk, really the fundamental doctrines have not changed at all!

Whenever we toy with wholesale fellowship, there is the danger of us forgetting our lessons from church history. Brethren, if there is anything besides the Bible that man needs to study, it is church history. Church history is like reading tomorrow’s newspaper today because when a man sees what happens in times past he can certainly interpret what is happening today and what will happen tomorrow. Attitudes and trends are virtually the same. When you begin to study church history you find, first, that the church of Christ can apostatize. These men today, in our fellowship, act as if they can rock the old ship Zion from foundation to the top and that nothing serious will happen. But they can

restructure us, and they can divide us, and they can spread us, and, the first thing you know, the old ship will do nothing except sink! Apostasy is a possibility. It always has been; it always will be. The apostle said to the Ephesian elders: *“Take heed unto yourselves and unto the church of God.”* Why? Because,

After my departure grievous wolves shall enter in not sparing the flock. And from among your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after them.

Church history teaches us that we have apostatized. We have split factions and it will happen again if the liberals go uncontested. It won't be two years; it may not even be ten weeks until apostasy is evident to the point that men withdraw fellowship.

The real issue is no longer **cooperation**, but **domination**. We live in the twenty-first century where men have money, power and prestige, and congregations who have a whole lot of this world's goods, put the little people in such a bind that they will knuckle-under. Brethren, we fought this battle with the *“antis”* a few years ago and the church came out from under the shadow of anti-ism. But there is still the problem that many individuals, because of who they are and what they are, are willing to pressure, to the point of breaking any man that will not bow down. Not that they are necessarily bad people. Sin has simply perverted their thought process. But, like Haman of old who could not possibly stand Mordecai, he had a scaffold built in order to hang him. These men will stop nothing short of just outright domination to bring a congregation, or an individual, into subjection and submission. The Bible says in 1 Peter 5:1-2 that the elders are to tend the flock of God among them. This is the built-in safeguard

that if a congregation gets out of its lawful place, then that congregation can be dealt with. The self-destructing power of a congregation is built by Almighty God. That is why *autonomy* means so much to so many of us. Church history also teaches us that: the attitude that the Christian Church had, concerning the scriptures, led to an apostasy; that liberalism concerning instrumental music being an aid and an expedient, led to separation of brethren to the dividing of the body of Christ. It did then—it will now. If not, why not? Will not church history teach us anything? It split the church once and it will do it again, and the quicker we challenge it, the quicker we discuss it openly, and the quicker we put a stop to it, the less brethren will be carried away by the dissimulation.

Church history teaches us that evil men use silence to hide their evil deeds. All you need, good brethren, to allow evil to triumph in any given area, is for good men to hold their peace. That is all it takes, men and women who just don't have the courage and conviction to stand up and be counted by God. Evil will be heard. The progress of evil is easily seen. You give them an inch and they are not going to take a mile, they've taken it! You keep trying, hoping some way that something will be done to slow them down and it is just exactly like adding gasoline to fire. They get bolder all the time, stronger all the time, until they finally reach the position they think they are God! The silence of good men is all it takes for evil to triumph in the church of God. Obadiah 9 has something to say about this. The children of Israel came up through the land of the Amalekites. The Edomites were half-brothers. They were descendants of Esau, half-brothers to the Jews. The Jews fought the Amalekites. The Edomites, their half-brothers, withdrew, stood and watched. They did nothing. And in Obadiah

God cursed Edom and said, “*The day that thou stoodest on the other side and looked, thou was as one of them*” (meaning as the enemies of the children of God). There comes a time when neutrality is guilt! Any man who cannot make up his mind and a man who will not speak out against error—the Bible shows, and the church history too, that evil will triumph unless godly men fight it to a standstill.

So we ask in conclusion, “*What can the church do about the dangers of fellowshiping just anyone?*” First, brethren, it is just exactly as it has always been.

Preach the word! Be urgent in season and out of season. Reprove, rebuke and exhort with all long-suffering and teaching.

1 Peter 2:15 says,

Be ready always to give answer to every man that asks the reason for the hope that is within you.

The apostle said in 2 Corinthians 2:11 that he would not give Satan a single advantage over him because he knew the deceitfulness of Satan. So, if we understand these things, there is only one way to offset it and that is, in humility, to have the courage to stand. Jesus said in Mark 8:38,

Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.

It’s time that the saints of God begin to shout; it’s time that they begin to teach; it’s time that they begin to debate and to discuss and to cry out against the evils that are within us.



Secondly, it is time that we unite back on the Word of God. 1 Peter 4:11 says, *“If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God.”* There is no alternative. A man cannot go beyond that which is written (1 Cor. 4:6). *“By the same rule whereunto we have obtained, by that same rule so let us walk”* (Phil. 3:16). These truths are self-evident that the people of God must speak the truth and they must stand in the word of God while they do it. The Bible teaches that we must beware of the false prophets (1 John 4:2). We must, of course, beware of Satan and his devices. Therefore, brethren, stand up while there is still time and opportunity.

And, in closing, may we say that the church of our Lord is not a backward, unenlightened, reactionary group of narrow-minded bigots, in spite of the implications of the throw the doors open crowd. It is the army of the King of Kings. It is armed with the sword of the Spirit. Before its triumphant advance, error and sin must fall, slain and still. Its rank will gladly open to receive every soul that will bow in homage to the King. But it cannot, it must not, receive and garland a Trojan horse filled with enemies of the truth of God. We will not allow them to pass. We must not, we cannot, for the future of the church, the future of the nation and our own soul’s salvation are in the balance.

### Endnotes

1 James Strong, **Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible** (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publ., 1979), p. 43.

2 **The Analytical Greek Lexicon** (New York, NY), p. 235.

3 Gerhard Kittle, Ed., **Theological Dictionary of the New Testament** (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. E. Eerdmans Publ. Co., 1965).

## Chapter 13

# Accurate Bible Versions Or Perversions

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**W**ho can doubt that the greatest problem confronting modern man is the widespread, almost endemic, ignorance of God's Word? More souls will be lost for not knowing God's will and revelation (cf. Hosea 4:6) than will be lost because they were misguided by a poor translation or paraphrase. Souls untaught at the Judgment will far outnumber those who were improperly taught because of Bible translation problems. Nonetheless, Christians have an unceasing command and call to vigilance (1 Peter 5:8). God has equipped the mental faculties of mankind with the ability to rightly discern on the matter of both quality and shoddy translations (cf. Prov. 1:2; 2:5, 9).

Since the English Revised Version was published in 1881, over a hundred translations and their revisions have come into the English-speaking marketplace.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, an in-depth study of all of them in such limited space is not possible. A mere list of them would exhaust multiple pages. While some specific versions will

be noted below, as much time must be spent in grasping some principles that separate acceptable versions from “*perversions*.” At the same time, the premise that there is a flawless, perfect English version of Scripture must be dispelled before proceeding. The quest is for versions which sacrifice neither reliability nor readability at the expense of each other.

### **An Overview Of The Process Of Translation**

Basically, translation is,

An act whereby one or more scholars proficient in the related languages take the message of the Greek or Hebrew scriptures and transfer them into a different target language.<sup>2</sup>

Of greatest concern to this study is the translation of the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek New Testament into English. Everyone having an English Bible possesses a translation.

Eugene Nida identifies three principle methods of translation – literal translation, translation of ideas (also known as “*paraphrases*”) and translation based upon close equivalents (also called “*dynamic equivalence*” by Nida<sup>3</sup>).<sup>4</sup> Though Nida, who was serving as secretary of the much debated American Bible Society when he wrote this in 1947, was biased toward the dynamic equivalence approach, most would agree that these are the basic choices in approach possible in the translation process. Most studied in the art of translation would agree that it is not exactly as cut and dry as this, but most translations fall under one of these three categories.

Literal (or formal or verbal) translations “*attempt to reproduce the modern English equivalent of the ancient world.*” Further, such,

Attempt to translate the Bible into modern English that is as close to the grammar, words, rhythm, and order of the ancient language as possible.<sup>6</sup>

Dynamic equivalence translation purports to aim “*more at conveying the thought of the original than at reproducing the grammatical structure.*”<sup>7</sup> Dub McClish defines a paraphrase as a version “*that only loosely follows the original Hebrew or Greek text or English version upon which it is based.*”<sup>8</sup> This goes back to Nida’s “*translation of idea*” category. Almost without exception, any Bible one would buy in a bookstore would be one of these.

But, how can one determine which translations are reliable versions and which are not? Robert L. Thomas makes these suggestions, that every translation should be examined **textually** (what manuscript families were used?), **methodologically** (literal or “*free*” – see paragraph above), **historically** (“*it is developed within traditions that have controlled English and American Protestantism and Catholicism?*”), **theologically** (doctrinal background and bias of the translators), and **philologically** (related to word usage, terminology, style and type of English used, etc.).<sup>9</sup>

Paraphrase versions are “*perversions*” by almost any standard. Their desire is to accommodate the “*receptor language*” (for the present study the receptor language is English), even at the expense of the original language. Too often in paraphrasing the,

Translator takes undue liberties throughout in adding, omitting and altering the original in such a way that often the equivalence in meaning is not transferred.<sup>10</sup>

The translators assume the role of commentators, infusing into the English text their doctrinal biases and pre-formed theology. The end result is that the reader gets how the translators believe the original language intends the text to say rather than how God originally said it through the inspired writers. Some noted examples of paraphrases include **The Living Bible**, **The Living Bible Paraphrased**, and **Peterson’s The Message: The New Testament In Contemporary Language**. Such writers as Eugene Glassman have made written apologies for technical paraphrase, contending that all translations inevitably paraphrase to some degree.<sup>11</sup> Yet, Glassman’s basic premise, that paraphrasing does not mean adding and/or omitting,<sup>12</sup> ignores that existing self-styled paraphrases have repeatedly done just that (for multiple, specific examples of such, the reader is directed to chapter eleven of Lewis’ book, **The English Bible**, 245ff).

The widest and middle ground belongs to the dynamic equivalence translations. In the appendix of their recent book on translations, Sheeley and Nash include the following in their list of dynamic equivalence translations: **The Centenary Translation Of The New Testament In Modern English**, **Moffatt**, **The Bible - An American Translation (Goodspeed and Smith)**, **Williams’**, **Berkeley**, **Phillips’**, **Jerusalem Bible**, **The Cotton Patch Version**, **The New English Bible**, **Good News For Modern Man**, **Revised English Bible With Apocrypha**, **New Century Version**, **The Contemporary English Version**, **New Living Translation**, and other lesser known versions.<sup>13</sup> Wayne Jackson writes, concerning dynamic equivalence, that it,

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Attempts to convey the meaning of the text in free and idiomatic **English without much regard for the exact working** (sic., “wording” NP) **of the original**.<sup>14</sup>

Often, it can be difficult to discern the difference between dynamic equivalence and paraphrasing. Especially is this true, noting Sheely and Nash’s list, which include such farcical attempts as **The Cotton Patch Version** and those taking extensive liberties like **Good News**, the **NCV**, and the **NLT**.

Dynamic equivalence involves interpretation and is, by nature, subjective. Subjective interpretation, to some extent, has been necessary in every translation of the Bible. For versions translated prior to the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Chester Beatty papyrus collection, Bodmer Papyrus II codex,<sup>15</sup> and other archaeological finds that give greater insight into the common usage of Hebrew and Greek words, there was a degree to which educated guesses (however infrequent) had to be made regarding the translation of individual words. Some passages, regardless of translators’ efforts, are nearly impossible to understand in English (cf. 1 Cor. 11:10). Some words are without English equivalents, necessitating either transliteration, marginal notes, or English words that come closest to original meaning.

Dynamic equivalence becomes perverse when subjective interpretation is mixed with doctrinal bias and presupposition. Assumptions are required, so that there is a thought for thought, rather than word for word translation taking place. What the translator believes to be the intent or spirit of the text considered is what is translated. This often has made for unfounded, unwarranted assumptions. Therefore, the end result of dynamic equivalence has in some instances been false

teaching on such subjects as premillennialism, amenability to the Old Law, Calvinism, and Catholicism. Such biases, as will soon be noted, have clouded the work of those in formal equivalence, but there seems to be a greater tendency to do so with the freer translation style of dynamic equivalence.

### **An Examination Of Particular Verbal Equivalent Translations**

While it may be disputed that some of the translations mentioned below are not actually verbal equivalents, they are considered to be such by many scholars, are promoted and sold as such, and will be so examined. A brief review of selected verbal equivalent translations will be given, without going into extensive history.

#### **King James Version**

Published in 1611, the King James Version has been the most enduring verbal equivalence translation of modern times. It is based upon the Tyndale Bible and was written in the spoken language of the day.<sup>16</sup> It was, for its time, a “*modern version*.” But, the impelling motive behind this translation work was a desire for accuracy rather than readability. The two major criticisms most often directed at the KJV are its translation of words, particularly from the Hebrew, without the benefit of later, important manuscript discoveries and its heavy reliance upon a “*late text*” (i.e., **Textus Receptus**).<sup>17</sup> Secondary objection is also sometimes aimed at the now archaic language in places throughout the version. It has received praise from such brethren as Guy N. Woods,<sup>18</sup> Foy E. Wallace, Jr.,<sup>19</sup> Robert Taylor, Jr.,<sup>20</sup> Bob Sweeten,<sup>21</sup> Leroy Brownlow and countless other good brethren. Yet, it has received criticism from brethren

like J. W. McGarvey, David Lipscomb, Wayne Jackson,<sup>22</sup> Jack P. Lewis,<sup>23</sup> Hugo McCord, Clem Thurman, Weyland Deaver,<sup>24</sup> and others. This writer grew up in congregations where the KJV was the version of choice, and he preaches from it and the New American Standard Bible (see below). Overall, it is an accurate Bible version.

### **New King James Version**

Nashville's Thomas Nelson Publishers gave the world the New King James version in 1982/1983, "*a new translation from the Hebrew and Greek texts, although it followed the same textual principles as its revered parent, the KJV.*"<sup>25</sup> One of its main objectives seems to have been to eliminate the archaic language of the KJV for today's reader. It sought to "*retain the familiar phrasing and rhythm of the KJV. It would be new, but not **too** new.*"<sup>26</sup>

Critics accuse the NKJV of having the newly-discovered manuscripts at their disposal but choosing the received text out of mere preference. Jack P. Lewis alleges "*5,788 differences in the Greek texts underlying the New Testament of the KJV and the RV/ASV.*"<sup>27</sup> This writer leaves brother Lewis' allegation to be debated by the scholars, but he simply notes it as a criticism lodged at the NKJV (who having the Byzantine, Vaticanus, Sinaiticus, Westcott-Hort, et al, at their disposal still deferred to the received text). However, as it relies upon the same text as the KJV, except in instances where later manuscript discoveries call for either minor changes or marginal notes, the NKJV should cause no alarm for those with confidence in the KJV. It, too, can be regarded as a relatively reliable version.

### **American Standard Version**

An ongoing clamor for revision was intermittently

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made from the time of the King James Version’s publication until the late nineteenth century. The end result of this revision project, begun by the English in 1870, was the publishing of the English Revised Version across the Atlantic in 1881. It ultimately, if only incidentally, helped cause the opening of the floodgate of versions glutting the market today.

