

**ANCIENT FAITH
MODERN WORLD**

2010

**The 38th Annual Lectureship
East Tennessee School of Preaching and Missions**

**ANCIENT FAITH/
MODERN WORLD**

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2010

The 36th Annual Lectureship
East Tennessee School of Preaching and Missions
Knoxville, Tennessee

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ANCIENT FAITH/MODERN WORLD

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PREFACE

There are many who are telling all who will listen that the ancient faith spoken of in the Bible is just that, ancient. They look at the Bible and see passages and entire letters written to people who were living in the midst of 1st Century culture and conclude they are not applicable to the modern world in which we live. The only hope they see is in updating its message to meet the demands of the 21st Century.

It is important for every Christian to develop, or strengthen, knowledge of and confidence in the ancient faith and its ability to guide us through the trials of the modern world in which we live. Thus, the lectureship committee chose the topic: Ancient Faith/Modern World. Each lesson was assigned based upon particular needs or areas of weakness that called for our attention.

As you read these lessons, it is our prayer that you will have your faith strengthened for the temptations which await you during the remainder of your life. We pray the Lord will give you the wisdom to know how to apply what you have learned to the circumstances in which you may find yourself. After examining the message presented in light of God's word (Acts 17:11), we would urge you to assimilate them and resolve to teach others also (2 Tim. 2:2).

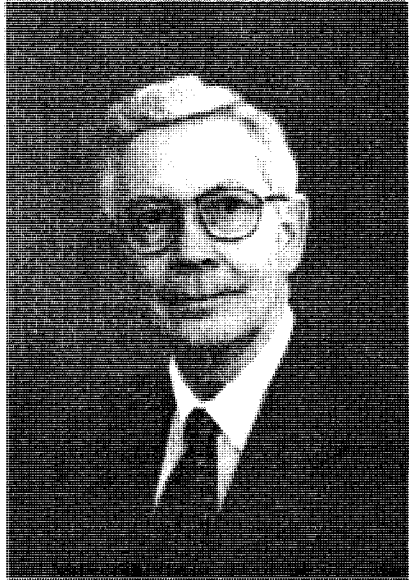
Special thanks go to Nell Rich for proofreading each manuscript at least once and sometimes over and over again. Her desire, and ours, was that readers of this book count it a valuable tool. A very special thank you to Paul Sain for printing the book.

Gary C. Hampton, ETSPM Director
36th ETSPM Lectures

DEDICATION

Superlative words such as “great,” and “excellent,” are so often overused we may find it difficult to appreciate them fully. When, however, it comes to listening to a sermon, participating in a Bible class, or reading an article or book, the man chosen as dedicatee of the 2010 lectureship book delivers genuine quality. In pulpit, classroom, books, articles, and correspondence courses he openly excels.

His long and distinguished life of Christian service as a preacher and educator continue to leave a legacy of outstanding accomplishment. He is a Freed-Hardeman graduate with fifty-six years preaching experience including seven years as director of East Tennessee School of Preaching and Missions. The wisdom he has acquired as a faithful man of the Book is arresting in its depth as well as in its practicality. The lives he has touched and the influence he has exerted literally reach around the world. Additionally, concerning his own family of four children (his three sons are all involved in preaching), ten grandchildren (another preacher), and two great-grandchildren, he and his good wife have every reason to be proud.



We at ETSPM and the Karns congregation are therefore delighted to honor **David R. Pharr** with the dedication of this 2010 lectureship book. We hope the future will long continue our partnership in the work of Jesus. Our prayer is that God will grant many more opportunities for David to both write and speak for this uplifting gathering of brothers and sisters. We thank you David, as well as your good wife, Peggy, for more contributions than we can number. You have left an enduring mark of superlative service and devotion. This token of honor can convey only a small segment of our deep appreciation. David, thank you for all the very special memories!

Edwin S. Jones

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SECTION I

GENERAL LESSONS

THINGS THAT CHANGE AND THINGS THAT DON'T SAM BARTRUG

It would be impossible for even the most casual observer to miss the emphasis on change in the religious community today. While that has generally been the case in the denominational world, and we have come to expect it to be thus; more recently it seems to be the rule rather than the exception in our own fellowship.

It would be difficult to read any of our brotherhood publications without coming across some discussion regarding change. Some of those publications decry change and have set themselves to withstand it no matter what form it takes. Some publications advocate wholesale change and seem to be intent on making such changes no matter the cost to any given congregation of believers. Some

Sam Bartrug currently preaches for the 7th Street congregation in McConnelsville, Ohio and also serves as one of the elders there. He is a graduate of Ohio Valley University and has preached for most of his adult life in the Ohio Valley area. He has done local work in WV, OH, and VA. He also does extensive Gospel Meeting work and has spoken on several brotherhood lectureships. He and his wife of 38 years, Marty, are the parents of three children and especially enjoy their three grandchildren.

publications opine that change is sometimes appropriate and desirable but that caution should always be the rule of the day so that we do not go too far with such change.

Our lectureships, periodicals, preacher's meetings, etc. have become hotbeds for debate over those who have come to be known as "change agents," and whether their intent and methodology will destroy our effort to restore New Testament Christianity, or lead us closer to what God has wanted us to be all along.

Many Christians are at times taken aback at some of the changes we have seen over the past few years, and often pause to wonder just what the church will be like in a couple of generations if change continues at the pace we have recently witnessed. There was a time when one could say, when preaching about the church, that you could travel from one ocean to the other and no matter where you stopped to worship with the brethren you would find a commonality in the worship and teaching. It would not be accurate to make that assertion today. Although we, in most cases are still more alike than we are different, things truly have changed among us. This reality begs several questions as to the desirability and legitimacy of such change. This lecture, and this lectureship, is designed to explore just where the Ancient Faith fits into our modern world and, of necessity, just how much we can or should change to accommodate and appeal to the lost and dying world around us. I will try to limit my remarks to three considerations: 1) Change in the religious realm was not unheard of in the Biblical record; 2) Some things are placed off limits to change in the Biblical record; and 3) Some ways to tell the difference between allowable and forbidden change can be determined by study of the Biblical record.

RECORDED CHANGES IN THE BIBLICAL RECORD

One would have to be either blind or willfully ignorant to miss the changes that took place in religion

throughout the Biblical record. Some of these changes were both sanctioned and initiated by God Himself while others met with His strong disapproval; but they occurred nonetheless. One of the first things I learned as a child was that God has dealt with mankind in three distinct and very different dispensations throughout history. The first was often referred to as the Patriarchal Age or Patriarchal Dispensation in which God spoke and worked primarily through the head of a family. During this time there was no written law and God's will was often known only through direct revelation. This age continued from Creation till sometime following the Exodus of Israel from Egyptian bondage, when a change in mode of revelation was brought about by no less than God Himself. This change ushered in what we know as the Mosaic Age or Mosaic Dispensation. Things changed dramatically when God met with Moses on Mount Sinai and provided him with the Law (including the Ten Commandments) by which Israel would be governed religiously, socially, and morally. Religion now took on a more formal and ritual nature for the descendants of Abraham although the non-Jewish world may well have remained under the less formal and not so well defined religion of the Patriarchal Age (Rom. 2:14-16). There was hardly a single aspect of Jewish life that was not affected by, and changed dramatically by God Himself in the act of giving the Law. The Mosaic Age allowed the Jewish people to know exactly what God desired of them in matters of ritual, morality, and relationships through a written law spelling out such matters quite distinctly. This Mosaic Age continued for centuries and covered a period from the giving of the Law clear through the lifetime of Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus had a deep respect for the Law (Matthew 5:17-19) and yet began to prepare His disciples for yet another God-initiated change. With His death, burial, and resurrection that change went into effect as chronicled by Paul in Colossians 2:13-17. (All Scripture is taken from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted.):

And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of our flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it. Therefore let no man judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or Sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.

This third and final Age is generally known as the Christian Age or the Christian Dispensation. When it began, following the death of Christ and the beginning of the Church, it brought such dramatic change to both Jew and Gentile that the religious world has never been quite the same since. While I am well aware that each of these Ages is worthy of its own in-depth discussion that is beyond the scope of my presentation, I merely mention them to point out the fact that the Bible not only records, but sanctions, tremendous changes in religion during the time span it covers.

The sweeping changes mentioned above also required more limited and detailed changes at times in the religious world they affected. For instance the transition from the Patriarchal Age to the Mosaic Age changed the rules for offering sacrifices. During the former, sacrifices were often offered wherever a worshipper happened to be at the time and often to celebrate God bringing him safely there (Gen. 12:7-9; 13:18; 26:23-25). During the latter when the tabernacle (and later the temple) was sanctioned by

God in the giving of the Law, sacrifice became limited to wherever it happened to be (Exod. 25-31; John 4:20). Jesus indicated that this would change again and that the worship of God would not be limited geographically when the Mosaic Age gave way to the Christian Age (John 4:21-24).

Another example of the above is seen in the author of Hebrews making the fact that Jesus is the high Priest of the Christian religion one of his central themes (Heb. 2:17-18; 3:1; 4:14-5:10; 6:17-20; 7:12-8:13; 9:11-14; 9:24-28; 10:19-25). In order to make this become a reality, however, a tremendous change in the Law had to occur. For this reason the author, who plainly declares Jesus to be our High Priest in 8:1 points out that this was accomplished by a change of the law rather than a change in the Law (7:12). One author has noted the following:

The law and the Levitical priesthood went together. One was integral to the other because on the basis of the priesthood the law was given. This is the meaning of the parenthetical statement in verse 11. Much of the law depended on the sacrificial system and could not operate without it. The priesthood was to the law what a foundation is to a building. Take away the foundation and the superstructure comes down with it. For the author it was axiomatic that if a new priestly order was established, that involved also a change of the old legal superstructure (Lightfoot 142).

Other changes that come to mind in the Biblical narrative concerning acceptable religious expression include the shift from Saturday to Sunday as a day of religious

focus (Exod. 20:8; Acts 20:7); a separate priesthood as opposed to the priesthood of all believers (2 Peter 2:5, 9); and doing away of animal sacrifices in the wake of the superior sacrifice of Jesus Himself (Heb. 9-10).

The obvious conclusion in all of this is that change is not always, nor of necessity, a dirty word! It is not a badge of honor to resolutely oppose any and all change. The Bible repeatedly shows us that to be acceptable to God required accepting change from time to time. Peter had to change his views on dietary laws - and on a deeper level his views on God's feelings for Gentiles - (Acts 10-11). Paul had to embrace the change from loyal Pharisee and defender of the Law to devoted and zealous proponent of the Gospel (Acts 9; Philippians 3). Ephesians believers had to submit to a baptism in the name of Jesus because the baptism of John was no longer valid and acceptable in the eyes of God (Acts 19:1-7).

SOME CHANGES ARE OFF LIMITS

Having said all the above, it is now important that it also be pointed out that some things were not subject to change as well. Unless God changes the rules no man is free to ignore what He has set forth as acceptable in the exercise of religion, relationships, or morality. While change was a perceivable reality in the Biblical record this is not to say that man was free at any time to make changes apart from God's revealed will. Cain was not free to change God's will concerning what constituted an acceptable sacrifice and when he attempted to do so it met with God's express disapproval and condemnation (Gen. 4:3-5; Heb. 11:4). There was no justification for Moses to change God's express instructions on supplying water to the people of Israel (Num. 20:1-13), and the end result of this unacceptable change was his being denied

entry into Canaan. David lacked the authority to ignore or disregard God's instructions for transporting the Ark of the Covenant and when he did so it had tragic results (2 Sam. 6; 1 Chron. 15). Jesus strongly condemned those who substituted their own ideas and traditions in a manner that set aside the express will of God (Matt. 15:1-9), and warned those who would follow Him that the Law was to be respected for so long as it remained in effect (Matt. 5:17-19). When the Gospel of Christ came into effect Paul forcefully admonished the Galatians for entertaining thoughts of changing it (Gal. 1:6-9). Jude felt so strongly about the changeless nature of the Christian message that he even changed his intended topic matter in order to write and challenge his readers to defend it (Jude 3).

What are we to think about what Nadab and Abihu would say in regard to whether God's laws can be capriciously set aside and ignored (Lev. 10:1-3)? Is it just coincidence that it is said, time and time again, that Moses followed the Divine instructions for constructing the tabernacle without variance (Exod. 35-40)? Is there any substantive reason to doubt if the Lord really meant it when He said not to tamper with the message of Revelation (Rev. 22:18-19)?

SOME WAYS TO TELL THE DIFFERENCE

How does one go about determining just what is open to change and what is not open to change when it comes to the Ancient Faith? The last portion of this study is not designed to be exhaustive, but it is hoped that it can provide some fodder for thought and just how to tell the difference between what may be open to change and what may not be.

One consideration in regard to what changes and what

does not change may well be suggested by Mark 16:15-20. What allows us to be justified in retaining verse 16 as a permanent fixture of the Gospel and relegating verses 17-18 to its distant past? It seems to this author that the crux of the matter is that two different needs are under consideration: 1) the need for salvation from one's sins; and 2) the need of early preachers to be able to establish the Divine origin of their message. The first need is an ongoing need. There will never be a time when man does not need forgiveness (Rom. 3:23), thus there will never be a time when belief and baptism are outdated. The second need was a temporary need. Eventually the Word of God would be completed and one could know whether the truth was being preached by comparing what was said to what the New Testament contained, thus there would come a time when miracles could and should cease (1 Cor. 13:8-10; Heb. 2:1-4). We are free to address temporary needs with whatever means of solution fits best; we are not free to change God's solutions to the permanent needs we face!