*“The disagreements between the English and the American translators ultimately led to the publication of the American Standard Version.”*<sup>28</sup> Philip Schaff was arguably the leading American in the revision project. His stated primary consideration for who would serve on the board of translators was *“ability and reputation in biblical learning.”*<sup>29</sup> The American Standard Version has often been hailed as the most textually accurate version among the three monumental works (over the KJV and RV). It has, by and large, been favorably received by most brethren since its 1901 publication. Lewis, an oft-critic of the KJV, lavishes considerable praise upon the ASV,<sup>30</sup> including its reversion to paragraphing the text, more consistent rendering of the original language, uniform spelling or proper names, and replacing many archaic words with more intelligible counterparts. The major criticism leveled at the ASV would be that twentieth century discoveries of Old and New Testament manuscript materials were not available to the translators in 1901.<sup>31</sup> All things considered, the American Standard Version is an accurate Bible version.

### **New American Standard Version**

The probable driving factor in the Lockman Foundation’s project that produced the New American Standard Bible was the overall unpopularity of the ASV in the religious world. Its name, according to the president of Lockman, S. H. Sutherland, stems from the

foundation's attempt to "*follow the principles used in the translation of the American Standard Version of 1901.*"<sup>32</sup> It purports to give America a new version in the tradition of the 1901 translation. Lockman apparently did not like the overall waning in the ASV's popularity.

The NASV, the first edition of which appeared in 1971 and the latest—and best—edition of which appeared in 1995, had the following translation goals:

1. These publications shall be true to the original Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek.
2. They shall be grammatically correct.
3. They shall be understandable.
4. They shall give the Lord Jesus Christ His proper place, the place which the Word gives Him; therefore, no work will ever be personalized.<sup>33</sup>

The NASB is one of the most literal translations ever produced. Sheely and Nash dub it "*a conservative translation in almost every sense of the word.*"<sup>34</sup> One reviewer concluded, "*One may say that the NASB represents a conservative and literal approach to the translation of the Scriptures.*"<sup>35</sup>

Non-Christian critics' number one problem with the NASB is the backhanded compliment.

Like the NASB, the main strength of the NASB Update (1995 edition, NP) is still its main weakness: a translation that is intentionally as literal as possible.<sup>36</sup>

Perhaps the best and most comprehensive review of the NASB recently done by a member of the church was done by Denny Petrillo.<sup>37</sup> The major weaknesses he cites, besides the criticism already noticed, is a premillennial slant in some verses and marginal notes (cf. Isa. 2:4;

Micah 4:1; Gal. 6:16; Rev. 5:10; 20:4; Matt. 24:34; Mark 13:30; Luke 21:32), infrequent interpretation of passages and doctrinal bias in marginal notes, and occasional misleading or contradictory translations.<sup>38</sup> He also points out that many criticisms it has borne come, not because renderings disagree with the Greek text, but rather with the KJV (cf. 651ff).

In the last decade, this translation of the Bible has seen the greatest shift in attitude in the Lord's church toward its reliability and acceptability than any other English translation. Its unfortunate, but inherent association with its publishing Lockman Foundation notwithstanding, this writer believes it to be an accurate Bible version. It, with all translations, has visible weaknesses. However, its problems are no more destructive than those in the KJV, NKJV, or ASV. With Warren Wilcox, this writer believes it *“is certainly the most accurate and the most revealing translation of the New Testament we now have.”*<sup>39</sup>

### **Revised Standard Version**

The Revised Standard Version was borne out of a dissatisfaction with the ASV of 1901. It was completely published in 1951 and *“authorized by a vote of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.”*<sup>40</sup> Thus comes the word *“Standard”* in the RSV.

It was both hailed and denounced as the first modern challenger to the KJV, for its significant departure in attitude regarding textual criticism. Further, it is lauded by some for being more simplistic in rendering English words. Some brethren have noted that, apart from Isaiah 7:14, the RSV is one of the more reliable Old Testament translations. It is set up in paragraph form, uses footnotes, poetic passages are in poetic form, and YHWH is once more translated *“Lord”*

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rather than the transliterated “*Jehovah*” of the ASV Old Testament.<sup>41</sup>

In this writer’s estimation, however, the weaknesses of the RSV cause significantly greater concern than do the first four versions reviewed. The influence of modernism seems most present in “*the tendency to undercut the divinity of Jesus.*”<sup>41</sup> If this was intentional, and the impression seems left in Isaiah 7:14, Matthew 1:25, and Matthew 12:6, then the translators are to be held in contempt for infusing their fallacious stand into the text. There are also other doctrinal biases seemingly evident, including “*faith only*” (Rom. 11:20). Great care should be exercised in using the RSV.

### **New International Version**

No modern version has been the center of more controversy. The roots of the project which produced the New International Version began in 1965 because of “*evangelicals’ dissatisfaction with the existing translations.*”<sup>43</sup> A group of more than 110 scholars helped to produce the entire Bible in 1978.<sup>44</sup>

A significant degree of Dynamic Equivalence is found, even admitted, in the linguistic approach to the text by those who translated the NIV. Nouns are supplied for pronouns, “*explanatory expansion*” occurs (the English rendering supplies words of explanation to aid in comprehension), words are added and omitted “*to express English ideas,*” changes to word order and sentence structure are made, and brother Lewis lists many instances of evident Dynamic-Equivalence renderings in both Old and New Testaments of the NIV.<sup>45</sup> Many other areas have been questioned and condemned, from Calvinistic and Premillennial biases to “*monogenes*” in John 3:16. Wayne Jackson, after pointing out many well-known problem areas in the NIV, is probably right in

his conclusion that “*the NIV simply takes too many unwarranted liberties with the text of the Bible.*”<sup>46</sup>

While this writer is not enamored with the NIV and sees some potential dangers associated with its use, he does not go as far as some in labeling those who may use this version in private study, comparative study, etc., as automatically being an unsound brother. Could Lewis be right, that,

People tend to use one measuring stick when they evaluate new translations and an entirely different one with the old translations....We need to know of the translation problems in both the old and the new translations?<sup>47</sup>

### **Various Extreme Versions**

It is amazing that some versions made “*the cut*” as verbal equivalences. For example, the inclusive versions are so considered despite the outright changes of Greek pronouns. The ablest defenders of gender-inclusive versions cannot possibly get around this problem. Even ultimate defenders of the principle of gender-inclusive versions, Mark L. Strauss, confesses,

The **real** battle is whether we will relativize biblical truth by translating according to our own social and political agendas or will we allow the message of God’s word to set the agenda.<sup>48</sup>

Why, without a prejudiced agenda, would one change the gender of the original pronouns? The **New Revised Standard Version, New Jerusalem Bible, New Century Version, International Children’s Bible, New American Bible, Revised English Bible, and NIV Inclusive (1995)**<sup>49</sup> are among the many inclusive

versions which have perverted God's message about gender roles.

### **A Summary Position On Translations**

The matters considered herein constitute one of the hottest "*hot button issues*" in the brotherhood currently. As with many issues, there have been extreme positions taken both to the right and to the left. The late Bobby Duncan tells of a letter he received from a dear sister out west after he published an article in the **VIGIL** which utilized a version other than the King James. In a rather harsh letter, she concluded, "*If the KJV was good enough for Peter and Paul, who are we, mere worms of the dust, to use anything else?*" For those insistent that it is the KJV or ASV or else, there is an inherent, common sense problem with which to deal. The classic lines from the letter quoted above make it crystal clear! As Wayne Jackson wrote,

If lines of fellowship are going to be drawn solely on the basis of the version a person generally quotes, Christ and the apostles are quickly out of fellowship with some!<sup>50</sup>

On the other hand, reckless, blind recommendations of any version is dangerous. Only after deliberate, fair, and open-minded study should one draw conclusions, pro or con, about versions. That means knowing something about denominational error and, more importantly, biblical truth! That the use of some of the modern versions is strongly associated with liberal positions and personalities is pretty clear. That is a factor which should not be overlooked. And, there is just as vocal and visible an attempt made by some to castigate and embarrass those who prefer to use the KJV and ASV. It seems that some have concluded that a man or

woman is caustic or radical simply because they use those enduring, reliable versions. That is **not** an exhibition of balance!

In discussing specific tensions churches of Christ currently face, most of them caused by those intent on loosing where the Lord has bound, William Woodson writes a caution to those to the right of center which this writer senses needs the reader’s attention:

The topic under discussion may vary – **sometimes a discussion of which version of the Bible one should use**, sometimes how to translate an admittedly difficult Hebrew or Greek word, sometimes the way to state a particular doctrine such as how we know Bible truth to be thus and so on a particular topic, etc. Regardless of what is otherwise believed by the one being criticized, or his loyalty or faithfulness to Christ for many years, there is a public exposure without the facts concerning all dimensions of the matter being presented, and most often with question begging or unwarranted claim of doctrinal superiority and accuracy being affected.

In some such instances there is little willingness for a fair and open dialogue with provision for defense and examination where accuser and accused are present. Instead, the denunciation is made, the accused – perhaps in absentia – is tried and pronounced guilty, and the ever present bulletin or monthly journal of a partisan leader denounces in print the person and position opposed without there having been a testing of the case, pro or con, in full and fair discussion.

Whatever the term used to describe this uncharitable linking of charge and vilification, it is a fact in some quarters of the brotherhood

and is most lamentable. The particular content of Bible teaching under discussion may be agreed upon by many, if not most brethren, but the lack of fairness, the hasty and devastating overkill, along with the unwillingness to consider the rights and feelings of the other person(s) is certain to contribute to alienation and disunion.<sup>51</sup>

All versions are not equal. Some are perversions. Some are more perverted than others. None are perfect. Every Christian should use discretion in finding a version as free from error as possible, then use it daily. What one teaches is of greatest importance, not merely from which version one teaches. A man can teach the truth using some modern versions. A man can teach error using the KJV. The opposite of this is also certainly true. The real danger comes from those who would “*pervert the gospel of Christ*” (Gal. 1:7), no matter which version they employ to do it.

### Endnotes

1 John H. Skilton, **The New Testament Student And Bible Translations**, Vol. 4 (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed Pub. Co., 1978), p. 171; for an annotated list of twentieth-century English translations through 1973, the reader is directed to Sakae Kubo and Walter Specht, **So Many Versions?** (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1975), pp. 208-232.

2 John Waddey, “What About Translations And Versions?” **The Holy Scriptures**, Wendell Winkler, ed. (Montgomery: Winkler, 1979), p. 258.

3 Jack P. Lewis, **The English Bible From KJV To NIV: A History And Evaluation** (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1981, 1982), p. 205.

4 Eugene A. Nida, **Bible Translating: An Analysis Of Principles And Procedures, With Special**



**Reference To Aboriginal Languages** (New York, NY: American Bible Society, 1947), p. 11.

5 Steven M. Sheeley and Robert N. Nash, Jr., **The Bible In English Translation: An Essential Guide** (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1997), p. 25.

6 Ibid.

7 Lewis, p. 205.

8 Dub McClish, “The Right and Wrong uses of Paraphrases,” Terry Hightower, ed., **A Handbook On Bible Translations** (Pensacola, FL: Austin McGary, 1995), p. 947.

9 Robert L. Thomas, in Skilton, pp. 91-93.

10 Kubo and Specht, p. 17.

11 Eugene H. Glassman, **The Translation Debate: What Makes A Bible Translation Good?** (Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 1981), p. 119.

12 Ibid., p. 28.

13 Sheeley and Nash, pp. 109-114.

14 Wayne Jackson, “How To Choose A Good Translation,” Hightower, p. 535.

15 Kubo and Specht, pp. 14-15.

16 Frederick C. Grant, **Translating The Bible** (Edinburgh: Nelson, 1961), p. 84.

17 Hugh Pope, **English Version Of The Bible** (Binghamton: Vail-Ballou, 1952), pp. 33-34.

18 Guy N. Woods, **Questions And Answers: Open Forum, Vol. 2** (Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate, nd), pp. 275-276.

19 Foy E. Wallace, Jr., **A Review Of The New Versions** (Fort Worth, TX: Wallace, 1973), p. 630ff.

20 Robert R. Taylor, Jr., **Challenging Dangers Of Modern Versions** (Ripley, TN: Taylor, 1991), p. 265.

21 Bob Sweeten, “A Review of the King James Version,” Hightower, p. 580ff.

22 Wayne Jackson, Hightower, pp. 537-539. Criticisms include “*firmament*” (Gen. 1:6); “*unicorn*” and other mythical creatures cited in the KJV; Calvinist-friendly renderings (Acts 2:47; 3:19; Gal. 5:17; and Heb. 6:6).

23 Lewis, pp. 35-68. In this chapter, brother Lewis points

out some **serious** flaws in early editions. Further, he notes in present editions textual problems, examples of paraphrase (cf. 1 Sam. 10:24; 14:45; Num. 11:29; Jer. 15:9; Psm. 8:5; Matt. 27:44; et al); incorrect renderings (Num. 11:25; Dan. 3:25; Psm. 77:2; Mark 6:20; 9:18; John 13:2; 18:1; Matt. 28:9; Acts 28:1; etc.), lack of uniform renderings and general readability, and doctrinal biases (toward Catholicism, about demonology, concerning hell and Hades and Sheol, and others). These are not cited to conclude the KJV as unfit, but to demonstrate that it is not entirely free of its own weak areas.

24 Weyland Deaver, "The King James Version Debate: A Response," Hightower, p. 408ff. Brother Deaver focuses on text-types, late date of the Textus Receptus, undergirded by the also late Byzantine tradition, and overplayed and unproven charges of heresy by those he calls "*K-J-Only-ers*" against the ASV, NKJV and others. Also, of note, Hugo McCord, at Faulkner University several years ago, listed several contradictions in the KJV (2 Tim. 2:5 vs 2:24; Acts 9:7 vs 22:9; 1 Sam. 21:1 vs Mark 2:24; Gen. 22:1 vs James 1:13; etc.).

25 Sheeley and Nash, p. 49.

26 Ibid., p. 50.

27 Lewis, p. 80, 335.

28 Ronald H. Worth, **Bible Translations: A History Through Source Documents** (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1992), p. 97.

29 Lewis, p. 70.

30 Ibid., pp. 80-85.

31 Sheeley and Nash, p. 39.

32 Worth, p. 142.

33 **New American Standard Bible** (Grand Rapids, MI: World, 1995), Forward.

34 Sheeley and Nash, p. 39.

35 Kubo and Specht, p. 179.

36 Sheeley and Nash, p. 41.

37 Denny Petrillo, "A Review of the New American Standard Bible," Hightower, pp. 640-659.

38 Ibid., pp. 648-651.

- 39 Ibid., p. 654.
- 40 Sheeley and Nash, p. 36.
- 41 Kubo and Specht, pp. 46-47.
- 42 Kenneth E. Ratliff, “A Review of the Revised Standard Version,” Hightower, p. 676.
- 43 Lewis, p. 293.
- 44 Lewis, p. 294.
- 45 Lewis, pp. 320-321.
- 46 Wayne Jackson, Hightower, p. 543.
- 47 **Fulton Evangelist**, church bulletin, Fulton, MS, 3/26/00.
- 48 Mark L. Strauss, **Distorting Scripture? The Challenge Of Bible Translation & Gender Accuracy** (Downers Grove, Intervarsity, 1998), p. 201.
- 49 Strauss, pp. 35-59.
- 50 Wayne Jackson, Hightower, p. 544.
- 51 William Woodson, **Change Agents And Churches Of Christ** (Pulaski, TN: Sain Pub., 1994), p. 45.

## Chapter 14

# The Operation Of The Holy Spirit (Direct Or Through A Medium)

*Robert R. Taylor, Jr.*



Robert graduated from Freed-Hardeman, David Lipscomb, and George Peabody Colleges ~ Faithfully preaching the gospel for almost fifty years ~ Has worked with the Ripley, TN congregation for over twenty years ~ An outstanding writer ~ More than two dozen books in print ~ Written for many journals and brotherhood papers ~ Irene and Robert have two children.