A second matter for consideration in this regard involves the difference between substance and methodology. God tends to be very specific when it comes to substantive matters, and at the same time tends to be quite general when it comes to methods of getting them accomplished. We understand this quite well in regard to the Great Commission (Mark 16:15-16; Matt. 28:18-20). We admit and accept the responsibility to take the Gospel to the lost and dying world about us and feel compelled to make sure it is the same Gospel preached in the First Century; yet we may vary greatly from one period of time to another in how we go about getting it to them. None of us would argue that God demands we travel by foot or on the back of an animal to take the unchangeable message of Christ from one place to another just because those were primary modes of travel in apostolic times. There was a time when

getting someone to a church service was our preferred method of teaching them the truth. Cottage meetings and one-on-one studies later became the rule, rather than the exception, in spreading the message of Christ. Would anyone dare to suggest that the apostles would not take advantage of computer and advanced communication technology today if they had them at their disposal in taking the Gospel into the entire world? We would rightly argue that the message is the same as it always has been, but with that argument would be the understanding that methods of taking the Word of God to the lost may not only change, but improve from generation to generation. When considering how the will of God can be better accomplished without changing in any way the essence of that will we may feel free to adapt and change where expedient.

There are other considerations as well, but perhaps the most important factor is whether something grows out of a "thus saith the Lord," or not. It is the conviction of this author that this is especially significant when it comes to the areas of salvation and worship. Since forgiveness takes place in the mind of God it does not even make good nonsense for man to feel like he can dictate the terms thereof. When God tells us we must hear in order to believe (Rom. 10:17), when He tells us that pleasing Him is impossible without faith (Heb. 11:6), when He demands that we repent or perish (Luke 13:3, 5), when He calls upon us to make some sort of confession of our faith (Acts 8:37; Rom. 10:9), and when He spells out over and over again the fact that baptism is associated with and actually precedes one's salvation (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; Acts 22:16; Rom. 6:1-6; Gal. 3:26-27; 1 Pet. 3:21); what part of that do I have the right to change, reject, or disregard? When did it become man's prerogative to dictate salvation's terms to God? Since God is the ultimate

object of worship it does not even make good nonsense for man to feel free to change what He has said to us about it! Whether our worship is entertaining, interesting, appealing, etc. may well be legitimate concerns; but they are not the ultimate concern when it comes to worship! The ultimate concern will always be whether it is pleasing and acceptable to God or not! It seems obvious to this writer that the one being worshiped is the one with the right to determine what that worship should be and that the one worshiping should be content to offer such with a glad and grateful heart. Apart from such we have already seen that one's worship becomes vain (Matthew 15:8-9). Because the New Testament addresses such things as salvation and worship what is said about them is off limits to change, unless God changes them Himself!

CONCLUSION

Things change. That fact cannot be denied. Things have changed dramatically from time to time in the realm of religion. The Bible documents those changes openly and freely. There are some things, however, that are eternal! They are not subject to change without God's permission. When it comes to the teaching of the New Testament such permission will not be forthcoming, for ours is a "faith once for all delivered" (Jude 3). Jesus is said to be the same "yesterday, today, and forever" (Heb. 13:8). We who would follow Him, and be His disciples should be content with what He teaches us we should be, to do what He teaches us we should do, and to be supremely appreciative that He has not left these things to fickle humanity. We, His church, would do well to emblazon the following words on our hearts:

The church of Jesus Christ is neither Jewish, Catholic nor Protestant. It is nondenominational in its origin, worship

and organization. It is the body of Christ, functioning according to New Testament pattern and worshipping according to New Testament instructions, extensive enough to embrace in its fellowship all who comply with God's requirements and who thus become part of that body. Moving on through time to its ultimate victory this "stone cut out of the mountain without hands" survives the rise and fall of temporal kingdoms and proves itself to be that which in reality it is – the Eternal Kingdom (Mattox 351).

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THE ANCIENT FAITH AND THE ANCIENT OF DAYS

DAVID PHARR

The theme for the 2010 East Tennessee School of Preaching lectures is titled "Ancient Faith/Modern World." We live in a rapidly changing world. The Twentieth Century brought advances in science and technology which could not have been imagined in all the centuries before. We are wondering now what marvels are yet to be developed in the Twenty-first. I think it is a fair evaluation to say that as a society we are proud of being modern, proud that we live in a modern world, a world that is so much better than all the worlds of the past. In regard to the gadgets and conveniences, as well as intellectual advancements, it is hardly expected that people would want to return to what used to be. We all know that in so many ways "the good old days" were really not so good. Who wants

David R. Pharr was director of ETSPM 1988-1995. Prior to coming to Knoxville he worked with churches in West Virginia and Ohio, then for almost 25 years with Charlotte Avenue Church in Rock Hill, SC. After ETSPM he was with the Clinton, TN, church for three years before returning to Rock Hill. He is now retired from local ministry and plans to do meetings and other appointments and to write. He is editor of Carolina Messenger and writes for The Spiritual Sword.

to go back to the limitations of the Nineteenth Century, much less to even more primitive times? It might seem a dichotomy, therefore, to suggest that this modern world

needs an ancient faith. But that is the very thing being urged in this lectureship. It is the message of churches of Christ.

At the same time, however, we have to admit that in so many ways the world of today is no better than all of human history—when we consider the savagery of war, and the selfishness of self interest, and sinfulness of our souls. The point is that science and technology have not mastered the enormity of sin. How Paul summarized human depravity is as applicable now as it ever was. He says this about our sin problem, “For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another” (Titus 3:3). [All Scripture is quoted from the KJV unless otherwise noted.] Our commitment to the ancient faith is because it is the means by which God in his grace has given us a solution for our sin problem. We are talking about the way to heaven. Ultimately, this is not about mere ritual, or ecclesiasticisms, or even about behavior. It is about how to be saved, how to please God, how to escape damnation, and how to get into heaven.

The wording of my specific assignment for this morning is “The Ancient Faith and the Ancient of Days.” The thing to be emphasized is that in all considerations about what we are and ought to be: it is all about God. “The Ancient of Days” is Bible terminology in reference to God. The lesson title is a play on the word “ancient.” It connects the ancient faith with the One who is “the Ancient of Days.”

THE ETERNAL UNCHANGING GOD

Three times in the seventh chapter of Daniel we find God so named. In a vision the prophet sees four beasts

which identify four world powers (Dan. 7:1-8). It's not our purpose now to examine the details of the vision, but it can be confidently determined that what was represented by these beasts were the empires of Babylon, of the Medes and Persians, of Greece, and of Rome. These would be forces that would greatly affect Jewish history for the next six centuries. (Bible students will recognize historical parallels in Nebuchadnezzar's prophetic dream in chapter 2.) The text then brings us to God's judgment of those empires as their "thrones were cast down." We are noticing especially how the One who sits in judgment is described. Daniel said:

I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool: his throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire. A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him: thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him: the judgment was set, and the books were opened (Dan. 7:9-10; cf. vv. 13, 22).

The imagery pictures a wise and elderly man who sits in the seat of judgment. He is ancient in regard to his days. We understand, of course, that it is God that is being represented. The point is not that God is an old God, but rather is portrayed in the vision as if he is a venerated man who is on the throne of judgment. His "garment was white as snow"—clothed in perfect purity. His hair was "like the pure wool"—perfect holiness. "A fiery stream issued and came forth before him"—fire that destroys sinners and purifies the people of God. "Thousand thousands" and "ten thousand times ten thousand stood

before him”—the armies of his majesty and might. “[T]he Great, the Mighty God, the Lord of hosts, is his name” (Jer. 32:18).

The ancient days of the white haired man says to us that God has been God through the ages. “Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God” (Ps. 90:1f). Especially pertinent, then, for our subject today is that the ancient God is still the same God, and that he has not changed. Yes, we live in an ever changing world, but God has not changed. “I am the Lord, I change not” (Mal. 3:6). With him there is “no variableness, neither shadow of turning” (Jas. 1:17). We are in a modern world, but God is God of past, present and future.

Though this judgment was against the empires of the beasts, the Revelation of John appropriates parts of the scene to foresee the judgment at the end of the world.

And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works (Rev. 20:11-12).

Such biblical portrayals of God in judgment ought to humble us to realize that: “[T]he Lord is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him” (Hab. 2:20), which

is to say we ought to yield in reverent submission to his will. What must be understood is that the ancient faith, which was the faith system given through the apostles, was given by the God who is not affected by the changes in human society. He has no need to catch up with what is modern.

THE ANCIENT FAITH

The ancient faith refers to the system of religion which was revealed to and practiced by the apostles. In the New Testament the word "faith" is used in two different, but related senses. It is sometimes used in the subjective sense, that is, one's personal belief. "But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Heb. 11:6). Throughout the great "faith chapter" (as Hebrews 11 is often described) there are repeated references to how great men of ages past served God "by faith." "By faith Abel..." "By faith Noah..." "By faith Abraham..." All such are in the sense of personal conviction and trust. So in Romans 5:1, "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." In such contexts "faith" and "belief" (believing) are the same thing, provided it is belief in what is right and true. This is what people usually understand when they hear the word "faith."

But the term is also used in the objective sense, often expressed as "the faith." "The faith" means what is believed and practiced, not the mere personal act of believing. This means it refers to the gospel, the New Testament system, or, as we are emphasizing in this lesson, it is the apostolic pattern, or model, or blueprint for the faith and practice of true Christianity.

This is the usage when Paul said he preached “the faith.” He said he “now preacheth the faith which once he destroyed” (Gal. 1:23). But, of course, what he preached was the gospel. And it was the only gospel because he had already warned that “though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed (Gal. 1:8f). The New Testament system being designated as “the faith” is especially significant in the third chapter of Galatians, where we are shown the contrast between “the law” and “the faith.” The law was one system, the faith is another. So, he says, “But before [the] faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed” (Gal. 3:23).

This usage is easily recognized in various passages where our translations provide the article, that is, “the faith.” For examples, Jude tells us to “earnestly contend for the faith” (Jude 3). A great company of the priests were “obedient to the faith” (Acts 6:7). The Spirit warned that, “some shall depart from the faith” (1 Tim. 4:1). Paul exhorted brethren to “continue in the faith” (Acts 14:22). Faithfulness means living consistently with this faith system. There are also places where the article does not occur, but where “faith” is nonetheless in the objective sense. It is the “one faith” of Ephesians 4:5, meaning “the common faith,” the faith all true followers hold in common (Tit. 1:4).

It happens that translators do not always show this significance. A notable example is in how Galatians 3:26 is rendered in our beloved King James, as well as in other versions. “For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.” It should be: “by the faith of Christ Jesus.” We appreciate that brother McCord’s translation recognized the presence of the Greek article (“through the faith in Christ

Jesus" loc. cit). It is obviously called for in the Galatians 3 context, which is showing the distinction between "the law" and "the faith" (Lenski 135). Paul's point is that people are not children of God through fleshly descent from Abraham, or through the Mosaic system, but by their obedience to the gospel. "Ye are all"—all of you—who are the children of God became such "by [the] faith of Christ Jesus." That is, by the gospel system. "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (v. 27). "Ye are all" in verse 26 corresponds with "as many of you" in verse 27. How many are included in the "all" of verse 26? It's "as many as" were baptized into Christ. No exceptions are allowed. "All," but none others, who are God's children by the gospel are the ones baptized into Christ.

THE APOSTOLIC PATTERN IN I CORINTHIANS

We have emphasized this because it needs to be understood that in the preaching of the apostles, in the teaching of the New Testament, there is a clearly defined system of religion. The "ancient faith" not only assumes that there was something ancient, back to the apostolic age, but also that it was something clearly defined. Some are very unhappy with the notion that there was a pattern for what Christianity is supposed to be. They prefer license to make religion what suits their own modern mind set without the parameters of a pattern.

But the very existence of the epistles demonstrates this. For what purpose were they written if not to give direction as to the right way to serve the Lord. Paul wrote to Titus about setting "in order" the things that were lacking (Tit. 1:5). Things are not "in order" unless they are according to the revealed order. At Corinth there were things out of order in the meetings of the church. His letter should

have corrected them, but if not, he would set things in order when he came (1 Cor. 11:34). We often quote 1 Corinthians 14:40, “Let all things be done decently and in order,” with the point that our activities should not be confusing or distracting, but cannot “in order” mean according to the right order, the pattern, that the church should follow?

To carry on with this concept of pattern, let’s notice how this is demonstrated in several places in 1 Corinthians. In 11:2 the apostle says, “Now I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things and keep the ordinances, as I delivered them to you.” This is not a demand made arbitrarily, because he explained in verse 23: “For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you” (cf. 15:3). The ordinances (apostolic traditions) which he had given to them had originated in heaven (cf. Matt. 18:18).

Again, consider what he says in 4:17. He was sending Timothy to them, to teach them, and he says that Timothy “shall bring you into remembrance of my ways which be in Christ, as I teach every where in every church.” Did you see that? Paul taught the same thing everywhere. It is interesting, too, how he says this will be brought to their “remembrance,” because where he said in 11:2 that they were to keep the ordinances (apostolic traditions), he prefaced it by saying, “Now I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things . . .” Remembering Paul was not the idea of remembering his person, but of remembering what he had taught them—the apostolic ordinances/traditions.

Another example in 1 Corinthians that illustrates the existence of a universal pattern is the instructions about giving. Notice how his instructions demonstrate a

consistency of the same procedure as required in other places. "Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come" (1 Cor. 16:1f). Remember from 4:17 that he taught the same in every place. Here, the same orders were for Corinth as had been given to the churches in Galatia.