**A**rdent appreciation and genuine gratitude are expressed to Paul Sain, the elders here at East Hill and every member of this good and great congregation for the treasured invitation to speak on this well-planned and excellently-executed lectureship. I have spoken on all of them except the one in 1994 when I had a lectureship and gospel meeting conflict in Virginia and East Kentucky.

Calvinism and Christianity both begin with the same alphabetical letter but there the similarity ends abruptly. Augustine, 354-430, and John Calvin, 1509-1564, are the founding fathers of this movement with Calvin supplying most of the framework in his **Institutions Of The Christian Religion**. Calvinism stands for five major errors in religion. An easy way to remember these fatal falsehoods is the usage of tulip as an acrostic with prompt apologies to this beautiful flower. They are:

- T – total hereditary depravity
- U – unconditional predestination or election
- L – limited design of Christ’s atonement
- I – irresistible grace
- P – perseverance of the saints

### **A Refutation Of The Above**

Unadulterated Christianity stands **five square** against all these. Precious babies are not totally depraved at birth tainted by Adamic and parental sin.

Redemption is not reduced to utter passivity on man’s part. There are stipulations of salvation; there are conditions of conversion; we do contribute to our salvation and it is far more than a mere whit Rubel Shelly and Randall Harris to the contrary notwithstanding. These two Change Agents contend that we do not contribute a whit to our salvation.<sup>1</sup> They are far more than a “*whit*” wrong in such a devilish declaration.

Limited and Lord do not mix and mingle with what Calvary accomplished. He was/is the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29). He, His Father and the Holy Spirit would have all to come to Jesus and be saved (Matt. 11:28-30; 1 Tim. 2:3-4; 2 Peter 3:9; Rev. 22:17).

Irresistible grace is synonymous with the old denominational doctrine of the direct operation of the Holy Spirit in conversion and sanctification – the very focus of this assigned study. It reduces the gospel to an impotent system robbed of vim and vitality, of power and profit. If the Holy Spirit converts and sanctifies directly, why even have a Bible? It is amazingly amazing that contenders for such always go to a written medium, the Bible, to seek sagging support for their falsehood. Unlike Calvinism, Christianity does not by-pass Biblical

loyalty and minimize its strategic importance.

Christianity says man can so sin as to be eternally lost. Calvinism reneges here contending that "*once saved, always saved*" is the final word of eternal security for every child of God. Taking this ridiculous error to its ultimate end caused one fellow to say he could not go to hell if he wanted to, another to say he could die drunk and still escape hell and another to say he could die in the arms of another man's wife committing adultery and heaven's door would still stand ajar for him! Is there anything more ridiculous or outlandish than religious falsehood? Calvinism is cold, cruel and calloused. Before his conversion to truth a great pioneer gospel preacher confessed that he often observed his children at play. As a Calvinist he said he often anguished over them wandering which ones were elect children and which ones were non-elect or reprobate children. The darkness of Calvinism held no answer for him. What a plight for a pious parent! Calvinism's coldness, cruelty and callousness are amply evident here. Yet the fangs of this ferocious monster have fastened themselves over nearly every religious group in America including far too many in churches of Christ. The late and lamented E. R. Harper saw this nearly thirty years ago and wrote his final volume in its scorching and scholarly refutation. He told how it had invaded a Texas congregation with which he had labored for so long and so well. This egregious error is making serious inroads among us and at a rate of reckless rapidity. I stand amazed at such among a people long distinguished for our crystal clear understanding of how the Holy Spirit operates both in conversion and sanctification. It is with heaviness of heart and sadness of spirit that I witness such and write of it.

## **The Scholarly J. Noel Merideth Defined This Error**

The late and lamented J. Noel Merideth penned a classic, timely and masterful refutation of Calvinism in the **Gospel Advocate** in 1977, fifteen years before his untimely death with a massive heart attack in 1992. As he began his thorough treatment of the fourth fatal and fallacious facet of Calvinism, Irresistible Grace, he wrote succinctly,

Since Calvinism has man born in sin and totally depraved, how could God save the elect? They teach that God calls the elect irresistibly to salvation to the effectual working of the Holy Spirit. They thus have a direct operation of the Holy Spirit on the sinner’s heart.<sup>2</sup>

Were brother Merideth living today, he would stand utterly amazed to witness the changes some of his brethren made during the 1990’s relative to the direct operation of the Holy Spirit upon the hearts of saints. Knowing him well, as I did, I think for a surety he would join me and label such as delayed Calvinism.

## **A Strange Twist Among Us**

We now have a growing number of brethren who contend that the Holy Spirit acts through a medium, the Bible or the Word of God, in conversion but begins promptly to act directly on the hearts of saints just subsequent to conversion or in sanctification. Thus, the Word of God is potent in saving a man from his alien sins, but becomes quite impotent in keeping him saved. Yet, the advocates of this view are constrained to go to a medium, the Bible, in efforts to bolster their weak cause! Why do they not prove their case directly and not by resorting to a medium? They are fond of

Ephesians 4:16. It is one of their sugar sticks. But just where is Ephesians 4:16 located? It is found in the gospel medium of the New Testament – not some direct part of their brain. They cannot argue their case for a direct operation minus an appeal to the very medium they reduce to impotency! How utterly inconsistent!

The Upper Room discourse and prayer in John 13-17 are of intense importance at this point. There is an abundance of exceptionally fine material on the Holy Spirit in these five chapters. In John 15:3 Jesus classed His eleven apostles as clean (morally and spiritually) by the marvelous means of His words – not by some sort of direct operation of the Holy Spirit upon their hearts. He stated, *“Now ye are clean through the word I have spoken unto you.”* Two chapters later He prayerfully interceded, *“Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth”* (John 17:17). It strongly appears that the Lord did not know that sanctification would be directly affected by the Holy Spirit.

Furthermore, it does not make even good nonsense to argue that it is a direct operation upon the saint’s heart and yet is never separate and apart from the word of God but always in conjunction with it whatever that bandied-about expression means. Webster defines direct as *“with nothing or no one between; immediate; close, firsthand, or personal (direct contact, direct knowledge)...”*<sup>3</sup> If this operation is direct, it has to be separate and apart from the Bible or the word of God. If not, WHY NOT? In conversion they say the Bible is between the Holy Spirit and the alien’s heart. But in sanctification, if it is direct, the Bible cannot be between the Holy Spirit and the saint’s heart. If so, HOW? How in the world do intelligent brethren get themselves into such muddled messes of Biblical misinterpretation?

When the Holy Spirit came in baptismal measure

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upon the apostles, He would guide them into all truth as per John 16:13. Would this all-truth system be ever so potent in conversions (Acts) and ever so impotent in sanctification (Romans-Jude)? The Holy Spirit gave us one book, Acts, to tell us what to do to be saved. Is Acts all potent in the accomplishment of such? The Holy Spirit gave us twenty-one epistles, Romans through Jude, to tell us how to stay saved. Are these twenty-one epistles so impotent in the realm of sanctification that a direct operation of the Holy Spirit is required? If a direct operation of the Holy Spirit upon the hearts of saints is required and imperative, why do we have these twenty-one written mediums at all? Why not do all edification directly? Would the Holy Spirit be deficient in doing it this way?

Some questions emerge. (1) Why should the Holy Spirit be more powerful through the medium of the Word of God in conversion than He is through the medium of the Word of God in sanctification? (2) Why should the Word of God be so much weaker in keeping people saved than in getting them saved initially? (3) Why should we have such power-packed verses incorporated into the epistles as Romans 1:16-17; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; Hebrews 4:12 and James 1:21 and not a few plain declarations that such power really comes directly through the Holy Spirit upon the hearts of saints with nothing between? (4) How do saved people know when the Holy Spirit is acting directly upon their hearts? (5) Is there some sort of revelatory communication indicating such? (6) Does the recipient of this direct operation have any say in the matter at all? (7) If not, what happens to man's free moral agency? (8) Could he, at any time, ever resist this direct operation of the Spirit upon his heart? (9) If not, what happens to his free moral agency? (10) Will not such direct operations upon his heart always

be subjective? (11) How could they ever be objective? (12) Will the Holy Spirit act directly on the heart of the saved even when the saved person rejects this whole direct contention? (13) Does such put his soul in any kind of jeopardy? (14) If so, what type of jeopardy? (15) Just what part of the Bible would I be required to reject when I register total disbelief and refusal of acceptance of this whole novel view that but recently has cropped up in churches of Christ?

### **Some Sure Consequences Of This Fatal Fallacy**

A certain corollary of the direct operation of the Holy Spirit is a flat denial of the free moral agency of man; it is a total refusal to understand the basic nature of this creature called man. For many years I have preached a sermon, both in local work and in gospel meetings, on a fundamental query raised in both testaments, "*What is man?*" (Job 7:17; Psm. 8:4; 144:3; Heb. 2:6). In its development I present both negative views by way of refutation and positive views for ardent acceptation. Negatively, I deal with the Sadducean (man is a totally materialistic being), the Epicurean (pursuing pleasure is man's priority in his earthly pilgrimage), the Evolutionary or Humanistic (man is an evolved creature minus a Divine Maker, a well-defined purpose for being here and a definite destiny before him) and the Calvinistic (man is a puppet on a dangling string from heaven void of any free moral agency) views of man. Positively, I portray man as a creature made in God's image, a free moral agent, one who fell and one who can be redeemed by the stately, sublime scheme of human redemption. He can be the voluntary recipient of Jehovah's amazing grace and the Messiah's marvelous mercy.

Cold, cruel and calloused Calvinism is at serious odds with Biblical fundamentals. How could a son and daughter of God, Adam and Eve, fall when apostasy is impossible? Be it recalled that Adam is called the “*son of God*” in Luke 3:38. Likewise, Eve would have been a daughter of God as much as Adam was his son. Be it further recalled that the fifth and final fallacy of cold, cruel and calloused Calvinism, and it is all three, denies any and all possibility of a fall. Incidentally, Calvinism makes impossible the Lord’s second coming. As per 2 Thessalonians 2:1ff He cannot come back until there is a falling away first. But Calvinism denies there can be any falling away. Minus such there can be no second advent of the Lord. Apparently, this has not dawned upon any of the Calvinistic commentators on 2 Thessalonians 2.

There are 1,187 chapters from Genesis 3 through Revelation 22. All of these treat man as a fallen creature needing redemption. Calvinism tries to deal with fallen man who has done what the system says cannot happen in the first place! By a denial of man’s free moral agency, Adam and Eve were not blameworthy at all for their Edenic transgressions in Genesis 3. How could they have been if neither possessed free moral agency?

Being totally dead in his sins, Calvinism has man totally unable to do anything relative to his redemption. They have man born totally depraved, totally corrupt, as bad at birth as is the old devil himself. Little babies, thus, are conceived in sin and born as totally depraved children. Calvinistic preachers have been known to consign babies to hell not a span long. Why? Because they say such are not-elect babies and die as such. Such a doctrine is as rotten as hell itself and then some! This is their first fallacy. Denying man’s free moral agency, they place redemption 100 percent in God’s corner and

0 percent in man's corner. This is their second fatal fallacy – unconditional predestination or election. This calls for their fourth fatal fallacy – irresistible grace or the direct operation of the Holy Spirit. Their whole system of egregious errors is tied together.

This presents another Herculean problem for cold, cruel and calloused Calvinism which would save the elect and damn the reprobate regardless of what people in each category do or do not do. A great preacher of the past, Jessie L. Sewell, has a sermon, in a book that deals with his life, labors and proclaimed messages, entitled, **“The Holy Spirit.”** Therein, he deals with whether the Holy Spirit acts directly on the human heart or indirectly, i.e., through a medium – the Bible. In irrefutable fashion, brother Sewell shows conclusively that if it is the former, then man could not resist the Spirit's direct operation regardless of how potent his resistance was.<sup>4</sup> They do not call it irresistible grace for nothing! Man cannot resist it, they aver. If man could resist this direct operation, he would have to be a free moral agent. But they aver he is not such. Calvinism strikes at the very basic nature of man and the whole scope of God's revelation to man – the Bible. The whole system is mass confusion; it is a maze of contradictions; it is a mixed-up system of maliciousness. It really strikes at the very character of Deity who would save some unconditionally and damn others unconditionally. And if salvation is unconditional, damnation, likewise, has to be the same. This is why corrupt Calvinism is cold, cruel and calloused because it denies redemption to the entire world of the non-elect and due to NO fault of their own except they have been born as non-elect babies. Yet, cold, cruel, corrupt and calloused Calvinism has heavily influenced almost every Protestant body on the face of God's green footstool. It has infiltrated churches

of Christ to an alarming degree. Brother E. R. Harper proved that to be the case in his monumental volume, **Harper On The Holy Spirit Issues In The Twentieth Century**, his very last published volume.

Those among us who contend for a direct operation of the Holy Spirit on the hearts of saints do not have their skirts free of poisonous and perilous Calvinism for a surety!

### **The Direct Operation Of The Holy Spirit Refuted**

The very presence of the Bible refutes such. There would be no need for a Bible if each man had a direct impact of the Holy Spirit upon his heart. Acts would not be needed if the Holy Spirit converts aliens directly. The epistles would not be needed if the Holy Spirit operates directly on the hearts of the saved. Matthew through John would not be needed because faith could be produced by the direct impact of the Spirit upon the hearts of all. Revelation would not be needed for surely the direct operation of the Holy Spirit could offer all the comfort and information needed in the heat of persecutions regardless of the source from where they came.

God is NO respecter of persons (Acts 10:34; Rom. 2:11; Eph. 6:9; Col. 3:25; 1 Peter 1:17). Yet, He would be if His Spirit operated directly on the elect for their redemption and failed to do so toward reprobates or the non-elect. He would be a sure respecter of persons and one very partial if irresistible grace was conferred on some and denied others. Would not the same principle work if He operated directly on saints but stoutly refused to do such with aliens? If not, WHY NOT? Aliens could refuse and resist because the power of the Holy Spirit is not working directly. Saints could not refuse and resist

because the power of the Holy Spirit is working directly. Intelligent brethren should be able to see what an entangled mess they create for themselves with this contention that the Holy Spirit operates directly on the hearts of the saved.

This direct operation of the Holy Spirit strikes at the very heart of the gospel itself. The gospel convicts all of sin (Rom. 3:9, 23). The gospel is God's call to all (Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8; 2 Thess. 2:14). Yet, this is not the Calvinistic approach to the Holy Spirit's direct operation at all. Calvinism denies stipulations of salvation, conditions of conversion and the plan of pardon. All who believe and obey the gospel will be saved as per Mark 16:16 and Hebrews 5:8-9. Doers of Deity's directives will enter the Eternal Paradise on heavenly high as per Revelation 22:14. The Timeless Trinity chooses to save those who choose to obey the gospel and remain faithful the remnant of their days on earth. Salvation is conditional as per Romans 10:17; John 8:21-24; Luke 3, 5; Romans 10:9-10; Acts 8:37 and Galatians 3:27. Yet Calvinism denies such in blatant, blasphemous fashion. Why should our brethren flirt around with a devilish system that wars against the Bible in general and the gospel of Christ in particular?