FOR EVERY GENERATION

Numerous other passages confirm that there was a divinely ordered pattern given through the apostles that was intended for the rest of the age. The apostles were commissioned to teach men "to observe all things" which Jesus commanded, with the promise that Christ would be with them "always, even unto the end of the world " (Matt. 28:18-20). This is not so much a promise that he would be with their persons as it is that he would be with their teaching, "even unto the end of the world." Why? Because the things they bound on earth were things which had been bound in heaven (Matt. 18:18).

A text often cited in support of schools like the one here at Karns is 2 Timothy 2:2. Paul told Timothy, "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." Obviously this is about training preachers, but consider also its implication regarding an ongoing pattern. Paul, an apostle, a spokesperson of Christ (an ambassador of Christ, 2 Cor. 5:20), represents what we will call the first generation. Timothy represents the second generation. The ones Timothy taught were the third, and the third would teach the fourth. Now, what did Paul expect should be taught to the third and fourth

generations? Obviously, the same things that he had taught to Timothy. We have illustrated the continuance of the same teaching through four generations—Paul, Timothy, the ones Timothy taught, and the ones they taught. But if the sequences were carried not just to the fourth generation, but to the fortieth, would it not be the same? At what stage of succession should there be departures from apostolic instructions. Of course we know that there were departures, and here is what is said about them: “Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith . . .” (1 Tim. 4:1). It is because of such departures that we continue to press for a return to the ancient faith.

A FAITH TO FOLLOW

Over in Hebrews 13 there is a statement about the Lord that many can easily quote from memory. “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever” (v. 8). This connects with what we have already said about the unchangeableness of the eternal God. Jesus Christ is God, God the Son. What needs to be considered is why the text gives this emphasis to the unchangeableness of Christ. There is an important connection in the context. The verse before reminds of the original teaching they had received. God had spoken through his Son (Heb. 1:1f) and he had not and will not change. Then in verse 9 the text warns against accepting new and different doctrines. “Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines” (v. 9).

Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation [way of life].
Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to

day, and for ever. Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines... (Heb 13:7-9b).

In verse 7 the writer refers to their apostolic teachers. These are the ones who had brought the word of God to them. This is understood by going back to chapter 2, where he speaks of the "great salvation, which began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him" (Heb. 2:3). They should be remembered. They were no longer with them, apparently dead in view of the reference to the "end of their conversation." Now we ask, "Why should the rule (authority) of men now gone continue to be respected?" It is because their rule, their leadership, was commissioned to them by the unchanging Christ. I sometimes ask, "Do we have apostles for the church today?" Some nod "yes" and some nod "no." Both are right. No, there are no apostles alive on the earth today, but yes, we still have Peter, Paul, and the others. They have as much authority today as they had in the long ago.

Then the text in Hebrews says, "whose faith follow." Remember that "faith" is often used in the objective sense. This is not so much referring to their personal convictions (though such would be consistent), but to their teaching and practice, the apostolic faith system. Some say there is no such permanent faith system (no pattern). But call it whatever one might, this still means a faith that needs to be followed... "Whose faith follow." The admonition is to follow that apostolic faith. The ancient faith had characteristics to be imitated. If that does not mean a pattern, words have not meaning. How could it be expected to follow their faith if there was no faith to be followed?

IT'S ALL ABOUT GOD

The ancient faith came from the Ancient of Days. The church as it was in New Testament times was not an accident of history. It was planned by the One who knows “the end from the beginning” (Isa. 46:10). James reminds us: “Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world” (Acts 15:18). There was and is divine purpose in the pattern. What the church is—what it is when it is faithful to the biblical pattern—is what the Ancient of days designed from the beginning. Paul underscores this very thing in Ephesians 3:10-11, as he tells us that God’s intent is “that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

You see, it’s not about culture; it’s not about human progress; it’s not about whether the world is ancient or modern. Loyalty to the ancient faith is loyalty to the Ancient of days. It’s all about God!

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ANCIENT FAITH AND “FAITH”

STEVEN HILL

Faith is absolutely essential for anyone who desires to obtain salvation and live a life pleasing to God. Anyone deciding to build a house must first lay a foundation, and faith is the foundation for the Christian life. Faith is the principle through which obedience puts us into Christ and keeps us there. Without it, it is impossible to live a life pleasing to God (Heb. 11:6). [All scripture is quoted from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.] Consider some of the essential truths about faith. (1) Our hearts are purified by faith (Acts 15:9). (2) We are sanctified or made holy by faith (Acts 26:18). (3) It is by faith that we are to live (Rom. 1:17). (4) We are justified or made righteous by faith (Rom. 5:1). (5) It is by faith that we can stand (Rom. 11:20). (6) We walk by faith (2 Cor. 5:7). (7) We overcome the world by faith (1 John 5:4). (8) We believe

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that God is the creator through faith (Heb. 11:3). (9) Faith leads us to obey God’s word (Heb. 11:30). (10) We have

access to the power of God by faith (Heb. 11:29,31,33). (11) We have our defense against the devil by faith (Eph. 6:16). (12) God's power protects us through faith (1 Pet. 1:5). Is it any wonder that we cannot please God without it? If pleasing God cannot be accomplished without faith, then let us consider giving more serious attention to what faith is and how we obtain it.

First we will look at what faith is, how we obtain it, the significance of its order in God's scheme of redemption, and the role of faith with continued obedience.

WHAT FAITH IS NOT

Sometimes the best way to find out about something is to first look at what it is not. Faith is not an opinion or some assumption that has no real evidence attached to it. Faith is not just an aimless hope or shot in the dark. It is not a maybe or a possibility. The definition of opinion according to the dictionary is: a belief or judgment based on grounds insufficient to produce complete certainty, a personal view, attitude or an appraisal. Faith is also not an assumption, which supposes something or is taken for granted. Faith is not an uncertain belief, a guess, an assumption or a speculation.

WHAT FAITH IS

Faith, according to Thayer, is: coming from the Greek word *pistis* and means conviction or belief. The Bible affirms that faith is based on being certain of something, "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1). The NASV renders it: "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."

The definition of faith according to the dictionary is: confidence or trust in a person or thing, belief that is not based on proof, belief in God or in the doctrines or teachings of religion, belief in anything, as a code of ethics or standards of merit, a system of religious belief, the obligation of loyalty or fidelity to a person, promise, engagement, the observance of this obligation; fidelity to one's promise, oath, an allegiance.

Man had not yet been created when God made the heavens and the earth, yet we believe this. Why do we believe this? We believe the testimony that was written down; however, eyewitnesses did not write it. It is by faith that we understand these things (Heb. 11:3). How did Noah really know that it was going to rain? Why did he decide to spend more than a hundred years building an ark? It was by faith that Noah prepared the ark that saved him and his family (Heb. 11:7). Why would Abraham take his son to a specific mountain and prepare an altar on which to sacrifice his son? What is the logic behind this kind of thinking? It was by faith and trust in God and His wisdom that led these men to do these things. The Bible is full of examples of men and women who by their faith and trust in God acted in ways that may seem uncommon to the average person.

AN EXAMPLE OF FAITH

Imagine you are blindfolded and strapped into a chair in a room with a timer that is ticking. It has been explained to you that when the timer runs out, you will die if you do not push the correct button. Then you are handed a keyboard with over thirty different buttons on it. You can only push one button. If you push the wrong button you will die immediately. One of your close family members is also in the room with you without a blindfold

and knows which button you need to push. Let's say you decide to guess, and push a random button. Would you feel comfortable putting your eternal destiny on that choice, that opinion? Do you have enough trust to feel confident in that decision? Imagine right before you pushed the button, your close family member said, "STOP, DON'T PUSH THAT ONE!" Then he tells you to push the one in the bottom left corner and it will save your life. This is the point we are trying to illustrate: (1) Opinion is what a person thinks. (2) Faith believes what one says.

SOME WAYS WE CANNOT OBTAIN FAITH

It is apparent that faith is extremely important to becoming a child of God, pleasing God, receiving His forgiveness, continuing to walk in the light, and getting to heaven. Each one of these is contingent on faith. Knowing what faith is, is also extremely important, but if that is all one knows then they fall incredibly short. We need to know how to obtain faith as well as what it is. Let us first consider how not to obtain faith.

One of the ways that faith is not obtained is by prayer. You cannot pray and receive faith. This is not taught anywhere in scripture. In fact, scripture teaches that you have faith before you pray. Paul writes to the Thessalonians, "night and day praying exceedingly that we may see your face and perfect what is lacking in your faith" (1 Thess. 3:10). Paul states that he prays for those in the church at Ephesus that their faith may be perfected and initiated (Eph. 3:14), and furthermore Paul prayed for them, "that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith..." (Eph. 3:17). The New Testament clearly teaches that prayer is only effective after faith is established. Keep in mind that faith and belief are often used interchangeably as you study the scriptures.

We have a part, as well as God, in the obtaining of our faith. God's part is in providing the evidence and the testimonies which confirm it. Our part is hearing that testimony and believing it to the point of action, "So then faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17). "For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also" (Jas. 2:26). Skeptics who misuse a verse from Paul's letter to the Ephesians commonly argue this misconception, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God" (Eph. 2:8). The pronoun "it" is what trips some people up when trying to determine the actual meaning of the passage. The word "it" in this text refers to salvation and not faith. Faith is not the gift of God but salvation is.

HOW DO WE OBTAIN FAITH

Faith is obtained by hearing the word of God (Rom. 10:17) and believing what God has said. In order to believe God's word, one must first hear. Hearing God's word can come through many sources, preaching, teaching, reading, etc. We obtain faith when we believe facts based evidence from God. A biblical faith is one that is based on factual evidence (Heb. 11:1). The evidence has to be great enough that one can be thoroughly convicted and convinced enough to believe in it. However, someone may be convicted and convinced to believe a number of things that are not true. Some will believe evidence that is not true and end up believing equally strong something false. Those who believe that which is untrue or false can be just as convinced and sincere in their belief as those who believe based on factual evidence. Faith is obtained in both cases, but the only faith that is pleasing to God is obtained if the evidence is founded upon truth.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF FAITH IN THE SCHEME OF REDEMPTION

The scheme of redemption consists of several major constituent parts. We must hear, believe, repent, confess, be baptized and then live faithfully unto death. These are the only things we read about in the New Testament regarding salvation. The very first thing we must do before ever confronting the other parts is to hear the word of God. This is where we establish our faith (Rom. 10:17). We will not obey something out of freewill if we do not first believe it to be true. If I were to say that I have a hundred dollar bill in my pocket and that I will give it to you if you come to me, would you come to get it? If you believe that I am telling you the truth then you will come to me to get the hundred dollar bill, but if you do not believe me when I tell you that I have a hundred dollar bill in my pocket, then why would you waste your time coming to me to receive something you don't believe that I have or will give you? There is a similar example in scripture, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:16). Why doesn't this passage read: He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe and is not baptized will be condemned? The reason is simple, if you believe that God will save you then you will be baptized. If you do not believe that God will save you, then why would you be baptized? There would be no point in being baptized if you do not believe that it is part of salvation. It would be a waste of your time. So we can see that faith is the initial element, which motivates us to obey God's redemptive plan of salvation. If we do not believe God's word then repenting, confessing, baptism, and living faithfully unto death are irrelevant and unimportant.

THE ROLE OF FAITH AND CONTINUED OBEDIENCE

Faith has the role of acting upon the already heard and believed word of God, carrying out what God tells us to do just as Noah obeyed God and built the ark (Gen. 6:13-22). Abraham listened to God when he was told to get out of his country and go to a land that the Lord would show him (Gen. 12:1-4). Moses acted on his belief in God's word when he was instructed at the burning bush to go back to Egypt and confront Pharaoh (Exod. 3:4-4:17). The role of faith in Joshua's life was getting up and leading Israel over the Jordan River to the land that the Lord was giving them (Josh. 1:1-2). These examples and many others throughout the Bible show us how faith plays a role of acting upon God's word and not just believing it (Jas. 2:26).

Our faith needs to continue and grow as well as move us to action (2 Pet. 1:5). We need to continue to believe and have faith ready at all times (Luke 12:46). Our faith needs to be strong till the very end (Heb. 3:14). In second Peter, we find a list of Christian graces that Peter tells us should be added to our faith so that we be neither barren nor unfruitful in our knowledge of Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 1:5-8). This shows us that faith needs to be strengthened and that it can develop beyond its infancy stage of when we first believed. Our faith needs to be tested so that we can develop further into what God wants us to be (Jas. 1:3). Paul thanked God for the growth of the Thessalonians' faith (2 Thess. 1:3). Paul wrote to Timothy that women will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith (1 Tim. 2:15). We cannot be presented holy, blameless, and above reproach in the sight of the Lord if we do not continue in our faith (Col. 1:22-23).

We must seek ways of sharing our faith (Philem. 1:4-

7). We need to go about telling others why we believe God's word and show them the same evidence that initiated our faith. Peter and John were sharing the faith of a lame man with the crowd (Acts 3:16). We must work diligently to plant the seed of God's word with as many as we can before it is too late.

CONCLUSION

Finally, faith is necessary for us to become Christians, remain faithful, and please God. Let us be confident of what true faith is, how we come to obtain it, how it fits into the scheme of redemption, and the importance of continuing in it obediently until death or until the Lord's return. The more we know about the subject, the better equipped we will be when presented with the opportunity to share with someone else who is seeking a faith of their own. Faith comes by hearing God's word (Rom. 10:17). So let us hear it and proclaim it all the more as we see the day approaching.

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WHAT IS HAPPENING TO US?

STEVE HIGGINBOTHAM

The story is told that the famous detective, Sherlock Holmes, and his faithful companion, Dr. Watson, once decided to spend a weekend camping in Sherwood Forrest. At about 3:00 a.m. the first night, Sherlock Holmes nudged Dr. Watson in the sleeping bag next to him and said, "Dr. Watson, Dr. Watson, are you awake?" "I am now," he said. "What do you need?" Holmes said, "Watson, look up and tell me what you see." Watson said, "My dear Holmes, I see hundreds of thousands of stars." To which Holmes replied, "Yes Watson, you are correct. But tell me, what does that mean to you?" At this point, Dr. Watson took a thoughtful moment to collect his thoughts and he said, "Holmes, to me it means that we are most fortunate to inhabit God's great universe as intelligent observers. Although we must be small in His eyes, we are blessed

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with powers of reasoning that no other creation of God has. I guess that's what it means to me." Dr. Watson was impressed by his answer, and thinking that this might be

one of those rare occasions when he proved himself to be more astute than his sharp and gifted friend, he replied, "Holmes, what does it mean to you?" "To me," Holmes said, "it means that while we were asleep, someone stole our tent!"

I believe the above fictional story illustrates well what has been happening to our culture. While Dr. Watson was considering the vastness of the universe, he had failed to consider something much closer to home, and much more necessary – his tent. Likewise, while we live in a day of educational, scientific, and technological achievements and advancements, our "tent" of moral objectivity has been stolen away from us while we have been slumbering. The objective, moral standard by which we judge human conduct has been stolen from us while we have been marveling at our vast accomplishments.

The day is coming, and is fast upon us, when we will find ourselves in need of shelter. Without our tent of moral objectivity, we are left exposed to the storms of life which blow and beat against us. I believe it's time we stop marveling at our ingenuity and our accomplishments, and get busy trying to recover our missing values.

Before discussing how we can recover our values, I wish to first establish that we have indeed had our "tent" of moral objectivity stolen from us, and are currently exposed to the elements. I believe three things have contributed to the loss of our values.

First, we have removed God from our thoughts. The apostle Paul described some Gentiles in the first century as being those who "...did not like to retain God in their knowledge..." (Rom. 1:28) [All Scripture is quoted from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.] Note that it wasn't

that these Gentiles did not know there was a God. In fact, Paul stated that, “For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse” (Rom. 1:20). Their problem was that they knew there was a God, but they did not like to remember that truth. Thus, they attempted to remove him from their daily lives, and not be reminded of their amenability toward Him and His law.

However, as our culture is discovering, the results of removing God from one’s thoughts are catastrophic. Without God, there is no moral anchor. There is no absolute right or wrong. Truth and error are as shifting as the waves of the sea. Without God, how does one judge human behavior? Upon what basis does one declare an action to be good and decry another action as being evil?

When a culture removes God from its thoughts, how does it account for its origin? If there is no God, then we are the product of purposeless evolution. And if we are the product of purposeless evolution, then why would we expect people to act any differently than the animal kingdom. What would give more value to a human’s life than the life of an insect? There would be no rational difference between the two, and we are seeing a generation arise that no more respects or values human life above any other form of life.

A typical example of the attempt to remove God from our thoughts was seen in a Federal Judge’s ruling to prohibit the state of Louisiana from using an abstinence based sex-education curriculum. The judge claimed that abstinence is a “religiously based virtue” and therefore does not belong in the state school’s curriculum (Associated Press). Really? Is our culture willing to jettison all “religiously based

virtues" in an attempt to remove God from our thoughts? Will we go that far? What about religiously based virtues such as "honesty," "no lying," "no stealing," "no cheating," and "respect for authority?" Will we remove these from school too? After all, they too are "religiously based virtues." Are all morals contaminated because they keep company with religion?

In another court case, a man's sentence for raping and murdering a young lady was overturned because the jury consulted the Bible during their deliberations (Cutrer).

These are just two among countless examples which demonstrate that our culture is trying to remove God from its knowledge. The attempt to remove God from our knowledge is one of the factors that help us to understand why we are where we are today.

Another factor in the moral downgrade upon which we find ourselves is that pleasure has become our god. Every culture has a "god," and if we refuse to acknowledge the "God of Heaven," then we will have to substitute some other "god" for Him. In our case, it is apparent that "pleasure" has become the "god" of choice in our culture.

However, long ago Solomon said, "He who loves pleasure will be a poor man..." (Prov. 21:17). In describing the people Paul called "enemies of the cross of Christ" (Phil. 3:18), Paul stated that their "god is their belly" (Phil. 3:19). This is another way of saying that pleasure, satisfaction, and fulfillment were their "gods," and it was an apt description of the philosophy of Hedonism. The philosophy of Hedonism states that good and evil are determined on the basis of pleasure and pain. According to Hedonism, if something brings one pleasure, it is therefore good, and if it brings one pain, it is evil.

Hedonism or allowing pleasure to be one's "god" explains how people who commit some of the most atrocious acts can pillow their head at night and get a good night's sleep. As long as an action brings pleasure, in the thinking of some, the action must then be right.

Not only can this philosophy be seen in culture, but it is being witnessed more and more in God's kingdom. Think how many extra-biblical innovations are justified without Scripture, but upon the basis that "we like it." That is a manifestation of this philosophy.

Finally, another factor that has led to our present moral decline is that deviancy has been "defined-down." Our culture accepts as normal today what at one time was deemed repugnant. Conduct that just one generation ago would have been considered on the "moral fringe" is now considered mainstream. If moral trends continue as they are, what will be considered morally mainstream by our children and grandchildren?

One of the mechanisms that drives us from point "A" to point "B" (morally speaking), is a change in verbiage and the use of euphemisms. Euphemisms take the sting out of sinful behavior and serve to salve what is left of our conscience. Abortion isn't called "murder," it's called the "right to choose." Homosexuality isn't called an "abomination," it's called a "gay" lifestyle. Extra-marital relationships aren't called "adultery," they are called "affairs." Sex outside the bounds of marriage isn't called "fornication," it's called "love." Failing to tell the truth isn't called "lying," it's called "misinformation." And cursing isn't called "profanity," it's called "colorful language."

Because of the use of these euphemisms, actions which were once connected with sinful words, no longer

are so, and the guilt is removed. What they amount to is a moral placebo to salve our consciences.

These three factors (i.e. removing God from our thoughts, replacing God with pleasure, and defining-down deviancy) have greatly contributed to the moral downgrade upon which our culture finds itself. But is there any hope? Can our culture be turned around? Can we ever go back to the moral standards which we once held? To frame this question in biblical terms, one might ask, "If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do? (Psalm 11:3).

If we are ever to make a difference in our culture, we must first embrace the Christian lifestyle for ourselves. The importance of living and modeling the Christian lifestyle should be self-evident. The apostle Paul repeatedly commanded the followers of Jesus to "walk worthy of the calling with which you were called" (Eph. 4:1), to "let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ" (Phil. 1:27), and to "walk worthy of the Lord" (Col. 1:10).

The reason the "Christian walk" is so important is that Jesus expects His disciples to "shine as lights in the world" to a "crooked and perverse generation" (Phil. 2:15). Without the example of a godly life, countless people will never come to know Jesus. Paul once told the Corinthians, "You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men; clearly you are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart" (2 Cor. 3:2-3). In other words, we may be the only "Bible" that some people ever read prior to their decision to turn toward God.

Embracing the Christian lifestyle, and consistently living it out in one's daily life will indeed grab the

attention of the unbeliever. The famous poet, Edgar Guest wrote:

I'd rather see a sermon than hear one any day;
 I'd rather one should walk with me
 than merely tell the way.

The eye is a better pupil, more willing than the ear;
 Fine counsel is confusing, but example is always clear,
 And the best of all the preachers
 are the men who live their creeds,
 For to see a good put in action
 is what everybody needs.

I can soon learn how to do it
 if you will let me see it done;
 I can watch your hand in action,
 but your tongue too fast may run.
 And the lectures you deliver may be very wise and true,
 But I'd rather get my lesson by observing what you do.
 For I may misunderstand you
 and the high advice you give,
 But there is no misunderstanding
 how you act and how you live.

When I see a deed of kindness, I am eager to be kind.
 When a weaker brother stumbles,
 and a strong man stands behind
 Just to see if he can help him,
 then the wish grows strong in me
 To become as big and thoughtful
 as I know that friend to be.
 And all travelers can witness
 that the best of guides today
 Is not the one who tells them,
 but the one who shows the way (Stone 9)

If we are to turn our culture back to God, not only must we embrace the Christian lifestyle for ourselves, but we must also proclaim that lifestyle to others. Prior to Jesus' ascension back to Heaven, He commissioned us with teaching the gospel to the world. In fact, that commission is recorded in every gospel account (Matt. 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:46-47; John 20:21). We must, with urgency, be about this task!

Consider the fact that not only did God save us and set us in a place of honor, he did so for a reason. Peter said, "But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Pet. 2:9). Don't miss the connection between our "position" and our "responsibility." God blessed us, elevated us, cleansed us, and took ownership of us, "that we may proclaim the praises of Him..." We cannot accept the blessings without fulfilling the accompanying responsibilities.

And finally, if we want to see our culture return to higher moral ground, we must pray for God's providential hand to work change, even at the expense of personal comfort.

James tells us that "...the effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much" (Jas. 5:16). Not only do we know that to be true because it is inspired by God, but we know from example and experience that this is the case. Because of Abraham's intercession on behalf of Sodom, God was willing to spare the cities if ten righteous souls could be found (Gen. 18:22-32). Moses pleaded with God to spare the Israelites, and God listened to him and relented (Exod. 32:9-14). Elijah prayed for no rain; God answered his prayer and it did not rain for three years

and six months (Jas. 5:17). The early Christians prayed for Peter after being arrested and imprisoned and God sent an angel and delivered him (Acts 12:5-11).

God is a God who answers prayers! The question is not whether God is big enough, or powerful enough to bring positive, moral change to our culture. The question is whether we have the courage to pray that God will intervene and allow Him the freedom to work in His own way. Just how important is it to you to have a more godly and moral culture? Is it important enough that you would be willing to experience the collapse of our economy if that were the means God used to awaken people to righteousness? Is it important enough to you that you would be willing to even experience a change in our form of government or in the freedoms we presently enjoy?

It is a frightening prayer, and requires a courageous, faith-filled disciple of Jesus to pray for God's intervention with no strings attached. Our society, whether it recognizes it or not, needs the intercession of God's people on its behalf.

If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do? We can embrace the teachings of Jesus, proclaim those same teachings, and pray for God's intervention. That's what the righteous can do.

On June 14, 1998, Ted Koppel offered the commencement address at Stanford University. Here is what he said:

...We will not change what's wrong with our culture through legislation, or by choosing up sides on the basis of personal popularity or

party affiliation. We will change it by small acts of courage and kindness; by recognizing, each of us, his or her own obligation to set a proper example. Aspire to decency. Practice civility toward one another. Admire and emulate ethical behavior wherever you find it. Apply a rigid standard of morality to your lives; and if, periodically, you fail – as you surely will – adjust your lives, not the standards. There’s no mystery here. You know what to do. Now go out and do it (Koppel).

I agree with Koppel to the extent that he goes. Our culture has for at least a generation, sunk into a moral and spiritual slumber, only to awaken to the realization that our morals have been stolen from us. The ultimate answer is found in the rigid and absolute standard of God’s word. When we find ourselves falling short of that standard, we must learn to adjust our lives, not the standard.

If there has ever been a time in the history of our nation when God needed a pure, distinct, praying, and vocal church, it is now! Will you step up to the challenge and enlist yourself in service to God to be a part of the solution?

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THE NEW TOLERANCE

CLARENCE DELOACH

The Bible and the Christian faith have been under attack since the close of divine revelation. After the church was established there were periods of severe pagan persecution. Christians were drowned in blood and consumed by fire—suffering anguish, martyrdom and death. Diocletian thought his drive to exterminate the Bible and the Christians who believed it so successful that over a burned and extinguished Bible he built a column and on it wrote these triumphant Latin words: “Extincto nomine Christianorum,” i.e. the name of Christian is extinguished. He was wrong! The Bible stands!

Then came ecclesiastical persecution as churchmen sought to destroy the influence of the Bible over the souls of men. Martin Luther was a grown man before he saw

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a Bible. Those who had the courage to translate it into the common language were targeted for persecution and death by the ecclesiastical authorities.

A more sophisticated and no doubt more deadly and long-lasting form of attack came later under the guise of modern rationalism. This wave of attack came from the

scholastic intelligencia in our universities. It continues now under the guise of humanism and pluralism. Many have described our era as the post-Christian age. Several years ago, W. Griffith Thomas wrote a book entitled *Christianity Is Christ*. The thesis of that book is that Christianity stands or falls on Christ. At the heart of most attacks has been the question, "Who is Jesus?" Is He an imposter, a lunatic, a humanitarian, philosopher or did He ever exist as an historical person? Deviant ideas about Jesus began to circulate even before the end of New Testament revelation. The Gnostic heresy was felt at Colossae, and John alluded to it in I John. The writings of the "church fathers" reflected several false ideas about Jesus.

While we have slept, our society has undergone a cultural change that is being spread through education, government and the media. Josh McDowell and Bob Hostetler have written a book called *The New Tolerance: How a Cultural Movement Threatens to Destroy You, Your Faith and Your Children*. The consequences and implications are frightening.