The book of Acts calls the Spirit's direct operation of fallacious Calvinism a colossal lie. Those converted heard the word of God; they believed what it said about Christ as God's only begotten Son; they repented of their sins; they confessed the Deity of Christ; they were baptized (immersed) for the remission of sins (Acts 18:8; 16:30-31; 17:30; 8:37; 2:38; 22:16). Conversions in Acts 2, 8, 9, 10, 11, 16, 17, 18, 19, and 22 all illustrate the above. Non-conversions in various chapters of Acts prove that men and women could and did resist. Felix, Drusilla, Agrippa, Bernice and Festus are examples of non-

converts in the book of Acts.

The epistles call the Spirit's direct operation on the hearts of the saved – delayed Calvinism – a colossal lie. They avoided worldly works and put on the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:19-23). God used a medium, His Word, to inculcate such – not a direct operation of the Holy Spirit. They put on the Christian graces as per 2 Peter 1:5-11. Again, God used a medium, His Word, to instruct of such – not a direct operation of the Spirit on their hearts. They worshipped in song, prayer, teaching or preaching, communion and contribution as per Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16; 4:2; Galatians 6:6; 1 Corinthians 11:23ff; 16:1-2; 2 Corinthians 8, 9. God used a medium to demand such – not a direct operation of the Holy Spirit upon their sanctified hearts. They were commanded to work as per 1 Corinthians 15:58; Ephesians 2:10; Titus 3:1, 8, 14 and Hebrews 6:10. But such was inculcated by a medium – God's Word – not some highly subjective direct operation of the Holy Spirit. Much is said about marriage and the home to saved people in Romans 7:2-3; 1 Corinthians 7:1-40; Ephesians 5:22-33; Titus 2:1-5; Hebrews 13:4 and 1 Peter 3:1-7. All of this was through a medium – God's Word – not a direct operation of the Holy Spirit upon the hearts of the saved. Sufficiency of teaching is done relative to the second law of pardon, the mission of the church, the organization of the church, fellowship perimeters of Christian fellowship and preparation for death and destiny. Again, all of this was done through a medium – God's Word – not by direct impact of the Holy Spirit upon the hearts of the saved. Even their sugar stick passage, Ephesians 3:16, is conveyed through a medium – God's Word – not by a direct operation of the Holy Spirit.

## **Wise Insights From J. Noel Merideth**

In his scholarly GA article written in 1977, brother Merideth wrote,

The New Testament records that the action performed by the Holy Spirit is also said to have been accomplished by the word of God. The Holy Spirit gives life through the word of God (2 Cor. 3:6; James 1:18). We are born of the Spirit through the word of God (John 3:3-8; 1 Peter 1:23-25; 1 Cor. 4:15). We are saved by the Spirit through the word of God (Titus 3:5; James 1:21). We are sanctified by the Spirit through the word of God (1 Cor. 6:11; 2 Thess. 2:13; John 17:17). We are saved by the power of the spirit (sic) through the word of God (Rom. 15:13; Rom. 1:16; Heb. 1:3). We are led by the Spirit through the Word of God (Rom. 8:9; Psm. 119:105). We are comforted by the Spirit through the word of God (Acts 9:31; 1 Thess. 4:18). We are made alive (by-RRT) the Spirit through the word of God (John 6:63; Psm. 119:50, 93). And the Holy Spirit dwells in us through the word of God (Rom. 8:9-11; Col. 3:16; Eph. 5:18).<sup>5</sup>

## **Wise Insights From Guy N. Woods**

Apparently, one of the final articles coming from the pen of the versatile Woods was entitled, “*A Historic Debate*” which appeared in the **Gospel Advocate** subsequent to his death in the fall of 1993. It was his scholarly review of the Hardeman-Bogard Debate held in Little Rock, Arkansas, in 1938. Neil Anderson has given me permission to quote from this perceptive article with incisive observations relative to the Holy Spirit. It is my seasoned judgment that brother Woods had the clearest understanding of the Holy Spirit of any man,



inside or outside the church, in modern times. He himself debated both Calvinists and Pentecostals, but not any of them ever swayed him in the least relative to the clear and well-defined views he held toward the Holy Spirit. Many of his own brethren disagreed with him and conversed with him about such. Not any of them ever swayed him in the least.

After giving a number of quotes from brother Hardeman relative to the Holy Spirit and how He influenced man, brother Woods stated,

And so is the conviction of the writer of these lines. The view, that the Holy Spirit exercises an influence apart from, and beyond that of the Word of God is a new, novel and dangerous doctrine, unheard of in churches of Christ until recent years. We challenge any man among us to produce a statement from any prominent writer from the inception of the Restoration Movement until 1950 who taught that there is additional guidance and direction through the Spirit not derived directly from God's Word. Any differences which obtained between brethren in earlier days regarding the manner or mode of the Spirit's "indwelling" did not extend to contentions urging additional influence. It remained for our day to produce the view that says Baptist Bogard was right in his insistence that there are influences wrought upon us by the Spirit in addition to the written Word. Such a view is, of course, an impeachment of the authority, totality and all-sufficiency of the sacred Writings; and it paves the way for the gross departures of those advocating tongue-speaking, the baptism of the Holy Spirit and special revelations now increasingly being heard among us. I believe that these unfortunate and fatal trends are

logical and natural consequences of the view that the Holy Spirit actually, bodily and literally resides in us and exercises powers over us beyond the divine revelation of truth set out in Scriptures. If I believed that such is so, I certainly would expect some outward, visible manifestation thereof. Strange indeed would it be that such power is present, yet not outwardly active! Why limit Him? “Tongue-speakers” are at least consistent in their error.

Those disastrous and dangerous views have resulted from an abandonment of the teaching touching the personality of the Holy Spirit. He is a person, not a mere influence (John 16:13). A person does not literally abide – nor can he – in the person of another. One person influences another person through moral suasion. Such is the manner by which the Spirit always has acted. “The Spirit of the Lord spake by me” (2 Sam. 23:2 KJV). “The Spirit speaketh expressly” (1 Tim. 4:1). “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches” (Rev. 2:7). God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, all of them divine Persons, are in us as they influence us by the Word of truth (1 John 4:15; Col. 1:27; Gal. 4:6). To reject the Word of God is to reject the Spirit who gave the Word (Neh. 9:30).<sup>6</sup>

Brother Woods has set forth here precisely and powerfully what I have offered again and again in this particular study.

Alexander Campbell debated N. L. Rice in 1843 and affirmed that in conversion and sanctification the Holy Spirit operates only through the Word of God. In 1938, N. B. Hardeman met Ben M. Bogard arguing that the Holy Spirit influences men through the Word of God. Rice and Bogard were in error. Yet, if these two debates

were held today with the very same propositions discussed, many of our brethren and professors would not be in Campbell’s or Hardeman’s corners; they would be squarely in Rice’s and Bogard’s corners. I find this very difficult to fathom!

### Conclusion

The Holy Spirit in conversion and sanctification works an influence, but in neither does He do it directly. He does it through the medium of God’s Word. To contend for a direct operation of the Holy Spirit in either conversion, sanctification or both is a serious impeachment of the all-sufficiency of the Bible. Advocates of this novel view now have to spend time in qualifying what they mean by all-sufficiency when they NEVER had to do this before adopting this error. Furthermore, they now slander God’s Word by the allegation that it is just informational. Until just a few short years ago none of our brethren employed this informational jargon in their speeches or writings. But new errors require a new vocabulary.

### Endnotes

1 Rubel Shelly, Randall Harris, **The New Incarnation** (West Monroe; Alton Howard Publishing Co., 1992), p. 207.

2 J. Noel Merideth, **The Five Points Of Calvinism**, Gospel Advocate, December 1, 1977, CXIX, No. 48, J. Roy Vaughn, Editor, p. 757.

3 **Webster’s New World College Dictionary**, Third Edition (New York, Macmillian, 1997), p. 389.

4 David Lipscomb, **Life And Labors Of Jessie L. Sewell** (Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate Co., 1957, Fourth Edition), pp. 177-190.

5 Merideth, op. cit.

6 Guy N. Woods, **A Historic Debate**, Gospel Advocate, December, 1993, Vol. CXXXV, No. 12, p. 43. Used by permission from Neil Anderson.

## Chapter 15

# Restoring The Erring Versus Leaving Others Alone

*B. J. Clarke*



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### Introduction

**H**ow wonderful it would be if all who become Christians would remain faithful! However, even a casual investigation of the Scriptures indicates that some who *“have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ”*, are *“again entangled therein and overcome”* (2 Peter 2:20). In the Parable of the Sower, Jesus spoke of those *“which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away”* (Luke 8:13). He also spoke of *“thorny ground”* hearts, who *“go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection”* (Luke 8:14). One cannot read the above descriptions without thinking of men like Demas, who deserted the faith because of his love for the world (2 Tim. 4:10). Sadly, the spirit of Demas is still very much alive today!

Although we could spend our time profitably by

producing passage after passage that demonstrates the possibility of apostasy, that is not our purpose in this present lecture. Our assignment is to discuss the choice that confronts us when brethren go astray. Do we expend the effort to restore the erring, or just leave them alone? What does the Bible say regarding this matter? To answer this question we wish to notice the following items: (1) The Mandate to Restore the Erring; (2) The Motivation for Restoring The Erring; (3) The Members Responsible for Restoring the Erring; (4) The Message For Restoring The Erring; (5) The Manner In Which To Approach The Erring; (6) The Methods Of Restoring the Erring; and (7) The Marvelous Results Of Restoring The Erring.

### **The Mandate To Restore The Erring**

In both Old and New Testaments, we are confronted with mandates from Almighty God commanding us to seek to restore the erring. Consider the force of the following passages:

When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Yet if thou warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul. Again, When a righteous man doth turn from his righteousness, and commit iniquity, and I lay a stumblingblock before him, he shall die: because thou hast not given him warning, he shall die in his sin, and his righteousness which he hath done shall not be remembered; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Nevertheless if thou warn the righteous man, that the

righteous sin not, and he doth not sin, he shall surely live, because he is warned; also thou hast delivered thy soul (Ezek. 3:18-21).

What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost. I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance (Luke 15:4-7).

Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ (Gal. 6:1-2).

Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins (James 5:19-20).

From these four texts of Holy Scripture we can deduce the following facts: (1) God expects for us to warn the wicked man, who was formerly righteous; (2) We will be held accountable if we fail to warn the wayward; (3) We will not be held accountable if we warn the wayward and they refuse to repent; (4) By warning the wicked we may be able to save his soul and ours; (5) One wayward sheep is of such importance that we should leave the ninety and nine safe sheep in order to seek it; (6) We must go

after the wayward sheep rather than waiting for its return; (7) It is our responsibility to seek to restore one who has been overtaken in a fault; (8) It is our responsibility to seek to convert the sinner from the error of his way.

Could language be any plainer? If we have any respect for the Bible at all then we will recognize that seeking to restore the erring is not optional—it is mandatory! No matter the excuse, if we wish to honor God’s will, we must seek to restore the erring.

### **The Motivation For Seeking To Restore The Erring**

Brother W. A. Bradfield used to say that there are two primary reasons why we do not seek the lost more than we do: (1) We do not really believe that they are lost; (2) We do not really believe that we will be lost if we fail to seek the lost. This is certainly true regarding why more effort is not expended to restore the erring. Grasping the significance of the first three words of James 5:20, “*let him know,*” is critical to possessing the proper motivation to seek the wayward. What should we know? We should know that if we convert a sinner from the error of his way we are saving a soul from death!

Thus, restoring the erring is a matter of life and death, spiritual life and death! Heaven and hell are real! We need to come to grips with the fact that if our erring brethren are not restored, they are going to suffer the pain of everlasting punishment in the lake of fire! Moreover, if we do not obey the mandate from God to seek to restore these brethren, then we are going to suffer eternal torment as well! When we fully appreciate this fact, then we will be sufficiently motivated to seek and save the lost.

## **The Members Responsible For Restoring The Erring**

Just whose responsibility is it to restore the erring? The answer lies within the four passages we have already examined. In the passage from Ezekiel, it is clear that the prophet Ezekiel was the primary one being addressed. However, the principle of the passage surely applies to all that care about the wayward. The passage from Luke 15, because of its reference to a shepherd seeking the lost sheep, may bring to mind the work of elders, who are referred to as shepherds of the flock (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2-4). Certainly, it is the work of elders to seek to restore the erring. However, both Galatians 6:1 and James 5:19 begin with the word "*brethren,*" thus evidencing the fact that all who share the privilege of brotherhood in Christ must also share the responsibility of seeking wayward brothers and sisters in Christ.

In reality, anyone who is "*spiritual*" has the responsibility to endeavor to restore the erring. Elders must lead the way, by their examples as well as their words, but it is equally important for the members to follow. The passage in James 5 does not specify which one of the members of the church is involved in converting the sinner from the error of his/her way. Hence, we cannot afford to sit back and watch while the elders and preachers do the work of seeking the lost sheep. Moses rebuked the tribes of Reuben and Gad for their suggestion that they not cross the Jordan and fight the battle with their fellow Israelites. In Numbers 32:6, he asked, "*Shall your brethren go to war, and shall ye sit here?*" Like those in Nehemiah's day, we are to work shoulder to shoulder to get the job done (Neh. 3). We are "*laborers together with God*" (1 Cor. 3:9). When every member of the body of Christ does his/her part of the work, it causes the



growth of the body (Eph. 4:16). Thus, if each and every member of the church will assist the elders in seeking to restore the erring, then that many more souls will be reached!

### **The Message For Restoring The Erring**

The message that needs to be preached to the erring is both positive and negative in nature. On the positive side, we can tell the erring that, although they are astray, God still loves them, and is willing to forgive their sins. This fact is certainly evident in the parable of the prodigal son, where the father longs for the return of his wayward son. Moreover, the father is willing to forgive his son for his riotous behavior, and to reinstate him to a place of blessing (Luke 15:11-24). Our Heavenly Father is equally gracious and merciful to forgive, as the following passages demonstrate:

Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon (Isa. 55:7).

Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, saith the Lord God. Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin. Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God: wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye. (Ezek. 18:30-31).

But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life (Rom. 5:8-10).

The message of these passages gives us a thrilling message to take to the erring. Sometimes those who have become Christians, and then have gone astray, erroneously conclude that God is so disappointed in them that He cannot possibly love them anymore. However, the Pauline passage above informs us that if God loved us enough to save us when we were enemies, that *“much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life”* (Rom. 5:10). What an encouraging thought!

We hasten to observe that, although He is not willing that any should perish, God also insists that all men come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9). When Simon the sorcerer sinned, after his baptism, the apostle Peter told him, *“Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee”* (Acts 8:22). In order to *“recover themselves out of the snare of the devil,”* erring children of God must repent in acknowledgment of the truth (2 Tim. 2:25-26). Furthermore, the erring need to be reminded that if they refuse to repent they *“shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death”* (Rev. 21:8). In short, the message for those who have strayed away is quite simple: God still loves you and wants you to come home; however, if you do not come home, then you will forfeit an eternal home with God, and suffer eternal punishment instead.

## **The Manner In Which To Approach The Erring**

In attempting to restore the erring, we must exhibit the quality of “*meekness*” in our efforts. Concerning the erring brother, Paul told the faithful to “*restore such an one in the spirit of meekness*” (Gal. 6:2). He told Timothy:

And the servant of the Lord must not strive;  
but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient,  
In meekness instructing those that oppose  
themselves; if God peradventure will give them  
repentance to the acknowledging of the truth;  
And that they may recover themselves out of  
the snare of the devil, who are taken captive  
by him at his will (2 Tim. 2:24-26).