Dennis McCallum calls it a "cultural metamorphosis" transforming every area of everyday life as it spreads through education, movies, television and other media. The fact is our culture is moving more and more not only to unreceptivity but to open hostility and militancy toward Biblical Christianity. To quote the Bible in vindication of any moral or spiritual principle is not only "politically incorrect," but is met by belligerent hostility. Those who speak with conviction on controversial themes are increasingly labeled as bigots, fanatics or religious creeps. Oprah became enraged on a recent program because someone stated that Jesus is the only way to heaven.

How does all this relate to "the new tolerance"?

How could tolerance create hostility, oppression and victimization? How could one who stands for truth and righteousness be branded a hate-monger? Would you have thought that in America the day would come when teaching God's agenda for marriage and opposition to the homosexual lifestyle would be labeled as hate-speech? In my judgment, we could be on the threshold of a wave of persecution against Biblical faith such as has not been seen since the first three centuries. And it will be done in the name of "the new tolerance," which is anything but tolerant. It will target you, your faith and your family. Since our world is changing so fast, words and ideas we were taught do not communicate the same things they once did.

Webster defines tolerance, "to recognize and respect the beliefs and practices of others without sharing them, even to bear with an individual or idea that you don't agree with." It is this kind of tolerance that we all cherish in America. We must recognize diversity of opinion and practice to have a free society. We can tolerate without agreeing! But, this is not the idea being advanced by "the new tolerance." The tolerance we have known respects the convictions of others without sharing it. This tolerance is taught in the Bible.

1. "Live peaceably with all men," i.e. make a sincere effort to get along with neighbors, co-workers and classmates though there is diversity of background and beliefs. (See Heb. 12:14) [All scripture is quoted from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted.]
2. "Receive one another." (Rom. 15:7)
3. "Bearing with one another in the Lord." (Eph. 4:2)
4. "As we have opportunity, let us do good to all men,"

i.e. those of different educational, national and religious backgrounds. (Gal. 6:10)

Tolerance as we have known it includes respecting and protecting the lawful and legitimate rights of others to speak, to assemble and express their political and religious thoughts. It entails learning and listening to those from other cultures and belief systems. When we visited the Dome of the Rock on the temple mount in Jerusalem, we were asked to take off our shoes; and the ladies were asked to cover their arms, which we respectfully did. That's true tolerance! It is a matter of Christian courtesy and respect to honor family and social customs when visiting other lands and cultures. We can live peaceably alongside others without agreeing with their views. We are taught to be a peace-seeker (Ps. 34:14), a peace-promoter (Prov. 12:20), a peace-maker (Matt. 5:9), and a peace-pursuer (1 Pet. 3:11). However, we are not to compromise our Christian principles.

True tolerance means that we will accept others of race, nation and sex as our Lord did. He spoke freely and respectfully to the Samaritan woman (John 4:6-30). He shared a meal with publicans and sinners (John 15:1-2). The old tolerance values, respects and accepts people as individuals—souls made in the image of God for whom Jesus died. But, it is done without approval or participation in their beliefs and practices. In our society, however, teachers, professors, news media, officials of government and celebrities want to redefine tolerance. It is equated with relativity, that no objective truth can be known. It is the idea that truth is created by humans and since humans are so flawed and so different, there is no rational way to discern what's right. Thus the "new tolerance" is defined as equality in all beliefs, values, lifestyle and perception of truth. It sees all religions, world views and claims

as acceptable with no one being dominant. Such is the pluralistic society that is being developed about us.

What effect does the new tolerance of pluralism have upon the exercise of our Biblical faith? It insists that you must agree with another's position as valid as your own. Otherwise you are a bigot. Multi-cultural education is all inclusive, and seeks to bring all to the center; thus, we must validate their experiences. This includes endorsing their values and lifestyles, whether homosexual, abortion, or Islamic influences. The fact is our children are being exposed to a new way of thinking and living. Sometimes they shock us with statements influenced by what they are being taught. Statements like, "let people live like they want to," or "who made you a judge on what others do," or "my generation is different from yours," or "what's wrong with that?" Whether we want to believe it or not, a great number of our children would surprise you. A recent survey revealed that 57% of youth in evangelical churches have already swallowed what the new tolerance is advocating. It is expressed this way: "What is wrong for one is not necessarily wrong for another." That is pluralistic thinking! Parents, elders, preachers and teachers have a challenge before them—to establish and strengthen our youth in the faith. It's later than we think!

The agenda of the new tolerance is not mere approval of pluralism, but to apply pressure through education and the media to get you to conform. Peter spoke about it in principle when he said, "They think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation, and they heap abuse on you" (1 Pet. 4:4). The new tolerance and the pluralism it advocates attack Christianity in four crucial areas.

1. The Biblical claim of truth. God is called the God

of Truth (Isa. 65:16). He cannot lie (Heb. 6:18). Every word of God is pure (Prov. 30:6). Jesus said we can know truth (John 8:32); that He is the truth (John 14:6) and that He can make us free (John 8:36). The ideology of the new tolerance looks upon any belief of absolute truth as evil, offensive and bigoted.

2. The Biblical Jesus and the atonement through his cross. The claims of Jesus are considered exclusive and judgmental. The new tolerance repudiates man's need for salvation, thus the gospel message is totally irrelevant.

3. The Biblical teaching on sin. Pluralism asserts that sin is a cultural concept that has no relevance to the new age. The Bible teaches that sin is universal and separates man from God (Rom. 3:23; Isa. 59:1-2). Sin is the violation of God's standard (John 3:4), and condemns man to the wrath of God. The new tolerance looks upon the condemnation of sinful behavior as discriminatory, judgmental and a violation of personal rights.

4. The Biblical teaching on the purpose and mission of the church. The church exists to hold forth the Word of life (Phil. 2:16). It is the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Her mission is to preach the gospel to the world (Matt. 28:18-20). That purpose and message represents an intolerable challenge to the new tolerance. It is viewed as a fanatic, narrow effort to impose upon others. The church is viewed as a self-righteous, biased approach whereby the views, beliefs and practices of others are seen as inferior.

The implications are clear. The Christian religion has become a major target of hostility. Though our nation was founded upon Christian principles, pluralism has changed all that. Little by little, day by day, a once strong faith

in God has been eroded. The faith of so many youth has been undermined. When that happens, the flood gates are opened. First comes the denial of absolute truth then comes a denial of right and wrong. What follows are broadmindedness and the acceptance and approval of all religions and ideologies. Lastly, comes the liberation from stifling ideas, and thinking of themselves as free they become slaves to their own lusts and desires. That's the very cycle Paul described in Romans 1:21-32 as he indicted the Gentile nations. Indeed, history repeats itself.

CONFRONTING CHALLENGES TO THE ANCIENT FAITH

WILLIAM WOODSON

INTRODUCTION

The term “Emerging” [or “Emergent”] Church Movement” in the denominational world was said by D. A. Carson to be some dozen or so years old in 2005 (Carson 9). One may differ from Carson’s approximate dating, but, the movement, per se, is of relatively short life—however long its formative roots may be. The gist of this emerging church movement is expressed by Carson as follows:

At the heart of the “movement”—or as some of its leaders prefer to call it, the “conversation”—lies the conviction that changes in the culture signals that a new church is “emerging.” Christian leaders must

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therefore adapt to this emerging church. Those who fail to do so are blind to the cultural accretions that hid the gospel behind forms of thought and modes of expression

that no longer communicate with the new generation, the emerging generation (Carson 12).

Generally speaking, the term “Emerging Church” is seldom, if ever, used to designate a similar movement among churches of Christ, among whom the identifying terms are rather “change agent movement.” While this is true, various leaders in the “Emerging Church Movement” such as Brian D. McLaren,, and Tony Jones appear on occasion as either guides or advocates of what change agents maintain (Shelly and York 34, 49, 120, 141, 219). In their second book the names of Stanley J. Grenz and Robert Webber (Ibid. 98, 175) are referenced as relevant sources of insight.

It is readily apparent, therefore, that the Emerging Church advocates have cross-fertilized the change agent movement in various ways. However tempting it might be to develop this one-way use or reliance of change agents on Emerging Church advocates and theory/practice thereof, our attention now turns to the origin of The Emerging Church/change agent movement among churches of Christ.

FORESHADOWINGS OF CHANGE AGENCY AMONG CHURCHES OF CHRIST

The change agent movement did not tumble full grown from the sky; rather, there were earlier efforts along the same line, making similar pleas concerning churches of Christ. For reasons that will become apparent, attention is called to only two expressions of views foreshadowing change agency that emerged in the early-mid 1980s. It is of special interest that both expressions were presented and rebutted by G. C. Brewer (1884-1956).

William Reedy and Carl Etter

In 1946 G. C. Brewer published seven articles in the *Gospel Advocate* that later were published with the title "AS TOUCHING THOSE WHO WERE ONCE ENLIGHTENED" (Brewer 5-116). Brewer responded to the writings of "TWO FORMER FRIENDS AND COLABORERS [William Reedy and Carl Etter]" who had left churches of Christ and written an explanation for their leaving that appeared in *West Coast Christian*, May-June 1945 issue.

Brewer observed that the main fallacy upon which they... "launched their attack is the assumption that the church to which they belonged and from which they are departing is a sect whose doctrines and practices they have ceased to believe and to whose arbitrary authority they could no longer submit." (Brewer 73). Then, he posed the question for the two who had left: "How does it happen then that after such men have been preaching the gospel and teaching the Bible for forty years they suddenly find that those whom they have been teaching and molding have degenerated into a denomination with views so narrow and rules so arbitrary that they (the preachers) can no longer endure the tyranny of their fellowship?" (Brewer 75). [One well acquainted with the change agent stance and agenda can readily see the relevance of this long ago question for those who have been cradled among us but now find us so errant that their concerns about the church, as LaGard Smith has it, "simply cannot be resolved without radically restructuring the church as it presently functions. Indeed, not so much restructuring it, but dismantling it by means of recapturing its original definition and meaning" (37). A few pages later, Smith averred: "The very nature of radical restoration is such that the act of demolition is as vital as the act of creation. Invariably, wrecking crews must raze the old structure before they can begin to build the new" (39).]

Brewer cited the arguments alleged against churches of Christ by Reedy and Ettore as including the following: The “Church of Christ views itself as including “all true Christians (76); it is based on “a superficial interpretation of the Bible and is fundamentally in error” (76); it consistently contradicts “the announced slogans of the so-called Restoration Movement” (78); it has “twenty unwritten creeds to one of which one must subscribe in order to have fellowship with the particular wing of the church with which one chooses to become identified” (78); it “forbids new light to enter and perpetuates its own inadequate insights by refusing to hear those who have persisted in their quest for truth” (79); in fact, “the system used is without scriptural sanction and has the net result of rejecting large portions of the Bible” (80); the youth within the church “go on for more advanced training” only be told “We know these to be the facts, but our people are not yet ready to receive them” (82); and on the list goes until twenty such allegations are made. Brewer refutes all twenty; but the present use of such criticisms shows the essence of the present change agent movement was faced and refuted long before many of the present leaders ever preached a sermon or wrote an article.

John B. Cowden, Earnest Beam, Roy Key

A second series of articles by Brewer responded to expressions foreshadowing current change agency in articles under the title “Grace and Law: Legalism and Liberalism.” published in the 1955 Gospel Advocate.

These articles center directly on the views long upheld by K. C. Moser (1893-1976) and were being stated afresh in the writings of John B. Cowden, Earnest Beam, and Roy Key. Hicks refers to these articles but only lists the titles and dates of each. All Hicks wrote concerning them is:

“Brewer received a question from a reader concerning the place of confession in the “plan of salvation.” The reader wanted to know if the “plan” had “four steps or three, and if one dies following baptism without confession with the mouth, what will Jesus do on the judgment day about it.” (John Mark Hicks Ministries “John Mark, K. C. MOSER..., my copy p. 12, notes 140, 141). An even casual reading of these articles will show much more, and of great significance, above and beyond the question asked and answered.

K. C. MOSER: In 1932 Moser published *The Way of Salvation*. John Mark Hicks said of this book: “[It] is based upon the principle of Grace through faith as opposed to law through works. Due to human sin, the law is impotent to save, and consequently humanity cannot hope to be saved through any amount of works. It is faith that saves, not acts produced by faith or works apart from faith. Mosher opposed any idea faith functions as a mere principle of action so that the acts rather than faith save” (Hicks 5). Later Hicks stated concerning Mosher’s view of “works”: “Works, therefore exclude grace. However, Moser did not believe that salvation was unconditional or that baptism was not part of what God requires for salvation. Rather, baptism draws its meaning from faith just as faith draws its meaning from its object, Christ crucified” (Hicks 6). Earlier, Hicks quoted Moser on repentance, confession, and baptism: “Repentance, confession and baptism are expressions of that faith which God requires before he bestows his grace. But these expressions draw their meaning from faith. They are not isolated acts.” “This view of baptism sanctioned by scripture,” he wrote, “lifts baptism from a meaningless act of legalism to the high plane of salvation by faith in Christ.” (Hicks 4). [K. C. Moser Firm Foundation 47 (6 May 1930) 447.] “Further,” Hicks states concerning Moser:

...when grace calls for faith, it calls for the acceptance of divine righteousness as a gift. All human efforts at obeying any law, whether human traditions, the Mosaic Code or the law of Christ, are efforts at human righteousness. The glorious call of the gospel is to accept God's imputation of Christ's righteousness through faith. It is a righteousness that does not depend on a righteousness earned by works from below, but upon the righteousness given from above through faith (Hicks 6-7).