We must be careful not to equate meekness with timidity. Sometimes we fail to endeavor to restore the erring because we are too timid.. We are so afraid of being labeled as intrusive that we just sit back and leave the erring alone. Meanwhile, they are headed for a devil’s hell!

It may even be the case that some of the erring would rather be left alone than to be lovingly confronted about their sins. Many years ago this author preached at a congregation where a man cheated on his wife, and started forsaking the assembly of the saints. When I suggested to one of the elders that we go and visit this erring brother, he replied, “*Well, he said he just wants to be left alone.*” My answer was, “*I am sure he would rather be left alone than to be confronted with his sins, but don’t we still have an obligation to try and reach him?*” In spite of my question, this particular elder was content to just “*leave him alone.*” I do not relish confrontation anymore than the next man, but

God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of  
power, and of love and of a sound mind (2 Tim.  
1:7).

We must not allow the fear of “*ruffling the feathers*” of the erring to cause us to just sit back and leave them alone.

Someone might object to our confrontation of the erring by quoting Matthew 7:1, “*Judge not that ye be not judged.*” A close look at the context of this statement makes it clear that Jesus was not forbidding all forms of judgment. He was simply saying that before we can help pull the mote out of our brother’s eye, we must make sure that there is no beam protruding from our own eye (Matt. 7:1-4). Matthew 7:5 makes it clear that, once the beam has been cast out of our own eye, we have the responsibility to try and cast the mote out of our brother’s eye (Matt. 7:5). Let the detractors say what they will. It is not a violation of the Lord’s teaching on judging to meekly approach the erring, confront them with their sins, and encourage them to come home!

### **The Methods For Restoring The Erring**

Jesus gave a specific method for restoring an erring brother. Consider the plan given by our Lord:

Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican (Matt. 18:15-17).

Admittedly, the above text refers primarily to a specific type of erring brother. In cases involving a personal offence between brethren, the first step is for

the offended brother to approach the brother who committed the trespass in an effort to secure his repentance. If this fails, then he is to take two or three others to try and effect a reconciliation. If there is still no repentance forthcoming, then the aid of the entire church is to be enlisted. If even this measure does not lead to the erring brother's repentance, then the church is to refuse to fellowship him.

It would not be unscriptural to employ a similar, though not identical, method in seeking to restore erring brethren, in general. The principles involved in settling a personal matter between brethren can also be used in reaching out to all erring brethren. For instance, the first step is to approach the erring brother and lovingly attempt to secure his repentance. If the initial effort fails, then other attempts should be made. If the erring brother/sister still refuses to repent, then a final all-out effort should be made to persuade them to repent. If they still refuse to repent, then fellowship must be withdrawn. Admittedly, in this permissive age, the very mention of withdrawing fellowship evokes a negative reaction. This is really not surprising, considering the fact that society is bombarded on a daily basis with the messages: “*Have it your way,*” “*Do your own thing,*” and “*I did it my way.*” Hence, the basic attitude of society toward the subject of discipline is vastly different today than just a few decades ago. Teachers in the public schools are intimidated to initiate discipline with unruly students for fear that they will incur the wrath of permissive parents. This attitude has even infiltrated the Lord's church; a large percentage of congregations of God's people have abandoned the practice of discipline altogether, apparently believing that such will not be tolerated by the broadminded members occupying the pews.

The Bible contains all that one needs to know

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pertaining to the practice of discipline. From the New Testament we learn that there is no greater joy than to be in fellowship with God and with the people of God. Conversely, it can be said that there is no greater sadness than the sadness of being out of fellowship with God and His children. It would be marvelous indeed if the blessed ties of fellowship never had to be severed. However, the same inspired book, which reveals unto us the means by which fellowship can be enjoyed, also records for us, the means by which fellowship is to be severed and withdrawn. Paul wrote the Thessalonians:

Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us...And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed (2 Thess. 3:6, 14).

In dealing with the problem of the man at Corinth committing fornication with his father's wife, Paul commanded the brethren to "*deliver such a one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh*" and not to company with fornicators (1 Cor. 5:5, 9). On yet another occasion, the apostle instructed Timothy to withdraw himself from false teachers (1 Tim. 6:3-5). To the Romans, he wrote,

Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them (Rom. 16:17; Compare 2 John 9-11).

No one who respects the authority of God's word can ignore the mandate given in scripture to withdraw from disorderly brethren. If we really care about the erring, then we will do what God says to do in trying to restore

them, even if it means withdrawing fellowship from them. Whether or not we think that the action of withdrawal is proper is not the issue. There is a way that seems right unto man, but the end thereof is death (Prov. 14:12). We must recognize that God’s thoughts are not our thoughts and that His ways are not our ways. His wisdom is as high above our wisdom as the heavens are above the earth (Isa. 55:8-9). Our desire to restore the practice of New Testament Christianity must include a commitment to restore the New Testament practice of withdrawing fellowship from those who walk disorderly. We must not preach the importance of keeping the commandments of God and then proceed to ignore the plain command to withdraw fellowship. It is inconsistent for us to chide the denominational world about the commandments that they ignore while we ignore the commandment to practice withdrawal of fellowship. The command of 2 Thessalonians 3:6 is no less sacred or significant than the command of Acts 2:38. God’s mandate must be honored.

It is extremely important that we have the proper motivation in withdrawing fellowship from a brother or sister in Christ. The model for us to follow is found in the missives of Paul. The motivation for withdrawing from the transgressor in Corinth was so that his “*spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus*” (1 Cor. 5:5). Contrary to the view of some, the action of withdrawal is an act of love! Biblical withdrawal of fellowship is never done out of spite or hatred. It is done out of love for souls! I remember a young girl asking me some years ago to show her the Scripture that gave the church the right to “*kick people out of the church.*” As I probed and asked questions, I learned that the church had recently withdrawn from one of her relatives. I tried to explain to her that the action of withdrawal was not so much an

effort to “kick people out” of the church as it was an effort to reclaim them and bring them back home.

Love and discipline are not mutually exclusive (Rev. 3:19). Rather, they are twin companions that complement each other beautifully. This harmonious connection is affirmed in both the Old and New Testament.

He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes (Prov. 13:24).

The writer of Hebrews makes this same inspired observation in Hebrews 12:5-11. The passage declares that the Lord chastens or disciplines those whom He loves. Neither the giver nor receiver of discipline enjoys it when it is administered. Yet, the results of this infliction of pain are worth it after all. Likewise, when the action of withdrawal of fellowship is carried out, it is not a joyous time for either the church or the member being disciplined. Yet, if the action taken leads to the reclamation of a lost soul, the infliction of pain will certainly have been worth it all. It is better to go through the emotional pain of being withdrawn from and then restored than it is to wander away from the church, die lost and suffer the everlasting pain of a devil’s hell.

### **The Marvelous Results Of Restoring The Erring**

When we are successful in restoring the erring, then we have saved a soul from death and covered a multitude of sins (James 5:20). When a lost sheep comes back to the fold, it is an occasion for rejoicing (Luke 15:5-7). When a lost and valuable coin is found, it is a time for celebration and rejoicing (Luke 15:8-10). How much more should we rejoice when a lost soul comes home?! When the prodigal son returned home,



The father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry (Luke 15:22-24).

Even in cases where the church has to withdraw fellowship from the erring, there can still be a joyful ending. One of the first manifestations of the action of withdrawal just might be the restoration of the withdrawn from child of God. Withdrawal works! It worked in the case of the man in 1 Corinthians 5. Referring to the punishment inflicted upon this man, Paul said,

Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which was inflicted of many. So that contrariwise ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow. Wherefore I beseech you that ye would confirm your love toward him (2 Cor. 2:6-8).

The withdrawal of fellowship had been sufficient to jolt the offending brother into repenting of his sins so that his fellowship with God and his brethren might be restored.

Incidentally, if there is no feeling of fellowship between the erring one and the members to begin with, the action of withdrawal will not be much of a jolt. The withdrawn from member must feel a sense of loss. Now that the brother had returned, Paul admonished the Corinthians to forgive him and accept him back with open arms. Countless other instances of the effectiveness of withdrawal are known of by this author. Withdrawal works because it is God’s way and God’s way is the best way. This is not to suggest that every individual who is

withdrawn from will definitely come back to the sheepfold. Nevertheless, the action is proper and will strengthen the body of Christ.

A second manifestation of the action of withdrawal is that the other members of the church will be more reverent and aware of what their lot shall be should they decide to walk disorderly. When the rest of the brethren saw the punishment inflicted upon Ananias and Sapphira, they were moved with great fear (Acts 5:11). There was no doubt in their minds that God meant business and that He expected them to learn a lesson from what happened to Ananias and Sapphira. Paul wrote Timothy, *“Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear”* (1 Tim. 5:20).

Thirdly, the action of withdrawal by the church will cause many in the world to respect the church for its strong stand. This is precisely what occurred after Ananias and Sapphira were punished for their transgression. Fear came not only upon the church but also upon as many as heard these things (Acts 5:11). The prevailing view today seems to be that withdrawal of fellowship makes us look unloving to the world about us and that to practice it is detrimental to our cause. We ought to be more concerned about what the world will think of us if we put up with sin than we should about how they will view our loving, yet firm, attempts to deal with sin.

It is true that there will always be those who are turned off by any kind of rigid stand. No one can deny that many in the world criticized the church for its withdrawal of fellowship from Marian Guinn in Collinsville, Oklahoma. When our erring sister Guinn appeared on the Donahue Show, along with her lawyer and brother Garland Elkins, there was certainly an element of the audience that considered her to be the

martyr in this case. Many hissed at the very mention of the Bible and its teaching on the matter. However, there are also many in the world who gained a greater respect for the Lord's church and its courage to stand up for what the Bible teaches.

The church in Jerusalem experienced multitudes of additions of both men and women to the body immediately following the punishment of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:14). Likewise, when the Lord's church faithfully, consistently and lovingly practices discipline today, the result will be greater respect and greater numbers of believers added to the body of Christ. Besides, even if the latest Gallup poll showed that 99.9% of all Americans were opposed to a church having the right to withdraw fellowship from its disorderly members, we must ignore the masses (Exod. 23:2) and obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29). God's way works!

### **Conclusion**

If all of the erring members of the church within our communities were to suddenly be restored, our church buildings could scarcely contain them. Truly, all we need to do is lift up our eyes to see that the field of erring brethren is white unto harvest. Let us remember that we have a mandate from God to seek to restore the erring. Let us all contemplate the lost and tragic condition of the erring so that we will possess the proper motivation for restoring them. Furthermore, let us remember that our own salvation will be dependent upon our willingness to seek the wayward. May all of the members of the church take their responsibility personally, and seriously. After all, we have a message of hope to bring to the erring. Therefore, we need to get busy engaging in whatever scriptural method possible to try and restore the erring so that we may see the marvelous results of their return!

## Chapter 16

# Faithful Soldiers Versus Compromising Traitors

*Jimmy Clark*



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**T**here are various figures mentioned in the Scriptures that describe God's people. Among those figures is that of a soldier. Paul wrote to Timothy,

Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier (2 Tim. 2:3-4).

Just prior to Paul's reference to Timothy being a good soldier of Jesus Christ are these words,

And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also (2 Tim. 2:2).

What should be true of Timothy as a good soldier should also be true of those faithful men. What Paul would commit to Timothy would need to be committed to others. Faithfulness in the ranks of the Lord's army would be

required for the good fight to be waged.

Today, one does not have to look far to see that the battle against the wicked one is far from over. Atheism, pluralism, denominationalism, and the like stand ready to attack the very heart of what Jesus came to bring into the world. Little by little some within the church are seeking to change the “*form of sound words*” (2 Tim. 1:13) into a different approach of looking at the Bible in view of the culture of that day in contrast to the culture of today. Relativism becomes the philosophy of some who once defended the very truths which they now oppose. It would do all honest Bible students well to look at the quality of being a faithful soldier in the midst of the compromising atmosphere of the age.

### **Division In The Camp**

Schisms can be present in a group without a clear separation of the division into two localities. There was a division within the twelve apostles while they were all with Jesus. John recorded,

From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him. Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God. Jesus answered them, Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil? He spake of Judas Iscariot the son of Simon: for he it was that should betray him, being one of the twelve (John 6:66-71).

These passages show that there were some who separated themselves from Jesus by not walking with him anymore. However, there was also one who

continued to be in the presence of Jesus on a daily basis and yet was more of a traitor than those who left. There is more than one way to have division.

When the first congregation of the Lord's people on earth had great unity among them as a whole, there was still divisiveness in the camp. Luke records of the Jerusalem congregation,

And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common (Acts 4:32).

Here is a picture of the congregation as a whole. However, the next chapter shows a division within the camp.

But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, And kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet (Acts 5:1-2).

The next chapter also shows a problem that could have created a great division in the camp if not properly handled.

And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations (Acts 6:1).

Facing the battles of a local work is a constant task. Unity is key to the success of any work. The faithful soldier is not trying to win a personal victory for himself. He is simply seeking to please the One who chose him to be a soldier (cf. 2 Tim. 2:4).

When one looks further into the book of Acts, one sees a different kind of schism that had arisen within the church.

And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved (Acts 15:1).

Luke states further of those proponents,

But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses (Acts 15:5).

When the apostles and elders along with the brethren there came together to handle the matter, a statement was given to those Gentiles who were being troubled.

Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no such commandment (Acts 15:24).

These faithful brethren knew that the souls of these Gentiles were at stake. They handled the matter with caution and clear thinking. They had a necessary inference concerning the Gentiles in the account given by Peter (Acts 15:7-11). They had approved examples of Gentiles being converted by Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15:12). They had a direct statement of scripture to verify the truth of the matter (Acts 15:13-18). Their conclusion (Acts 15:19-21) was drawn from reasonable evidence and produced a clear Biblical solution. The sword of the Spirit was being used to great effectiveness in the battle to preserve the unity of the brotherhood in that day. However, the battle of that day did not end the struggle.

Paul wrote to the Corinthian brethren,

Now in this that I declare unto you I praise you not, that ye come together not for the better, but for the worse. For first of all, when ye come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you; and I partly believe it. For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you (1 Cor. 11:17-19).

These words should ring clear to every generation. Heresies will come and go among congregations and the brotherhood as proving grounds to show the genuineness of God's people. Liberalism and radicalism will plague the brotherhood, but out of it all will come forth a stronger people. There are some qualities of the Christian life which cannot be developed without struggle. Paul wrote previous to the eleventh chapter,

For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire (1 Cor. 3:11-15).

The value of the materials used in building "*God's building*" (1 Cor. 3:9) is seen when the fires of trial come against them. When the test comes, then does one see the value or lack of value in the materials used. When the trials come against the brotherhood, people



will begin to see out of those tests the genuine house of God.

Further in time during the first century were more words denoting division in the ranks. Peter wrote,

But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction (2 Peter 2:1).

John wrote,

Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us (1 John 2:18-19).

Compromise and treachery were common in the first century, even as is the case today. It is tragic enough that there are those outside of the church who fall prey to the devil’s devices. The worst problem comes when the opposition is from within. Peter wrote,

For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is

turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire (2 Peter 2:20-22).

### **Devices Of The Compromisers**

There are certain patterns that can be found in the New Testament that were true of the false teachers among the brethren. Peter gave the brethren a profile sketch of the type of false teachers which the brethren would find among them in the book of 2 Peter. Consider some of the details given and how true they fit situations today.

One trait was covert activity among the brethren. Peter wrote,

But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies... (2 Peter 2:1).

Paul wrote of certain false brethren,

And I went up by revelation, and communicated unto them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to them which were of reputation, lest by any means I should run, or had run, in vain....And that because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage (Gal. 2:2, 4).

False teachers often seek to cover their motives for spreading their doctrines to be effective. Jesus Himself said of false teachers, "*Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves*" (Matt. 7:15). How often does one hear someone say that some message which they had heard had an uncertain sound about it though they could not

quite put their finger on the problem. How many congregations have had problems arise within their members due to some agenda pushed privately in a classroom or home where the elders were absent from those gatherings?

Another trait was centering their target group upon the unstable and weak members. Peter wrote, “*Having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin; beguiling unstable souls...*” (2 Peter 2:14). Paul wrote,

Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple (Rom. 16:17-18).

Brethren need to be informed of the tactics of the compromisers so that they do not make themselves targets for their devices. The enemy had much rather capture easy prey than to battle the strong.

Another trait was a calling to hearers about freedom that they could not provide. Peter again wrote,

While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage (2 Peter 2:19).

Some today seem to think that they have found the truth about grace that the brotherhood has never realized. These compromisers look at salvation by grace as accepting all those who hold Christ as Savior and Lord. Jesus taught to the contrary,

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he

that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven (Matt. 7:21).

Some are now denying that immersion in water is essential to be saved by grace. This is said in spite of what Jesus said to Nicodemus,

Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God (John 3:5).

Some are maintaining that God accepts the worship of those who are simply sincere and devout in their worship having no need to find Biblical authority for their worship. This again is contrary to what Jesus said, where it is written, *“God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth”* (John 4:24). Truth is not subjective and subject to personal preferences. Jesus said, *“Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth”* (John 17:17).

Another trait was carnality. Peter wrote,

For when they speak great swelling words of vanity, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness, those that were clean escaped from them who live in error (2 Peter 2:18).

Today, the definition of what constitutes adultery has been changed by these influences. Entertainment and *“felt needs”* are promoted and exalted. Much of these are said to be an attempt to reach out to the community, especially the unchurched, to bring them to Christ.

Another trait was condemnation of the way of truth and those who stood with it. These are not satisfied simply to spread their doctrine. They are aggressive in their attacks upon the truth. Peter wrote,

And many shall follow their pernicious ways;  
by reason of whom the way of truth shall be  
evil spoken of (2 Peter 2:2).

Again,

But these, as natural brute beasts, made to be  
taken and destroyed, speak evil of the things  
that they understand not; and shall utterly  
perish in their own corruption (2 Peter 2:12).

Is it not odd that those who are outside of their  
*“fellowship”* are lauded as men and women of faith while  
those who uphold *“the faith which was once delivered  
unto the saints”* and are identified as members of  
churches of Christ are considered sectarians and  
legalists? Such is not odd when one sees the devices of  
compromise.

Another trait was the characteristic of pride. Peter  
wrote,

But chiefly them that walk after the flesh in  
the lust of uncleanness, and despise  
government. Presumptuous are they, selfwilled,  
they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities (2  
Peter 2:10).

Pride will often be found at the heart of treachery.  
Intellectual elitism has always been a problem in the  
world. Paul wrote to the Corinthians,

For ye see your calling, brethren, how that  
not many wise men after the flesh...are called:  
But God hath chosen the foolish things of the  
world to confound the wise... (1 Cor. 1:26-27).

### **Decisiveness Among The Committed**

James wrote, *“Submit yourselves therefore to God.  
Resist the devil, and he will flee from you”* (James 4:7).

Faithful soldiers of Christ must keep these words in mind. Jesus Himself resisted Satan with the words *“it is written”* (Matt. 4:4, 7, 10) and the text then stated, *“Then the devil leaveth him”* (Matt. 4:11). The Lord God has given man what he needs to face the wiles of the devil. Paul wrote to the Ephesian brethren,

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand (Eph. 6:10-13).

There are decisive actions to be taken as a soldier of Jesus Christ. These are mentioned in various passages of scripture throughout the New Testament.

The committed are to maintain their own personal faith and pure mind. Paul wrote to Timothy,

This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee, that thou by them mightest war a good warfare; Holding faith, and a good conscience... (1 Tim. 1:18-19).

Paul was an excellent example of such faith and conscience. When Paul stood before Agrippa, he stated,

I think myself happy, king Agrippa, because I shall answer for myself this day before thee touching all the things whereof I am accused of the Jews (Acts 26:2).

When Paul was on that momentous voyage during the storm, he stated to the others onboard,

And now I exhort you to be of good cheer: for there shall be no loss of any man's life among you, but of the ship. For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, Saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee. Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me (Acts 27:22-25).

When Paul was in prison in Rome, he wrote to the Philippians, *“I am set for the defence of the gospel”* (Phil. 1:17). Faith is the heart of faithfulness. One must believe in order to stand. Great confidence in the God of heaven and His word would make all soldiers of Christ to be as Joshua and Caleb (cf. Num. 13:30; 14:6-9).

The committed are also to be courageous. When the children of Israel were about to go into the land of Canaan and battle the inhabitants, the Lord said to Joshua, *“I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee. Be strong and of a good courage”* (Josh. 1:5-6). Four times in this chapter is the exhortation for strength of mind and courage of heart given (Josh. 1:6-7, 9, 18). One of the great hindrances of the good fight is a lack of courage to stand. Even when the children of Israel were to fight those carnal battles with their foes, Moses stated,

And the officers shall speak further unto the people, and they shall say, What man is there that is fearful and fainthearted? let him go and return unto his house, lest his brethren's heart faint as well as his heart (Deut. 20:8).

Facing the battles of a local work is a constant task. Unity is key to the success of that work. The development of courage comes with trust placed in the One who gives the victory and the commitment to live as the Lord of hosts desires.

The committed are again to endure the afflictions of the battle unto the end. Perseverance is a quality admired by all but possessed by too few. Battles will never be easy. Paul said of the Christian's warfare,

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor. 10:3-5).

Paul told Timothy twice to endure. *"Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ"* (2 Tim. 2:3). *"But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions"* (2 Tim. 4:5). All who are faithful soldiers of Christ will be a *"partaker of the afflictions of the gospel"* (2 Tim. 1:8).

The first century had its great soldiers of the cross. Paul addresses Epaphroditus with the words,

My brother, and companion in labour, and fellowsoldier, but your messenger, and he that ministered to my wants (Phil. 2:25).

A man by the name of Archippus is identified by Paul to be *"our fellow soldier"* (Phile. 2). The conflict may be difficult, but there were those who faced the challenge. The rewards stood before the soldiers of Christ



overshadowing the conflicts. Paul states of his own commitment to the Lord as a faithful soldier,

I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing (2 Tim. 4:7-8).

## Chapter 17

# Righteousness Versus Wickedness

*B. J. Clarke*



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**W**hat a timely theme has been chosen for the annual Truth In Love lectureship! It is always an honor to be associated with this great event, conducted by the great East Hill church. The faithful eldership, dedicated membership, and outstanding gospel preachers that make up this congregation have done much to extend the influence of the cause of Christ throughout the world.

My particular assignment in this series of lessons is to encourage people to make the right choice between righteousness and wickedness. To accomplish this task we wish to provide a brief survey of four major areas:

- (1) A brief survey of the righteousness of God.
- (2) A brief survey of righteousness vs. wickedness in the Scriptures.
- (3) A brief survey of modern day righteousness vs. wickedness.
- (4) A brief survey of how Jesus has made it possible for wicked men to be made righteous.

## A Brief Survey Of The Righteousness Of God

It is the very nature of the case that God possesses the attribute of being righteous. Moses declared as much when he said,

He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, **just and right is he** (Deut. 32:4).

After the plague of hail upon Egypt,

Pharaoh sent, and called for Moses and Aaron, and said unto them, I have sinned this time: **the LORD is righteous**, and I and my people are wicked (Exod. 9:27).

Ezra also attested to the righteousness of God when, near the close of his recorded prayer in Ezra 9, he confessed,

O Lord God of Israel, **thou art righteous...** behold, we are before thee in our trespasses: for we cannot stand before thee because of this (Ezra 9:15).

In the book of Nehemiah, the confession of the Levites is also recorded:

Howbeit **thou art just** in all that is brought upon us; for **thou hast done right**, but we have done wickedly (Neh. 9:33).

Because God is righteous, i.e., just and holy, He cannot allow sin to go unpunished. Habakkuk said to God, *“thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity”* (Hab. 1:13). A righteous God cannot tolerate unrighteousness! That being the case, He must demonstrate His attribute of righteousness by actively opposing that which is unrighteous. The final Day of Judgment will be a *“revelation of **the righteous**”*

**judgment of God** (Rom. 2:5). In fact, the saints at Thessalonica were reminded that “**it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation**” to them that trouble the saints (2 Thess. 1:6). In His righteousness, God will punish those who harm His people, and He will take vengeance on those who have never obeyed the gospel (2 Thess. 1:7-9). On the other hand, the saints of God will be glorified with Christ (2 Thess. 1:10).

### **A Brief Survey Of Righteousness Vs. Wickedness In The Bible**

We don't have to read very far into the Sacred Writings before we see man confronted with a choice between righteousness and wickedness. Although God had specifically forbidden Adam and Eve from eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:16-17), the text declares that,

...when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that **it was pleasant** to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat (Gen. 3:6, emp. mine BJC).

Centuries later, John summarized worldliness as “*the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life*” (1 John 2:16). Eve was motivated by the lust of the flesh when she saw “*that the tree was good for food.*” She was motivated by the lust of the eyes when she saw that the fruit upon the tree “*was pleasant to the eyes.*” And she manifested the pride of life when she partook of the fruit because of her desire to be wise, like God. Adam succumbed to her influence and participated in this transgression against God.

With the exception of Noah, and his family, the

human beings dwelling upon the earth before the flood were so wicked that every imagination of the thoughts of man’s heart was only evil continually (Gen. 6:5). Moses described the antediluvian world as “*corrupt*” and “*filled with violence*” (Gen. 6:11).

God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth (Gen. 6:12).

Tragically, mankind’s obsession with worldly pleasure came at a great price: destruction in the flood and loss of the soul (Gen. 6:13). In contrast, Noah was “*a just man and perfect in his generations*” (Gen. 6:9). He found grace in the eyes of the Lord; he and his family was spared by God.

According to Genesis 13:13, “*the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the Lord exceedingly.*” The Lord described their sin as “*very grievous*” (Gen. 18:20). The description of their tawdry behavior is recorded in Genesis 19. Their wickedness came in the form of homosexuality. Their destruction was the consequence (Gen. 19:24-29).

On numerous occasions, the children of Israel manifested a spirit of wickedness. One such description of their wickedness is found in 2 Kings 17:7-23 (Comp. 2 Chron. 36:11-21). They exhibited such wickedness in the following areas:

1. Fearing other gods, rather than the One True God (2 Kings 17:7).
2. Following the wisdom of the world (2 Kings 17:8).
3. Living as hypocrites by putting on a righteous public persona only to sin as soon they were “*in secret*” (2 Kings 17:9, 33).
4. Deliberately disobeying God’s explicit instructions to follow their own willful way (2 Kings 17:15, 34-40).

5. Refusing to listen to God's messengers (2 Kings 17:13-14; 2 Chron. 36:16)
6. Conforming to the world around them, rather than influencing the world to conform to God's authoritative law (2 Kings 17:15-17).
7. Leading their children astray (2 Kings 17:41).

In Luke 15, Jesus paints one of the more vivid pictures of wickedness in the Bible for us. He tells the parable of two sons. The younger of two sons had grown weary of waiting for his father to die and pass on his inheritance. So he boldly asked his father for immediate distribution of the goods he had coming to him. Then the text declares:

And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living (Luke 15:13).

Abandoning all sense of responsibility, the young son pursued pleasure with a ravenous appetite. He was so obsessed with his quest for pleasure that he paid no attention to how quickly his wealth was evaporating. Soon, "*he had spent all*" (Luke 15:14). To make matters worse, a mighty famine arose in the land and he was completely broke. He had nothing. In desperation, he took on a job feeding swine in the fields. When he observed that the swine had more food than he did, the harsh reality of his hedonistic binge, and its consequences, came crashing down around him. He remembered that even the household servants back at his father's house had more than enough food, while he was starving. Hence, he made the decision to go home and beg for no more status than that of a hired servant. However, the father would give him far more.

Upon his return, he received the compassionate

welcome and embrace of his father. Moreover, his father clothed him with the “*best robe*” and put a ring on his finger and shoes on his feet. Furthermore, the fattened calf provided more than enough food for this hungry son. Like so many before him (and after), he learned that the pleasures of sin last for only a season (Heb. 11:25). On the other hand, the pleasures available to us in the Father’s house are the purest and most permanent of pleasures!

One of the saddest examples of someone choosing wickedness over righteousness is recorded in 2 Timothy 4:10. Therein, Paul wrote, “*For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world.*” A co-worker of Paul in the ministry of the gospel (Col. 4:14; Phile. 24), Demas exchanged it all for the fleeting pleasures of the world. Paul does not give us all of the details as to how Demas apostatized. When his love affair with the world began? Did it happen abruptly, or gradually? We are not told, and it really does not matter. Paul does tell us that the root cause of his departure was that he fell in love with the present world. Apparently, Demas was blinded to the fact that the joy of worldly pleasures can never equal that of heavenly treasures. Sadly, the spirit of Demas is alive and well today. How many times have we seen a once faithful member of the Lord’s church fall away because of the lure of worldly pleasures?

Hosts of passages in the New Testament demonstrate the practice of wickedness. Paul mentioned those who were “*serving divers lusts and pleasures*” (Titus 3:3). Two passages stand out in providing a list of wicked acts committed by those who are pursuing wickedness. Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness, full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity, whisperers, Backbiters,

haters of God, spiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, Without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful: Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them (Rom. 1:29-32).

This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away. (2 Tim. 3:1-5).

He also foretold of a time when some would not endure sound doctrine but would instead, “*after their own lusts,*” heap to themselves to teachers, having itching ears (2 Tim. 4:2). Like those of Isaiah’s day, they would say, “*Prophecy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophecy deceits*” (Isa. 30:10).

The apostle Peter also described those who,

have walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries (1 Peter 4:3).

He also mentioned those who “*walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government*” (2 Peter 2:10). These same individuals “*count it pleasure to riot in the day time*” and “*allure through the lusts of the flesh*” (2 Peter 2:13, 18). Numerous scriptures describe various individuals as “*walking after their own lusts*” (2 Peter 3:3; Jude 1:16, 18).



## **A Brief Survey Of Modern Day Righteousness Vs. Wickedness**

It is impossible to survey the righteousness vs. wickedness in the Bible without being reminded of modern day circumstances. Indeed, an entire book could be written to chronicle the episodes of modern day wickedness. Tragically, the United States of America, is not only the number one superpower in the world, but may also be number one in wickedness.

1. We are number one in the world in teen pregnancy.
2. We are number one in the world in murders of young males between the ages of 15 and 24.
3. We are number one in the world in murder by handguns of people of all ages.
4. We are number one in the world in the percentage of population in prisons.

We are also among the leaders in the use of illegal drugs. Consider the following evidence:

1. Over 60% of the world's illegal drugs are consumed in the United States.
2. There are over 5,000 new cocaine users every single day in the United States.
3. An estimated 10% to 23% of workers use drugs on the job.
4. Federal agencies estimate that substance abuse costs nearly \$100 billion in lost productivity each year.