The characterization of Brewer as a crypto-change agent is alleged because of the fact that he wrote a statement in the 1933 *Gospel Advocate* (Brewer "A Review") encouraging his readers to read the book—*The Way Of Salvation* by K. C. Moser (1893-1976). This book is heralded by current change as the earliest true and successful discussion of the nature of grace among our brethren.

A more detailed discussion of Brewer's articles than was given by Hicks relates to the change agents use of Brewer's statement in the 1933 *Gospel Advocate* (Brewer "A Review") encouraging his readers to read the book—*The Way Of Salvation* by K. C. Moser (1893-1976). This book is heralded by current change agents as showing he [Moser] provided something of the earliest, accurate, and successful discussion of the nature of grace among our brethren.

Hicks wrote concerning the place of Moser as related to the change agent movement: "Recently, Moser has been identified as a starting-point, or at least, an early reflection of a theological shift among churches of Christ on the doctrine of grace and the practice of kerymatic preaching...

[C. Leonard] Allen summarized his contribution. ‘The efforts of Moser, he concluded, stand directly behind some of the theological shifts occurring among contemporary Churches of Christ.’ (Hicks 2)

[Imagine: Such brethren as David Lipscomb, E. A. Elam, H. Leo Boles, C. A. Nichol, A. G. Freed, R. L. Whiteside, N. B. Hardeman, G. C. Brewer, Gus Nichols, Franklin Camp, and so many others completely failed to properly understand grace! ww]

It is with this background that one should consider and evaluate change agent allegations set forth about his views as shown in Brewer’s several articles on “Grace and Law: Legalism and Liberalism,” *Gospel Advocate* 1995. These articles show clearly that change agent allegations about his [Brewer’s] views on grace and faith are false. Further, these articles demonstrate his rejection of various current change agent views, and that well before they were made public in the mid 1980s.

Brewer wrote the following:

In a recent article in the *GOSPEL ADVOCATE* I discussed the subject of grace and salvation. This was a lecture delivered at Abilene Christian College and was, therefore, too long a chapter for an average article in the *GOSPEL ADVOCATE*. This, however, was published for the purpose of laying a foundation for some discussions that are to follow. The words used in the heading of this article are being bandied about in the pulpits, in the college lectures and in papers and pamphlets today to an extent that they have not been used before in a generation, at least. I have been quoted by some writers,

and the quotations were intended to convey the idea that I support the conclusions that these writers are driving upon those who read their works. I have discussed the matter of grace and works through long years of writing, preaching and debating. My position on the doctrines involved is not at all secret nor is it in any way different from the position held by gospel preachers who live today and who have lived before us. It is true that some men have not spoken as plainly upon the subject as some others have, and some men may also have emphasized the one side to the neglect of the other side and, therefore, created the impression that they were legalists or that they believed in a law salvation. However, I do not believe that any gospel preacher whose position has been thoroughly understood ever taught that men are saved by their own works or by reaching the perfection demanded by law (Brewer GA 1955 p. 205).

The men who are today pleading against legalism and advocating a liberalism that is about equivalent to libertinism, are basing some of their arguments upon the word "plan." This is not the first time we have met this quibble. Some men who are older than the young men involved in this controversy today based an objection to some of our preaching and writing upon the misunderstanding of the word "plan" at least twenty-five years ago. This word has been used by our brethren for many years. It is possible that it has been overworked, but I do not believe that any brother ever used the term in the sense in which we are all accused of using it by these objectors to legalism (Brewer, GA 1955 p. 510).

Alexander Campbell wrote a book called "The Christian System." Robert Milligan wrote a very fine book called "The Scheme of Redemption." Dr. T. W. Brents wrote a book which has been standard for about seventy-five years entitled "The Gospel Plan of Salvation." Some other books with similar titles could be found in what is known as "Restoration Literature." Anyone who is acquainted with these books will know that the authors did not use the term "system," "scheme," and "plan" in the sense in which these modern critics are charging against us. These writers included in these terms the whole story of human redemption. In fact, each book is a treatise on theology. Anyone of the books mentioned would be a good textbook in the science of theology. This includes the discussion of God and of Christ and of man. It includes man's soul and God's provision for man's redemption and all that is taught concerning God and man and sin and the Saviour (Brewer 1955 GA p. 511).

These critics, however, think that we use the term 'plan' in the sense of a blueprint. They think that somebody believes and teaches that God has given man a blueprint by which he is to build his character and to achieve salvation. It makes salvation simply a matter of human achievement and this achievement is met by complying with the plan of building according to the blueprint and that this work will have to bear the rigid inspection of the Great Master Builder. These quibblers think that the poor miserable soul who holds this conception of salvation or of the gospel thinks that the plan consists only in the steps of salvation. They think that somebody teaches that the plan consists in faith, repentance, confession and baptism. Therefore, in order to be saved, sinners must not have faith in the Saviour, but must have faith in the plan. They have faith in faith, faith in repentance, faith in confession, faith in baptism and this is what these critics are crying

out against. If there is or ever was any person who had this conception of the gospel or who had this idea of the meaning of the word 'plan' or who had no faith except the faith here indicated, that soul does not deserve to be excoriated and held up to contempt as these young liberals are attempting to do. He deserves pity of the most sincere sort. He is not worthy of the high intellectual treatment that these boys think they are giving him (Brewer, GA 1955 p. 511).

Further quotations seem unnecessary to make it clear that in these articles Brewer is being misinterpreted, misconstrued, or misunderstood as to what he actually believed and taught at that time on what is alleged about grace, faith and works.

It is noteworthy that on January 12, 1932—the year when Moser's book *The Way of Salvation* was published, to be reviewed the following year by Brewer who requested that the book be read—he began a debate with Ben M. Bogard in McDougal, Arkansas. The third day of the debate Bogard "affirmed that a sinner is saved at faith and before baptism." Further, Brewer deals with Bogard's misuse of Acts 2:38 at some length with the result Bogard says, "But baptism does not move us from one place to another; it only changes our relationship." To these words Brewer replied as follows: "'Correct!' shouts his opponent the moment he takes the floor. 'Surely baptism changes our relationship. No one ever claimed more for baptism than that. But see what that does for Baptist doctrine.'" (Brewer, *Forty Years...37, 39*).

The rest of the 1932 exchange on baptism is most interesting, but it is noteworthy that in 1942 Brewer penned an article of particular relevance to his views about baptism and salvation in which he responded to a question about

a radio preacher and the “steps” leading to salvation. He replied:

The brother who preached the radio sermon...was simply trying to teach that one is not saved before and without baptism; that baptism is one of the conditions on which salvation is promised; that it is the consumating [sic] condition—the final act of the soul before the soul enjoys the remission of sins. In this the brother was correct and eminently scriptural. This is what gospel preachers always preach. Technically, the critic may have had a point, as we shall see. The radio preacher may have been too literalistic in separating the steps of obedience and in attributing a specific value to each one—apart from the others. Neither repentance nor baptism would have any value apart from faith. In fact, neither would even be possible without faith. They are included in faith. In the New Testament style of speaking they are faith. In that sense faith puts into Christ (Brewer, “Believing into” GA July 9, 1947, 658; See additional insight on p. 659).

Again, Brewer gave a detailed exegesis of meaning of the Greek word *eis* that is frequently debated concerning its significance in Acts 2:38—the opponents of the essentiality of baptism seeking to evade the force of this preposition with the essentiality of baptism (Brewer, “Baptist Debaters...” GA July 23, 1942, 708).

Both articles show his continuing resistance to any position that would eliminate baptism as essential to

the remission of sins. By the several indications of the conviction of Brewer on this vital theme it is maintained here that change agents erroneously claim, or imply, that Brewer, if he were alive today, would uphold their various agenda items on the plan of salvation and the essentiality of baptism for remission of sins.

Hicks observes that Moser was placed on the Gospel Advocate staff on January 1, 1933; the last article under his name as staff member was dated August 24, 1933. This brief tenure was due to the fact that the "staff" (including H. Leo Boles, B. F. Srygley, C. R. Nichol, and R. L. Whiteside) objected to Moser's "peculiar ideas" on the conditions of salvation which they believed were contrary to the gospel." They did not want Moser, as a staff member, to use the Advocate as an official rostrum from which to address the church" (Hicks 7).

One who knows much about either or all of the men named as opposed to Moser's views and regarded them as contrary to the gospel will not be impressed with a claim his teaching was in the mainstream of the thinking of brethren of that time. One also must wonder why Moser did not challenge for a debate, written or oral, on his various views with one or more of these capable men on staff—they were certainly acquainted with and competent in defense of what they believed. For one, R. L. Whiteside certainly offered significant rebuttal to the teaching of Moser concerning the "principle of faith" and Moser's view of the meaning of the word "impute", likening it to "the children's game of 'play-like'" (Whiteside 92, 98).

One should also observe that after two exchanges with C. D. Crouch, Moser stated: "This is my reply to his second criticism, and, so far as I am able to see now, it is my last" (Moser GA 1947 805).

It is also significant, in my view, that Brewer's earlier opposition to similar views articulated by Reedy and Etter are seldom, if ever, discussed by change agents.

CONCERNING THE ORIGIN OF THE CURRENT CHANGE AGENT MOVEMENT

In the years that passed from Brewer's articles in 1956 other materials such as *Voices of Concern* might well be noted as pointing to the change agent movement, but space does not allow such discussion. The modern change agent can very well be dated as follows: The occasion was at a gathering of brethren on March 21, 1983 at a campsite owned by the church of Christ in Centerville, Tennessee. For several years prior to this date the church had conducted a one day gathering of preachers and others for a day of speaking, singing, prayer, and general fellowship. In the March 21, 1983, Rubel Shelly, a principal speaker, addressed the assembled group with a strong criticism of churches of Christ as being predominately sectarian in stance and deserving of Shelly's denunciatory diatribe and jeremiad. Caught by surprise, brethren who had long known and loved Shelly sought to understand why he was speaking so about our brotherhood and began trying to turn him from his error and the offense of his denunciative speech—to no avail.

In Joplin, Missouri August 7-9, 1983 Shelly and Don Dewelt, a preacher in the Independent Christian Church, conducted what was termed a "Summit" meeting involving 50 preachers each from respectively the church of Christ and the Christian Church. Various manuscripts and tape recording became available from the sessions. It was quickly apparent that attendees from churches of Christ were not of one mind about the themes and content of the sessions. Some were very much opposed to appeals

being made of striving for unity with Christian Churches without the necessity of removing instrumental music from worship service as well as rejecting other views held that denomination; others, to much surprise, were interested and even insistent to pursue means of attaining such unity and allowing the use of instrumental music to continue.

These two events were opening moves in a brotherhood controversy that still remains, but has escalated far beyond what was anticipated or expected from the Centerville speech and the Joplin sessions.

Gradually various items of change agent agenda (as well as others not herein expressed) were made known and upheld as follows:

- Salvation is by grace alone through faith alone; baptism for remission of sins is not essential to salvation;

- The Bible teaches: First, Second, Third, and (sometimes) Fourth order truth; ONLY First Order truth is necessary to salvation and to fellowship. Previously: "Essentials," "The Seven Ones" [Ephesians 4:4-6 as explained by change agents], or "Bullseye" doctrines, etc., had been set forth as constitution the same basis for fellowship.

- There are two churches: (a) the "church of Christ" revealed in Scripture and (b) the "Church of Christ" born of the American Restoration Movement, man-made as are other denominations. This "Church of Christ," best known as the "Yellow Page Church of Christ." needs to be moved closer to the "Church of Christ revealed in Scripture," This man-made "Yellow Page Church of Christ" can be changed and revised as other men desire or as needed "to connect" with the present culture, then changed again for the next.

- Baptism is not the fifth step in the plan of salvation [hearing the gospel, faith, repentance, confession, and baptism]; this is theologically horrible and is a theological monstrosity.

- The one step to salvation is faith. Baptism is not required to be received “for the remission of sins.”

- Baptism “to obey God” after or before salvation is sufficient to be saved and to be pleasing to God.

- There should be room in the kingdom of God for those who, believing in Jesus as the Son of God, differ about whether the church has elders or a bishop, or a convention; about whether premillennialism is true or false, or about whether baptism is for or because of the remission of sins.

- Fellowship and worship are to be extended to and to include all who believe that Jesus is the Son of God, including Independent Christian Churches, Community Churches, Disciples of Christ, Baptists, Methodists, Charismatics, Presbyterians, etc.

As the years have gone by, these several views and others have been presented in lectureships in some colleges and universities among us; have been set forth in such papers as *Wineskins* and *Image Magazine*, and have been embraced and accepted as true churches by some churches of Christ. To be sure, intense opposition has been given to these views by lectures, articles, books, and seminars.

It is the case, sadly, that in virtually every case where these items and others of the change agent agenda have been forced into and upon targeted churches controversy, discord, and division have followed. It is to be desired that brethren would quickly and well recognize the articles of faith and practice maintained by the advocates of this change movement and give immediate and determined resistance to it on its first appearance.

Summary Observations of change agency over the years

1. It is noteworthy that in spite of boastful claims that this movement “is the only game in town,” the failures of the movement have been glaringly apparent. The showcase termed Nashville Jubilee has long been dead; so with Image and Wineskins magazines. To be sure, a Wineskins on internet can now be called up, but otherwise these papers lie “in the dustbins of history.”

2. It is remarkable that the champions of the movement have stoutly refused to defend their various positions in open, full, and honorable debate. There is no lack of proclamation of their supposed strength and merit; what is lacking is the willingness to have these claims tested against capable opponents in public discussions.

3. The efforts to uphold the central themes of the change movement have shifted time and again over the years. One thinks of the “Seven Ones of Ephesians 4” debacle; the “Bull’s Eye” claim; the “Orders of Truth” effort, etc. History records the “New Hermeneutic” position; the “Hermeneutic of Suspicion” phase; the “Postmodernism” effort—this last being the phase now in vogue.

4. Early on, (1987) a change agent leader affirmed: “If an effort were to be made to introduce the instrument into a local church where I held membership or into our larger fellowship of believers, I would oppose it strenuously. If the contrary position prevailed, I would have to exit the group and forego fellowship the fellowship of worship which I believed to be unscriptural” (Shelly 108). In the intervening years, this leader has been silent in the presence of various churches which laid aside convictions and practices of long standing and introduced instrumental music into worship services. So much for consistency!

5. In 1984 we were told: "One who has not received the one baptism [of Eph. 4:5, ww] has not yet been born into the family and has no child-status with God which permits brotherhood and fellowship. In fact, one who has not received the one baptism has neither been admitted to the one body of Christ nor been made partaker of the living hope believers have through the resurrection of Jesus." (Shelly [1984] 91-92). This view was later spoken of being difficult to as follows: "We feel compelled to affirm a distinctive believe (sic,) that the immersion of penitent believers constitutes baptism as we understand it to have been practiced and taught by the first generation of the church of God. Yet we somehow sense it goes too far to 'de-certify' the Christian status of the majority of those who have ever confessed Christ over twenty centuries." (Shelly and York 184). Further, we are told: "His (Christ, ww) followers cannot have spiritual fellowship with those who do not confess him as their crucified and risen Lord, but those who make that common confession must begin to honor him by looking for ways to include him rather than to exclude one another" (Shelly and York 54-55). In the same book, one reads of a woman who had received "baptism" as an infant but as a adult asked if she were saved and a sister in Christ. She was assured she was! Again, consistency is of no consideration.

6. In 1984 we were told: "The American Restoration movement arose in the early nineteenth century and pleaded for a return to the things which are fundamental, essential, and universal to the Christian religion. Thomas Campbell, Alexander Campbell, Barton W. Stone, and other 'founding fathers' of that movement had a clear vision of their goal of calling people back to the New Testament church rather than establishing another denomination. They came to their vision through arduous personal study of Scripture and had a defensible rationale for their program in mind.

They paid a high price for their dream but thought nothing more important than Christ and the gospel” (Shelly 1984-6).

This high sounding, commendatory statement does not tell all there is to the change agent evaluation of what such statements would seem to imply!

Enters here the shady lady known as deconstruction—a new word in biblical interpretation, especially among churches of Christ. As an interpretive procedure, it calls for the necessity and ability to get behind given textual materials [deconstruct] so as to reconstruct and evaluate, allegedly, the social, historical, religious, theological, personal, and other ingredients which were present in, entered into, and gave meaning to the resultant “construction” of the materials being studied. When this deconstruction” is done on a given text, we are told such shows the claims or duties set forth therein were and are relativized to the situation in which it originated. The text, therefore, does not in and of itself, give a valid message or “meaning” in or to the present time. Instead, each text can only give rise to those ideas which occur to the reader as he is studying the text, none of which is necessarily connected with or dependent on the text itself.

This process of deconstruction has been applied among change agents with particular reference to the “restoration plea” as well as to Bible passages which restrict the role of women in public worship and passages concerning divorce and remarriage.

Consider the “deconstruction” of what we term “the restoration plea.” The commendatory statement quoted above would seem to imply what was stated then was true and is still true for today. But, we are told, the restoration plea emerged within a world view—or way of

thinking and evaluating information—that reflected what was called commonsense realism or the Baconian mindset. This mindset held one could carefully study, analyze, and interpret the text of scripture so as to reach timeless truth or series of truth statements which could be handed down to succeeding generations and these statements would have the same meaning and significance for each succeeding generation as they had when first discovered and stated.

“Not So!” the deconstructionist shouts. Reason? We are told that the common sense, Baconian [reflecting the method of studying texts and reaching valid conclusions expressed by Francis Bacon (1561-1626)] method of interpreting scripture was the reigning thought structure at the time of the Campbells, Stone, and others of that period. Both, so to say, were joined at the hip and could not be separated.

Further, we are told, the governing world view and thought structure of the present time is so different from the common sense, Baconian world view and methodology that conclusions reached then no longer appeal to the present and must be rejected as being products of erroneous methods of interpreting scripture.

Some questions will help us to evaluate the merit of such a claim.

1. Must all conclusions reached during the period of the late 1700s and early 1800s be rejected as unworthy of acceptance today? If so, does this situation also invalidate the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States? Would change agents so affirm today? If not, on what basis?

2. When Alexander Campbell repudiated sprinkling and pouring and received immersion in 1812, was this a

false decision? Would change agents so affirm today? If not, on what basis?

3. When Thomas Campbell published his Declaration and Address (1809), does this mean the document must now be rejected in every part? Would change agent so affirm today? If not, on what basis?

4. When Barton Stone and others published the Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery in 1804, does this mean they were mistaken to do so? Would change agents so affirm today? If not, on what basis?

5. How was it that the Alexander Campbell, before a Presbyterian, debated the Presbyterians John Walker (1820) and W. L. McCalla (1823) who upheld infant baptism? Did the world view of common sense realism and Baconianism cause Campbell to deny the doctrine and cause the Presbyterians Walker and McCalla to affirm it? Would change agents so affirm today? If not, on what basis?

CONCLUSION

The study of change agency is far-ranging, and its history of division and false worship and false doctrine is apparent. Its proponents refuse to attempt defense of its peculiar doctrines and practices. Brethren should be alert to and resist its entry into targeted churches. Much information is available to refute its claims and manifest its history. Greater treatment is not possible because of limited space, but the arbitrary and unproved aspects of change agent teaching become more evident as they are studied with thoroughness. This, however, must suffice for the present.

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RESTORATION PRINCIPLES DONE RIGHT

ANCIL JENKINS

As one studies the Restoration Movement of the first half of the 19th century it is easy to be envious of its success. We thrill to the results of Walter Scott's efforts in the Western Reserve where he baptized 1000 each year in 1828 and 1829. Alexander Campbell was able to bring entire congregations into the Restoration Movement. Reports to the papers of that time reveal baptism numbering from ten to hundreds. It is no wonder Barton W. Stone spoke of the spread of the good news as moving down the Ohio valley like, "fire in wild stubble" (Stone 1833).

My conviction is the times of Alexander Campbell and Barton W. Stone were providentially prepared as they were at the first coming of Jesus Christ (Gal. 4:4). Just as the preparation for the ministry of Jesus began several years

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before his birth, so the root of the Restoration Movement was planted years before Stone and the Campbells.

Only recently has the role played by the Scottish reformers begun to be recognized. Likewise, Elias Smith and Abner Jones of the New England Christians and

James O' Kelly made significant contributions despite their imperfect understanding of significant teachings of the New Testament.

GENERAL CONDITIONS

Frederick Jackson Turner accepted the U. S. Census definition as the margin of that settlement which has a density of two or more to the square mile. This isolation produced a high level of stress and fear. Fear of Indian attacks, illness and crop failure also contributed.

The isolation and hardships did not contribute to spirituality or provide many opportunities for spiritual growth. Even where churches existed, a preacher's visit was irregular at best. Often marriage and funeral ceremonies were delayed for weeks or months until someone would come to officiate. Even for those who were literate, often the Bible was the only book available.

Other factors brought about a spiritual stagnation or even open rebellion. The influence of deism was very pronounced in Kentucky and the writings of Tom Paine were extensively read. Many of the Kentucky settlers had revolted within the established church in Virginia, and they were antagonistic to religion as the result. Reverend John Lyle closed his female seminary in Paris in 1810 because the parents of some of the girls that were in attendance objected to his reading the Bible in the school (Fortune 26-27).

One must not overlook the newfound spirit of freedom of that time. The War of Independence had been over but a short time. Men who had gained independence and had become property holders by their efforts of clearing their own lands were unlikely to be unduly submissive to

authority. These men, who were building a new country with days and weeks of unremitting toil and unconquerable determination, were not apt to respond positively to preaching stressing dependence and authority.

FAILURE OF CALVINISM

To people such as these the doctrine of Calvinism had little appeal. These were people who, for the first time, had land of their own. They cleared their own lands, defended it from Indians and wild animals and were imbued with a feeling of independence (Fortune 41). Calvin's notions of predestination, that man could do nothing to gain salvation on his own, fell on many deaf ears.

A sense of complacency, or of spiritual "dryness," grew among the people. What little religion they had became boring and cold. Eventually this led to a reaction which developed into a new spiritualism - or "revivalism." One feature was that one could believe from the depths of his heart during worship, rather than just go through the motions during services.

Also contributing to a longing for comfort and assurance was the constant stress on both men and women. A family's survival depended on a harvest from newly cleared land. Women were especially vulnerable because of their many responsibilities. She was often pregnant while also having small children. In many places a prevailing fear of Indians was rampant. Little could be done to prevent death from disease or accidents. It is likely that some of this stress came out in the exercises seen in the early camp meetings.

Why cannot we duplicate this today? The precious gospel has not been changed. In reality, we possess far

greater materials and opportunities than they ever did. It is not likely we will see an explosion of growth as they did. However, we can look to some factors that contributed to their success that we can emulate.

PRINCIPLES WHICH PRODUCED SUCCESS

A deep and abiding desire for truth. The prevailing division in churches was a deep distress to many. Yet, dedicated men refused to submit to the status quo. "Hence they [Stone and others A] concluded, that while they continued in the connection in which they then stood, they were off the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, of which Christ himself is the chief corner stone" (Wikipedia).

This commitment to truth is seen in the two significant documents of the early years of the Restoration Movement. In the Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery Barton W. Stone and others wrote,

Item. We will, that the people henceforth take the Bible as the only sure guide to heaven; and as many as are offended with other books, which stand in competition with it, may cast them into the fire if they choose; for it is better to enter into life having one book, than having many to be cast into hell. Item. Finally we will, that all our sister bodies read their Bibles carefully, that they may see their fate there determined, and prepare for death before it is too late.

In Apology of the Springfield Presbytery (1804) truth once more is mentioned,

With truth, religion ever has revived, and both die together. It flows from God as rays

of light from the sun; stop the communication of light, and the world is instantly in darkness. All, who are acquainted with revivals of true religion, know the doctrine under which they generally commence, is simple, plain, practical and pointed to the conscience. They also know what usually stops the gracious work; a lusting after forbidden food, and the loathing the manna of simple truth (<http://www.mun.ca/rels/restmov/texts/bstone/APOLOGY.HTM>).

The Springfield Presbytery, founded by Barton W. Stone and others after they withdrew from the Presbyterians, was short lived. Through their desire to follow the Bible as they understood it, these men dissolved this organization because there was no New Testament authority for its existence.

Thomas Campbell stated similar convictions in the Declaration and Address. That in order to do this, nothing ought to be inculcated upon Christians as articles of faith; nor required of them as terms of communion, but what is expressly taught and enjoined upon them in the word of God. Nor ought anything to be admitted, as of Divine obligation...but what is expressly enjoined by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ and his apostles upon the New Testament Church; either in express terms or by approved precedent (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Declaration_and_address).

There has been a major shift in our time in regard to the role of truth since the early days of the Restoration Movement. "This is defined as a proposition is true in all possible contexts without creating a contradiction (Wikipedia). Many in both the secular and religious world reject the concept of absolute truth. Yet, to restore New

Testament Christianity, there must be an absolute standard, the Bible as absolute truth.

Not only was there a call for accepting the absolute truth of the Bible, there was also a willingness to obey this truth, no matter how high the price for this action. Like the early Christians, our fore bearers fully accepted the command of Jesus to deny themselves and follow Him (Luke 9:23). Likewise, the pioneers of the Restoration Movement were willing to do the same.

After dissolution of the Springfield Presbytery, Stone told the church at Cane Ridge that he no longer believed as he once did and he was releasing them from their pledges to financially support him. After his wife died in 1810 he and Reuben Dooley, who had recently lost his wife as well, went on a preaching tour. They went taking only their horses and the clothes on their backs. Several years later Stone moved to Illinois, one purpose being to legally release his slaves. This was a great financial sacrifice.

B. F. Hall, as a young man, was baptized and determined to preach the gospel. When he chose to pursue an education to prepare himself for the ministry, his father disinherited him.

Tolbert Fanning refused to take an oath of loyalty to the Union after the army's occupation of Nashville. His conviction that a Christian should not swear cost him his house which was burned by the Union army as punishment. For a period of time, Fanning and his wife Charlotte almost starved. After the war they continued their lives of sacrificial living and service. David Lipscomb and his wife suffered in a similar way because of their convictions.

Unlike Hall, John Taylor of North Alabama learned the truth of the gospel by his own study. It was only with great difficulty he was able to persuade someone to baptize him for the remission of sins. He then preached the gospel at great sacrifice. When he lost his horse as the result of the Civil War, he put his Bible and hymnbook in a small bag made for the purpose and still preached fervently within walking distance of his home.

The people of the Restoration Movement joined those on the frontier who showed a remarkable sense of adaptability. This rustic living necessitated change and development. The covered wagon and the Kentucky long rifle are examples. The camp meeting is an illustration of this on the spiritual level. People lived long distances from each other and the few churches that existed were not able to provide much enrichment.