**The Dallas Morning News** featured a column by Sue Connally which carried this heart-rending account:

The shrill, piercing cry, almost inhuman in its intensity and timbre, sears its way into your conscience. Once you've heard it, you can never forget it. The sound is made by a baby only one

day old. But this is not a normal child; it was introduced to life “hooked” on heroin! The typical, disturbing scream means that the pain and rigor of withdrawal are already taking place. This little one became addicted when the woman carrying it used drugs. Muscles in the tiny body are taut, the rigid arms and legs flail incessantly, and the high-pitched cry continues for hours. Such children, although showing intense hunger, can’t retain their feedings. The tremors that rack them are so severe their bassinets shake. Occasionally there are even convulsions. “They could never rest, but would run themselves to death,” says Dr. Dolores Carruth, “unless we sedate them.”

Can you imagine babies being born screaming for a “fix?” That’s what sin does!

The Greek philosophers argued that one who was in a normal state of consciousness could never find the knowledge necessary to living a fulfilled life. Hence, one had to turn to the Greek god Dionysius in order to find release from the limitations of human knowledge. The method for accomplishing this goal was to drink oneself into a drunken stupor until he became free of all inhibitions. R. C. Sproul explains:

People believed that in a drunken stupor they could make contact with the supernatural world during their mystical experience of “*euphoria*,” an experience called not “*getting low*,” but “*getting high*.”...Added to this was an array of sexual involvements including temple prostitution. The prostitutes were able to help a person break down his inhibitions so that he could make contact with the gods and experience the feeling of ecstasy that was the release of the soul.<sup>1</sup>

The above-described obsession with alcohol and sex sounds all too familiar, does it not?

Although I almost always disagree with the views of Bill Maher, host of the late night television talk show, **Politically Incorrect**, I do think he was right on target when he said:

Recently, there’s been a trend in America that I find very disturbing...rewarding immoral and illegal behavior...For example, we now give free needles to junkies, which seems to me to be only a step away from giving condoms to rapists.

Speaking of television, modern day wickedness abounds therein. Whether it is the outrageous, vulgar, and blasphemous antics of Howard Stern, or the misleading emphasis of the show *“Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous,”* the television airwaves are saturated with wicked inducements. Certainly, modern media has become one of Satan’s greatest tools in accomplishing his goal of keeping our minds on secular matters. Through modern television programming, Satan’s henchmen (TV producers, scriptwriters, etc.) constantly assault and bombard the very foundations of our faith. The airwaves are full of *“electronic visions of a world so violent, sensual and narcotic that childhood itself appears to be under siege”* (**U. S. News and World Report**). Analyst and columnist Michael Novak wrote,

Our own public moral culture formed preeminently by television, cinema and music is a disgrace to the human race.

Even the **Ladies Home Journal** published an article entitled *“Living In Truly Tasteless Times,”* in which the author asserted:

...the American people appear to be unshockable now, desensitized even to genuine brutality–

not to mention simple civility—and possessed of an insatiable appetite for whatever might once have been thought unsavory, crude, crass and even decadent...our popular culture is becoming flashier, trashier, more vulgar and exploitive.

AND HOW DID THIS HAPPEN? How did television get from where it was in the 1950's to where it is in the 1990's? The answer is quite simple. Slowly, but surely, the media have pecked away and chipped away at our sensitivities, steadily seducing us into the surrender of our moral convictions until we have practically lost our ability to blush (Cf. Jer. 6:15). Like the frog in the kettle, we have been imperceptibly boiled, hard-boiled towards sin, one degree at a time. Modern songwriters promote wickedness in lyrics that Satan himself could have written. A popular singing group known as Salt N' Pepa has a song entitled "*None of Your Business.*" The song contains the following lyrics:

If I wanna take a guy home with me tonight,  
it's none of your business; if she wanna be a  
freak and sell it on the weekend, it's none of  
your business.

This author knows of more than one "*Christian*" mother who has purchased the compact disc containing this song as a present for their teenage daughters.

For more evidence of wickedness, read. Look at the headlines on the magazines located next to the checkout stand at the supermarket and you will see wickedness personified. One of the popular authors of articles for "*women's magazines*" is Helen Gurley Brown. In one of her articles, she redefined the meaning of "*promiscuity.*" It used to be that promiscuity meant "*having sexual relationships with more than one person, outside of marriage.*" However, Helen Gurley Brown wrote that

promiscuity is “*Having sexual relations with more than one person **in the same day.***” This philosophy of romance is not just confined to the magazine rack. Take a quick peek at some of the book titles at your local bookstore and you will see the influence of wickedness. Make no mistake about it. The attacks against God’s blueprint for the home have come fast and furious. Consider the following quotations:

Sex is a function of the body. A drive which man shares with animals. Like eating, drinking and sleeping. It’s a physical demand that must be satisfied. If you don’t satisfy it you will have all sorts of neurosis and repression psychosis. Sex is here to stay. Let’s forget the prudery that makes us hide from it. Throw away those inhibitions, find a girl who’s like minded and let yourself go (**Hugh Hefner, Playboy Editor, as reported by Eternity Magazine**).

Marriage has existed for the benefit of men and has been a legally sanctioned method of control over women...the end of the institution of marriage is a necessary condition for the liberation of women. Therefore, it is important for us to encourage women to leave their husbands and not to live individually with men...we must work to destroy it (marriage) (**From The “Declaration of Feminism”**).

We must destroy love. Love promotes vulnerability, dependence, possessiveness, susceptibility to pain, and prevents the full development of woman’s human potential by directing all her energies outward in the interest of others (**Women’s Liberation, Notes from the Second Year**).

It would be nice to say that such outrageous thinking

regarding human sexuality was totally confined to the secular world. However, it just isn't so. Even those who claim to represent God have perpetrated some of the most vicious attacks against His authority. For example, in 1971, four mainline denominational churches announced their new perspective on sex outside of marriage. They concluded that sex was intended to be enjoyed by any two lovers of either sex who could conjure up some kind of "*meaningful relationship*." At last, people had been "liberated" from their sexual "*bondage*." Millions celebrated by engaging in free love. And what are the consequences of this teaching?

1. We're now reeling under an epidemic of more than thirty-eight sexually transmitted diseases, with devastating new micro-organisms showing up every few years.
2. Every year 3,000,000 teenagers are diagnosed with a sexually transmitted disease.
3. Nine million adults are infected with an STD each year.
4. Cervical cancer in young women has soared to unprecedented rates.
5. An AIDS epidemic literally threatens the entire human family and twenty million Americans are afflicted with genital herpes. They can expect to suffer from it for the rest of their lives.
6. In the last year, just in the last year, more little babies have been born with a birth defect because of a sexually transmitted disease than all the babies affected by polio during the entire epidemic of the fifties. In just 365 days! It's the little children being born who are paying the price. Free love?
7. The state of Illinois this year will spend 853 million dollars dealing with the effects of illicit

sex. Free love?

Not long ago, in England, the Church of England and the Methodist Church sold their shares in British Satellite Broadcasting because of its plans to carry the Playboy Channel. Remarkably, Christie Hefner of Playboy Enterprises responded by expressing that she was puzzled over the decision because the Playboy Channel “*encourages relationships to last between couples.*”

For just a glimpse of the emotional consequences of not respecting God’s marriage laws, consider the following letter to Ann Landers:

Dear Ann Landers:

Ten years ago I left my wife and four teenagers to marry my secretary with whom I’d been having an affair. I felt I couldn’t live without her. When my wife found out about us she went to pieces. We were divorced. My wife went to work, and did a good job educating the boys. I gave her the house and part of my retirement fund.

I am fairly happy in my second marriage, but I’m beginning to see things in a different light. It hit me when I was a guest at our eldest son’s wedding. That’s all I was—a guest. I am no longer considered part of the family. My first wife knew everyone present, and they showered her with affection. She remarried, and her husband has been taken inside the circle that was once ours. They gave the rehearsal dinner, and sat next to my sons and their sweethearts.

I was proud to have a young pretty wife at my side. But it didn’t make up for the pain when I realized that my children no longer love me. They treated me with courtesy, but there was no affection or real caring. I miss my

sons, especially around holiday time. I am going to try to build some bridges, but the prospects don't look very promising after being out of their lives for 10 years. It is going to be difficult re-entering now that they have a step-dad they like. I'm writing in the hope that others will consider the ramifications before they jump. Just sign me — **Second Thoughts in P.A.**

A conversation between a teenager and his grandfather will help to remind us of the wisdom of following righteousness rather than wickedness in the realm of human sexuality. The young man said, "*Granddad, your generation didn't have all these social diseases. What did you wear to have safe sex?*" The wise old gentleman replied, "*A wedding ring.*"

Another area of sexuality where wickedness is rearing its ugly head is that of homosexuality. There is unquestionably more tolerance towards homosexuality today than in the past. For example, Paul Turner, so-called "*Pastor*" of the predominantly "*gay*" Good Samaritan Parish in Toledo, Ohio, argues that when Paul was condemning homosexuality in his writings, he was referring mostly to prostitution and promiscuity, not to a loving, caring relationship between two people. Mr. Turner, who recently celebrated his seventh anniversary with his male "*lover,*" says, "*How can you condemn a gay couple who are living the Christian life?*" The answer: Romans 1; 1 Corinthians 6!!! These sinners are described as participants in "*vile affections.*"

And what would qualify as a "*vile affection?*" Paul provides us with an example of such vile affections by discussing men and women "*leaving the natural use*" of their bodies to intercourse with those of the same sex. History records that homosexuality was rampant in ancient Rome. In fact, 14 of the first 15 emperors are



reported to have been professed homosexuals.<sup>2</sup> According to Paul, homosexuality is “*against nature*.” In other words, it is against God’s sexual design. Some homosexuals have tried to argue that the phrase “*against nature*” means against your in-born sexual orientation. They say, “*Homosexual relationships are not unnatural. They’re perfectly natural to me.*” Hence, they argue that it would be “*against nature*” for the heterosexual to engage in homosexuality and, likewise, it would be equally unnatural for a homosexual to participate in heterosexual activity.

In reply, we observe that all of the wishful thinking in the world won’t eradicate God’s plain teaching on the subject from the Bible. A journal article written by Richard Hays shows conclusively that the terms “*natural*” and “*unnatural*” were “*very frequently used...as a way of distinguishing between heterosexual and homosexual behavior.*”<sup>3</sup> Therefore, to act “*against nature*” is to violate God’s established order, and to act “*according to nature*” means to behave in harmony with God’s intent in creation. At creation, God saw that man was lonely and needed a mate. God did not bring another man to Adam! At the beginning, the Creator made them male and female (Matt. 19:3-9; Gen. 2:18-25).

In another desperate attempt to justify their perversion, homosexuals argue that what Paul is condemning in Romans 1 is a homosexual forcing himself on another against their will. The text declares otherwise. Paul speaks of men burning in their lust **one toward another** (v. 27). Thus, what Paul is condemning is homosexuality by mutual consent. Furthermore, homosexuals will often claim that God made them to be homosexuals. Have you ever heard a more blasphemous charge leveled against the Almighty? If that were true,

it would mean that God condemned folks to hell for something that He made them to be. 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 makes it abundantly clear that impenitent homosexuals will not inherit the kingdom of God. But if God made them that way, then He is responsible for them being unable to enter the kingdom of heaven! Who can believe such nonsense?

Despite the plain teaching of Scripture, homosexuality is more accepted in America now more than it ever has been in the history of our nation. Books like *“Heather Has Two Mommies”* target children to accept the homosexual agenda. The book seeks to explain that a little girl named Heather has a family just like other kids do; she just has two mommies. In other words, Heather has two lesbians for parents. The book goes on to *“explain”* to its young audience that Heather’s family is not freakish or deserving of censure. Indeed, wickedness is alive and well on planet earth! However, regardless of the increasing tolerance manifested toward homosexuality in society today, God’s Word still calls such activity: (1) *“vile affections;”* (2) *“against nature;”* (3) that which is unseemly; and (4) *“error.”*

A poignant summary of wickedness in America was captured by a Wichita preacher, whose opening prayer angered legislators in the Kansas House of Representatives.

We confess we have ridiculed the absolute truth of Your Word and called it moral pluralism. We have worshipped other gods and called it multiculturalism. We have endorsed perversion and called it an alternative lifestyle. We have exploited the poor and called it the lottery. We have neglected the needy and called it self-preservation. We have rewarded laziness and called it welfare. We have killed our unborn

and called it choice. We have shot abortionists and called it justifiable. We have neglected to discipline our children and called it building self-esteem.

As one legislator walked out and another sat down, Wright continued.

We have abused power and called it political savvy. We have coveted our neighbors' possessions and called it ambition. We have polluted the air with profanity and pornography and called it freedom of expression. We have ridiculed the time-honored values of our forefathers and called it enlightenment. (**National & International Religion Report**, February 19, 1996, p. 8.)

Another well-known religious activist once said,

If someone on American television in 1959 claimed to have had a vision stating: *“In the next thirty years we will have murdered twenty-five million children in ways too barbaric to describe (abortion). Sodomites will be parading in the streets. Politicians will be proclaiming gay pride week. Your tax money will be going to fund blasphemy and homosexual pornography. It will be illegal for a public schoolteacher to recite the Lord’s prayer or read Psalm 23 in her classroom, but that same teacher will be able to tell your child where to get a condom or an abortion without your consent or knowledge; that there would be a drug crisis, that we would have mass crime going on in our country.”* Who would have believed it? Nobody.

Sociologist and historian Carle Zimmerman, in his 1947

book **Family and Civilization**, recorded his keen observations as he compared the disintegration of various cultures with the parallel decline of family life in those cultures. Eight specific patterns of domestic behavior typified the downward spiral of each culture Zimmerman studied.

1. Marriage loses its sacredness; is frequently broken by divorce.
2. Traditional meaning of the marriage ceremony is lost.
3. Feminist movements abound.
4. Increased public disrespect for parents and authority in general.
5. Acceleration of juvenile delinquency, promiscuity, and rebellion.
6. Refusal of people with traditional marriages to accept family responsibilities.
7. Growing desire for and acceptance of adultery.
8. Increasing interest in and spread of sexual perversions and sex-related crimes.

Could the United States be headed down a path similar to that of ancient Rome? Let's look at the five reasons for Rome's downfall, as set forth by Edward Gibbon in his classic work **The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire**. They are:

1. The undermining of the dignity and sanctity of the home.
2. Increasing taxes and spending of public money for bread and circuses.
3. The mad craze for pleasure, with sports becoming more exciting and more brutal.
4. The building of gigantic armaments, when the real enemy is the decadence of the people.
5. The decay of religion, with faith fading into mere form.

## A Brief Survey Of What Jesus Did To Make Wicked Men Righteous

One of the best summaries of what Jesus did for man is captured in 1 Peter 3:18, wherein we read,

For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit.

The word translated “*just*” in this passage is from the same Greek word (*dikaios*) that is translated “*righteous*” elsewhere in the New Testament (Cf. Matt. 9:13; 13:43; 25:46; Rom. 3:23). Likewise, the word “*unjust*” in 1 Peter 3:18 is the same word that is translated “*unrighteous*” in 1 Corinthians 6:9. Thus, it would be just as accurate to translate 1 Peter 3:18 to say that,

Christ hath once suffered for sins, **the righteous for the unrighteous**, that he might bring us to God.

With the same theme in mind, Paul reminded the Corinthians of what God had done for them through Christ:

For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him (2 Cor. 5:21).

As our sinless sacrifice, “*Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us*” (Gal. 3:13). Passage after passage in the New Testament emphasizes that Jesus Christ is the one and only means whereby sinful men can be declared righteous. Consider the centrality of Christ as revealed in the following passages:

Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that **through this man** is preached

unto you the forgiveness of sins: and **by him all that believe are justified from all things**, from which **ye could not be justified by the law of Moses** (Acts 13:38-39).

But now **the righteousness of God without the law** is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even **the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ** unto all and upon all them that believe (Rom. 3:21-22).

Knowing that **a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ**, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, **that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law**: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified (Gal. 2:16).

In short, our salvation is,

not by works or righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5).

Rather, Christ Jesus *“is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption”* (1 Cor. 1:30).

Our response to the grace of God is to obey the gospel of Jesus Christ (Heb. 5:8-9). All that Jesus has done to make men righteous will be of no avail if they do not comply with the terms of His will. Only the blood of Christ can make men righteous, but in order to contact that cleansing blood, man must do what God has demanded. God requires men to hear, believe, repent, confess, be baptized, and continue steadfastly in the faith (Rom. 10:17; John 8:24; Acts 17:30; Acts 2:38; 1 Cor. 15:58).

## Conclusion

Satan seeks to convince us that we can never be fulfilled in the pursuit of righteousness and godliness. Satan’s message is that true fulfillment is found in wickedness rather than godliness. However, we must mark the immoral philosophy of the world as disgraceful. We must have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness. Instead, we must expose these works and lay them bare (Eph. 5:11). Some will ridicule and scoff at our conviction, but we must be steadfast and unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord (1 Cor. 15:58). The stigma formerly connected to sins such as adultery, homosexuality, materialism, stealing, cursing, dancing, immodest apparel, and others too numerous to mention, must once again be felt in our nation.

Let us never forget that *“to be carnally minded is death”* (Rom. 8:6). That is why Paul described the one living in pleasure as *“dead while she liveth”* (1 Tim. 5:6). Wickedness is a deadly philosophy! We need to recognize that when lust has conceived it brings forth sin, and sin, when it is full-grown, will bring forth death, the second death which is the eternal lake of fire (James 1:13-15; Rev. 21:8). Thus, we need to take heed lest our hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and the cares of this life, and we be found unprepared on the day when God will judge us (Luke 21:34). Paul’s inspired words to the church at Corinth are still good advice for us today:

Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part

hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty. Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God (2 Cor. 6:14-7:1).

As we stand against the wiles of the devil, let us remember the following admonitions from Holy Scripture:

1. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof (Rom. 6:12).
2. This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh...they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts (Gal. 5:16, 24).
3. Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth: fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry (Col. 3:5).
4. Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart (2 Tim. 2:22)
5. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof (Rom. 13:14).



### Endnotes

1 R. C. Sproul, **Lifeviews: Make An Impact on Culture and Society** (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1986), p. 130.

2 William Barclay, **The Letter to the Romans**, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), p. 32.

3 Richard Hays, “*Relations Natural and Unnatural: A Response to John Boswell’s Exegesis of Romans 1,*” **Journal of Religious Ethics**, Spring 1986, p. 192.

## Chapter 18

# Heaven Versus Hell

*Dave Miller*



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One of the critical needs of our day is a renewed awareness of the wrath of God. The Bible still teaches that a place called “*Hell*” is being prepared for all who fail to obey Jesus Christ. That place will involve eternal punishment. The Bible describes, in considerable detail, a Judgment Day that is coming, at which time all human beings who have ever lived will be judged and consigned to one of two realms for all eternity: Heaven or Hell.

The fear motive is the most prominent motive used by God in human history. Human civilization can become so degraded that even the threat of punishment will not turn people around. American society is fast approaching the point at which even “hellfire and brimstone preaching” will be ineffective. We must preach this Bible doctrine to the world around us before it is too late. Coming to grips with the reality of Hell can even help to jolt the change agents among us into sobering up from their intoxication with loose change.

Our English term “*hell*” is from the Greek term “*gehenna*” and is used in the New Testament to refer to

the place of final punishment. Jesus used the term eleven times and James used the term one time in James 3:6. Jesus stated in John 5:28,

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

The verse teaches the reality of both Heaven and Hell. You cannot believe in Heaven and not believe in Hell. The same Bible that teaches one, teaches the other.

Consider these scattered statements on the subject from the lips of Jesus:

When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit upon the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats....Then He will also say to those on the left hand, **Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels...** And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life (Matt. 25:31-32, 41, 46).

You cannot believe in eternal life and not believe in eternal punishment. The same Greek word is used in the same verse to describe both of those realms. Just as existence with God after this life is over will be forever, i.e., “*eternal*,” so separation from God due to one’s failure to obey God in this life will result in eternal punishment.

In Matthew 18:9, Jesus said,

And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you. It is better for you to

enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire.

Jesus is not teaching here the idea of mutilating the body. He's simply stressing the fact that whatever it takes for us to be obedient to God in this life—to be conformed to His will, to resist the forces of temptation that try to lure us into their grasp—whatever it takes to be faithful to God is worth making the sacrifice so that we might live with God forever rather than spend eternity in *“hell fire.”*

In Matthew chapter twenty-three, Jesus addressed Himself to the religious leaders of His day. Though these men were religious, Jesus said to them, *“Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell?”* That was a rhetorical question. Jesus was saying they were so wicked, they were so evil, they were so out of step with God's will in this life, that He saw no way for them to leave this life without facing damnation in Hell.

In Matthew 13:41-42, Jesus said,

The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

How can a person possibly listen to those words spoken by Jesus Christ nearly two thousand years ago and yet say there's no such thing as Hell?

In Revelation 20:15, we find the words, *“And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.”* Revelation 21:8 announces,

But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.

### **Unending, Conscious Pain?**

*“But does the Bible teach that Hell is a place of continuing, eternally conscious pain?”* Even within churches of Christ, some are saying, “No.” They are contributing to the weakening of doctrinal conviction and commitment to obedience that characterizes the current landslide of change. But the Bible is explicit and precise in its insistence that Hell is a place of perpetual consignment characterized by unending punishment.

In Mark 9:43 and 48, Jesus referred to Hell as a place of unquenchable fire and a place where the worm dies not. Some refuse to accept these details as factual by suggesting that no such condition is possible since, if something is on fire, it would burn up. Yet, we have similar examples in the material realm in Exodus 3:2 where Moses encountered the burning bush—a bush that was on fire but remained unconsumed. In Daniel 3:27, Daniel’s three comrades were thrown into a burning fiery furnace that was heated up seven times hotter than normally heated. The text says that the fire had “*no power on their bodies.*” But the same fire killed their accusers.

The real question to be decided on this point is: can the omnipotent God of both the universe and the eternal realm so arrange things that the wicked burn in the flames of Hell for eternity while continuing to exist consciously? Indeed, He can. One must deny the plain language of Scripture in order to avoid the force of these statements.

In Luke 16:19-31, we have a description of Hades. Hades must not be confused with Hell. Hades exists now and serves as the receptacle for disembodied spirits of those who have died on earth. Hell will commence after the Judgment Day at “*the end of the world*” (Matt. 13:49).

But Hades is depicted as resembling Hell in that in one portion of Hades the rich man is in ongoing, conscious torment in flames.

Several other phrases are used in the New Testament to describe the nature of Hell. In Matthew 8:12; 13:42, 50; 24:51 and Luke 13:28 we find the phrase “*there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth*”—obviously signifying pain and suffering. In Matthew 13:42, 50 we find the phrase “*furnace of fire*,” stressing further the fact that the pain will be severe. In Matthew 22:13 and 25:30 we find reference to “*outer darkness*.”

Notice that all of these phrases, “*weeping and gnashing of teeth*,” “*furnace of fire*,” and “*outer darkness*,” emphasize the fact that Hell will be a place where the wicked and disobedient will be consigned and fire will cause continuing agony.

Some insist that consignment to Hell will bring an end to their existence. But these passages assert that consignment to Hell will create and commence agony for those placed there. The fact that these individuals are weeping proves that they are conscious and continuing to exist—they are neither annihilated nor extinct. They do not cease to exist.

In Matthew 10:28 and Mark 12:9, we find a term translated “*destroy*.” In Matthew 7:13; Hebrews 10:39; 2 Peter 3:7; and Revelation 17:8, 11, we find another Greek term that is translated “*destruction*” and “*perdition*.” In each of these cases, the destruction spoken of entails an ongoing condition—not loss of existence. Those who are destroyed suffer a loss of well-being, happiness and being blessed.

Notice carefully Revelation 20:10. The beast of chapter 17:8, 11 went “*into perdition*.” Did that mean he became extinct or unconscious? No, because in chapter

20:10 he is described as existing along with the false prophet and the Devil and together they are “*tormented day and night forever and ever.*”

Still another Greek term is used in 1 Thessalonians 5:3 and 2 Thessalonians 1:9 translated “*destruction.*” Again, the word refers not to annihilation but to an ongoing condition of banishment “*away from*” God. So the word refers to loss of well-being, not loss of being.

In Matthew 25:46, the term that is translated “*punishment*” includes the idea of “*torture*” or “*him who suffers.*” The passage of Scripture is stressing the eternal suffering which will last as long as the eternal life mentioned in the same verse.

A participial form of the same word is used in 2 Peter 2:9 and translated in the ASV “*under punishment*” to denote a continuing condition of punishment in Hades between physical death and the Judgment Day. In 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6, we are told that disobedient angels are being “*reserved,*” i.e., detained, kept or imprisoned, until the Judgment, at which time they will be permanently consigned to eternal suffering (2 Peter 2:17; Jude 13).

In Matthew 18:8; 25:41; and Jude 7, the word “*eternal*” is used to speak of “*eternal fire.*” In Matthew 25:46, the term is used to refer to “*eternal punishment.*” In 2 Thessalonians 1:9, we find “*eternal destruction,*” and in Hebrews 6:2, we find “*eternal judgment.*” So in each of these cases, the Bible is referring to unceasing, unending, perpetual pain, forever excluded and banished from God’s presence.

Another relevant term found in the New Testament is translated “*cast*” or “*thrown.*” Matthew 5:29 speaks of the entire person being “*cast into hell.*” Matthew 13:42 speaks of being “*cast into a furnace of fire.*”

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Revelation 20:10, 15 speaks of being “*cast into the lake of fire and brimstone.*” Again, notice that the action of “*casting*” cannot refer to being cast into unconsciousness or extinction, for Revelation 19:20 describes those who are “*cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone.*”

Closely related to the term “*cast*” is the term “*cast out*” in Luke 13:28. The New Testament speaks of those who are “*cast out into outer darkness*” (Matt. 8:12; 22:13; 25:30). Once again, this term cannot refer to being annihilated or rendered unconscious and extinct because in Matthew 8:16 (four verses after the reference to those who were “*cast out into outer darkness*”), demons were “*cast out*” of many people. Those demons were not rendered extinct, but merely “*sent away*” (8:31). Likewise, Satan was not annihilated when he was “*cast out*” in John 12:31.

Another extremely interesting word is used in the New Testament to connote the pain associated with punishment after this life is over. In Luke 16:23, 28, reference is made to “*torment*” in the Hadean realm. In Matthew 18:34, we have a reference to the “*tormentors*” which, in context, identifies what God will do to the wicked. In Revelation 14:10-11, God’s wrath will be executed against the disobedient in that they will be “*tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb.*” The passage proceeds to describe the continual nature of this punishment—forever and ever with no rest day or night.

So the Bible clearly teaches that the same fate that awaits Satan and his henchmen, also awaits all who are disobedient to God and who leave this life unforgiven by the blood of Jesus. In Revelation 20:10, Satan and his cohorts are cast into the lake of fire and brimstone and tormented day and night forever and ever. In verse fifteen,



the same is true for all those whose names are not found written in the Book of Life. Matthew 25:41 makes plain the fact that disobedient human beings will be placed in the same location as the Devil and his angels. Therefore, according to the Bible, Hell will be permanently populated by Satan as well as all human beings who do not follow God’s will in this life.

### **Conclusion**

Does Hell exist? Absolutely! The Bible teaches the existence of Hell as clearly as it teaches the existence of Heaven, God and Christ. If we believe the Bible, if we believe Jesus Christ, if we believe God, we must believe in Hell. Perhaps fear of Hell is not the most mature motivation for obeying God and living faithfully to Him (e.g., 1 John 4:18). But it certainly is a valid scriptural motive for causing a person to consider how he’s living in this life in order that he might be prepared to leave this life in good graces with God. In fact, the failure to give full recognition to the reality of Hell and eternal punishment has created a climate that is conducive to softened doctrinal convictions and openness to unscriptural change.

We need a renewed awareness of God’s anger. Hezekiah pleaded with his contemporaries to “*serve the Lord your God, that the fierceness of His wrath may turn away from you*” (2 Chron. 30:8; cf., 29:8, 10). We need more people who “*tremble at the word of the Lord*” (Ezra 9:4; 10:3).

Our generation has so misemphasized and distorted the love, grace and compassion of God that we no longer have a healthy respect for the wrath of God. Statements like, “*It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God,*” and “*our God is a consuming fire,*” and “*Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord,*” have no real

meaning to people today—even in the church (Heb. 10:31; 12:29; 2 Cor. 5:11; cf., Ezra 9:14).

Nevertheless, the New Testament is unmistakably clear in its insistence that each one of us simply must decide in this life to conform ourselves to the requirements of the New Testament. We must refrain from conducting ourselves unfaithfully.

All those who fail to become Christians in the appointed way and all Christians who fail to live the Christian life faithfully have but one inevitable eternal destiny. The following Scriptures underscore this critical fact. They help us to gain a healthy perspective in learning to live life in view of eternity:

But to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil.... For there is no partiality with God (Rom. 2:8-11).

And I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, fear Him! (Luke 12:4-5).

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men... (2 Cor. 5:10-11).

...when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with

everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power (2 Thess. 1:7-9).

May all persons embrace a healthy awareness of the wrath of God and the prospect of an eternal Hell as appropriate punishment for those who fail to take God seriously in this life.

### Endnotes

1 For example, see Edward Fudge, **The Fire That Consumes** (Houston, TX: Providential Press, 1982); F. LaGard Smith, “A *Christian Response to the New Age Movement*,” Pepperdine University Lectureship (April, 1988), tape #3; John N. Clayton, “*Book Reviews*,” **Does God Exist?** (Sept./Oct., 1990), p.21. For decisive refutations of these prominent spokesmen, see Gary Workman, “*Eternal Punishment*” in Dub McClish, ed., **Studies in the Revelation** (Denton, TX: Valid Publications, 1984), pp. 492-508; Wayne Jackson, “*Changing Attitudes Toward Hell*,” **Christian Courier** 28/6 (Oct., 1992):21-22; Wayne Jackson, “*Debate Challenge Withdrawn*,” **Christian Courier** 23/8 (Dec., 1987), p.31. Additional research among our brethren on the general subject include: various chapters in Jim Laws, ed., **Then Cometh the End** (Memphis, TN: Getwell church of Christ, 1999), pp. 69-88; Terry Hightower, ed., **Whatever Happened To Heaven and Hell?** (San Antonio, TX: Shenandoah church of Christ, 1993); and Thomas B. Warren, **Immortality: All Of Us Will Be Somewhere Forever** (Moore, OK: National Christian Press, 1992).

2 William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, **A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament**, 2nd ed. (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), pp. 440-441; Joseph H. Thayer, **A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament** (repr. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1977), p. 353.

3 Much of this lecture was adapted from the author’s book **Piloting the Strait**.