This was equally true on the spiritual level. The scattered population and the shortage of preachers did not allow for large congregations which were common in the East. This factor also did not allow for preachers to be confined to one place but demanded itineration. Most preachers received little or no compensation for their work, requiring them to teach school or farm for a living.

Due to the primitive means of transportation, this meeting was usually not more than a few miles' distance from those attending. They would leave home and stay as long as they desired. Because of the lack of sufficient accommodations or the lack of funds, camping out was necessary. This event not only provided spiritual nourishment, it also gave opportunities for fellowship for those long lacking human contact. Some came out of sincere religious devotion or interest, others out of curiosity and a desire for a break from the arduous frontier routine,

although many in this group often became sincere converts as well.

In the earlier days buildings of denominational churches were often opened to Restoration Movement preachers. However, because of disagreements in doctrine the buildings were closed to them. They would seek other venues and would use schoolhouses, brush arbors, people's homes and front yards. Moses Lard tells of people felling trees and building benches in the forest. He stood on a stump and preached (Lard 1863).

The practical mindset of the people demanded a simple message which provided hope. This was uniquely developed by the pioneer preacher Walter Scott.

Riding into a village near the close of the day, he addressed himself to the school children who were returning home from school, in such a way that he soon had quite a circle of them gathered round him. He then said to them: "Children, hold up your left hands." They all did so, anticipating some sport. "Now," said he, "beginning with your thumb repeat what I say to you: Faith, repentance, baptism, remission of sins, gift of the Holy Spirit—that takes up all your fingers." ...he continued until they all could repeat it in concert, like a column of the multiplication table. . . He then said: "Children, now run home—don't forget what is on your fingers, and tell your parents that a man will preach the gospel tonight at the school-house, as you have it on the five fingers of your hands (Baxter 180-181).

An overriding principle of the early Restoration Movement was that men were able to obey the gospel and they were lost without this obedience. We are safe to say that a member of a denomination would never

leave a sermon from these early preachers without hearing the necessity of obedience and baptism. Many sacrificed much to follow these simple instructions. Benjamin Lynn (17??-1814) rode seventy miles and convinced Barton W. Stone to baptize him for the remission of sins even though Stone did not believe this at that time. We should be humbled and inspired to read of the stories of sacrifice and determination of early preachers and converts.

Time changes but principles do not. We cannot duplicate situations in which the Restoration Movement began in America. Yet the spiritual is governed by laws as much as the natural. The law of nature is that if you plant seed, cultivate and receive moisture and sun, seed will produce fruit. In the same way, if we plant the gospel as did these pioneers, we can expect similar results. A factor in the result is our faithfulness.

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AN ANCIENT SERMON FOR A MODERN WORLD

CLANCY ETIENNE

INTRODUCTION

Since entering the New Testament Church, I have seen many ungodly deeds done by members to each other. Some of these actions were done toward me. I have also wronged other saints, however, the Lord's Church is still the best place to be. There has not been, there is not now, and never will there be another organization that holds a distance second place to the Church of Christ. People in the Lord's Body are not perfect, but only in it can they become perfected.

When Matthew chapter five is viewed as a single thought, it can communicate (as a backdrop for the lessons

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being taught) this idea: – Jesus called His disciples and said to them, “Do you see the people of the world? Do not be

like them. Yet, do not condemn them.” Why not? There are two reasons: (1) If His followers were to become like the people among whom they lived, the disciples would never have a better example to which to invite them, and (2) if the twelve were to condemn that populous, they could never find them worthy of hearing the Savior’s saving message. Please see Jonah chapter four.

This part of the Sermon on the Mount is a practical prescription for living. It is straight forward; it lays the foundation on which volumes of truth would be stacked. If this part of Scripture was all we had for divine guidance, we could find in principle all that is said elsewhere in the New Testament. Matthew chapter five could be rightly called a little gospel. In a compact version, it communicates well the conduct of brotherhood and kingdom living.

CHRISTIANITY, WHAT IS IN IT FOR ME?

— MATTHEW 5:3-16

Jesus is indeed the master teacher and is also the greatest salesman. He knows how to reach the mind of his prospects. His approach communicates. He creates value and the fear of loss. Without any deliberation, Jesus catalogs a list of nine benefits that belong to those who are willing to live for His cause: (1) “theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (2) “they shall be comforted” (3) “they shall inherit the earth” (4) “they shall be filled” (5) “they shall obtain mercy” (6) “they shall see God” (7) “they shall be called sons of God” (8) “theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (9) “rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven” (Matt. 5:3-12). [All quotes are from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted.] The very first of said list suggests investment. One has invested into God’s enterprise; therefore, he has shares in it. Only Jesus is qualified to own a kingdom, however, when we stand

with Him, He shares ownership. We become partners with our Lord. The second takes into account the way of this present life – individuals can be knocked down and may have to suffer alone, but in God's Kingdom, one is never alone. Number six is a big attention grabber. Is this not the longing of the human heart to someday see God? As a divine romancer, all through the Bible, He has been wowing us to come close. In the seventh, one learns he could be related to God. To be related to the best and the greatest is never a kept secret. It is worthy of publication. This is headline information. The last one returns to the language of the first – (investment and dividends). Pay day is coming. The idea of being rewarded for labor appeals to the human heart. It is a good motivator. God really has something in store for those who love Him. One's labor is not in vain in the Lord (1 Cor. 15:58).

Christianity is indeed the only life one can live and yet never live long enough to regret living it. Our Lord has something to offer, but it is only for those who want it badly. In a world where many know the price on every price tag, yet the value of nothing, many fail to invest in Jesus at the level He desires. Where there is value, there is a price to be paid. In electronics Sony brands retain a better resale value; thus, one pays more for it, so it is in Christianity. Living for Jesus holds greater value than all the world offers. Therefore, there is a bigger price to be paid.

It is of ceaseless amazement to see Americans voluntarily enlist into branches of the military, knowing that they may go to battle where they may lose their lives. Yet they do so proudly. And when the ultimate sacrifice has been made, it is often said of the deceased, he died for his country. In this example, the only reward is one of pride – (good pride). Yet, from this example, New

Testament Christians would do well to learn a lesson about commitment and dedication. In Christianity, there is a much greater reward.

In the early part of our text, Jesus assures His first followers that the cause to which they were called requires total commitment. However, if in their faithful living, their lives were taken, they are promised, never to die again. "He who leads into captivity shall go into captivity; he who kills with the sword must be killed with the sword. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints" (Rev. 13:10). "Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Rev. 2:10).

Present-day saints are too easily offended and when they are, they abandon their Lord. We need to learn a lesson from the Syrophenician woman. She was ignored, despised and insulted, yet she kept on coming because she realized how badly she needed Jesus (Matt. 15:22-28; Mark 7:26-29). Regardless of the price of our walk, we too need to realize we need Jesus badly. Without the Son of God, we have no hope. On one occasion Jesus asked the twelve, "Do you also want to go away?" Simon Peter speaking for the group said, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (John 6:67-68).

It was said of some early saints who understood the value and the cost of Christianity, "And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death" (Rev. 12:11). The reward that awaits faithful saints is worth more than any trial they may suffer (Rom. 8:18).

The Master teacher nails home the importance of value and cost by the use of illustrations. In his illustrations, Jesus uses mineral (salt) and energy (light) (Matt. 5:13-16). The faithfulness of those in Christ is synonymous to the continuous presence of the character of salt – saltiness. Just like salt is not found without its essence – saltiness, a Christian must never be found without his flavor – faithfulness. Salt is a symbol of covenant (Num. 18:19; 2 Chron. 13:5), it faithfully maintains its taste and is used to remind Christians they are in a covenant relationship with Jesus. Therefore, they must live as covenanted people. Breaking this covenant is, as if to say, they are no longer in Christ.

The original word translated light, also means to shine (Internet). Thus, Christians alone are the shiners (reflectors) of the real light - Jesus Christ (John 8:12, 12:36; 1 Thess. 5:5). As reflectors of the Savior, saints cannot allow anything to bring dimness to their shine. Who lights a lamp just to cover it? No one becomes a saint to not let others know he is. While individuals do not become Christians only to let others know they are, it is a major reason for doing so. When born again believers allow Christ to be seen in their lives, the unsaved are able to be led to the source of their shining. God's redemptive scheme involves drawing all men and taking many sons to glory (John 12:32, Hebrews 2:9-10). Disciples have been lit by Jesus for all in the house (world) to see the light (God's deliverance). The world will be in a terrible lost condition if the Savior's reflectors are hid (Lenski 202). Let us remain burning and shining lights, because we are followers of Christ in order to light up our dark world (203). One of our purposes for existence is to show light. Christians are not effective unless they shine (Phil. 2:14-15).

FINDING A COMMON GROUND – MATTHEW 5:17-20

In His effort to secure righteousness greater than that of the scribes and Pharisees (Matt. 5:20), it may have been assumed that Jesus was contradicting or condemning the Old Testament customs. The declaration, “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill” (Matt. 5:17) was advantageous to the efforts the apostles. It can also be helpful to present-day saints.

A valuable lesson to be learned is the idea of finding a common ground. In an effort to win friends and influence people for the cause of Christ, it is wise to find matters in which both teacher and student agrees initially. This provides a better atmosphere for teaching. It is critical to understand where people are and why they have come to the conclusions of their belief in order to bring them over to our understanding of a matter. People are generally more reasonable when they are first understood. That is true even when their position is false. Had the apostles entered their Jewish culture, giving the impression they were seeking to disrupt the teaching of the law, they would have created a controversial atmosphere and their teaching would be less effective.

How many sects could have been prevented, in the history of religious divisions, had both parties just listened better, hearing each other out? Could it be that we have helped to create some unwanted and maybe unscriptural groups in our own brotherhood because we were not open; not seeking a common ground? The idea “seek first to understand and then to be understood,” is not only true, but very valuable in the effort of pointing souls to heaven. Jesus was a master of this idea. He often asked

questions and used the responses of His audiences to serve as backdrops for some much needed lessons.

Finding a common ground does not mean one is agreeing or endorsing others erroneous position. The advantage is, the student comes away with the idea that the teacher cares, and as a result, the presenter affords himself leverage for the change he seeks in the life of his student. A number of wise and successful teachers like Jesus, Paul, and Ananias, who preceded our time in the Christian race, utilized the idea of seeking a common ground (Luke 2:52, Acts 21:19-26; 22:12).

HOW TO INVITE THE WORLD TO A GODLY CHANGE – MATTHEW 5:21-48

In the Caribbean culture there is a proverb, “clean up your own back yard before asking me to clean mine”. Not only is this logical and reasonable, it is also applicable to efforts in changing a sin sick world. The New Testament renders it, “Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye” (Matt. 7:5). We must first buy what we are selling. If what is being taught really works, the effects must first be evident in the life of the teacher. We can change the world by first changing ourselves. What are some areas in which change is needed?

1. Elevated thinking is needed. We must strive for a spirit of excellence as it relates to the business of God. God’s cause is too grand and too holy for our too-often casual and half-hearted interest. We cannot sing praises to God’s holy name only to appear as though we are singing silent night – (we are barely making a sound, the diaphragm has to be engaged). We cannot plan a gospel meeting or campaign effort just to say we are having one.

Sacrifices must be made. The highest affordable level of advertisement must be undertaken. The best presenter for the event must be secured. He must be marketed well. His loyalty to the cause and experience must be told in a way that is bigger than life for the purpose establishing credibility with his listeners. The level at which the presenter is held or presented, will be the level on which the gospel will be received by those who have not yet learned. Often there is a reluctance to market or lift up presenters for the fear that they are being given praise which belongs to God. There is a degree to which a presenter of God's word can be given tribute, market, recognition, esteem, and even praise, without accrediting him the praise which belongs to the Almighty. In some New Testament passages the terms honor, praise and tribute, in reference to men are synonymous (Rom. 13:3,7; 1 Cor. 11:2,22, 1 Pet. 2:14). We must be aware, however, worship is the highest form of praise, and that belongs only to God.

The expectation of any and all events must be set. Too often efforts toward God's cause fail because the level of thinking is too low for the expected results of said event. There must be challenges to compel the raising of the bar of expectation.

God is dynamic, He is dramatic, and is also demonstrative; therefore, when in service to the King, actions must be characteristic of His character.

2. Beliefs must be updated. There comes a point in the maturing of a Christian when he has to move away from surface understanding of Scripture in order to seek a deeper contextual understanding. This exercise will afford him the ability to search the word of God for himself and not totally depend only on what someone else has said. He will be better equipped to identify a thus-says the Lord

rather than embracing culturally accepted traditions. This will require an open mind. In open-mindedness there is the possibility of going too far. That is a regrettable truth. However, if open-mindedness is not allowed, men will become timid and afraid due to the fear of criticisms, as they desire to dig deep into the word of God for the purpose of bringing new and better understanding of the Scriptures. In this exercise, sermon outlines may have to be scraped. Some study books may even have to be rewritten, but this is a small price for a huge profit. Teachers have a responsibility to search deep in order to help condition the minds of their students in the need to get back to the New Testament pattern. An example of the foregoing is Matthew 7:1-2. This reference can no longer mean one is not allowed to judge, but rather, carefulness must be given less the judgment being made, also condemns the individual making said judgment. Another example is found in Romans 11:26. The context here will not support the thought that all Israel - (Israelites or Jews) will someday become saved. The key word in the verse is "so." So is an adverb of manner and answers the question, "how?" How shall they be saved? The answer, just like the Gentiles are saved by faith in Jesus Christ, if the Jews are ever going to be saved, it must be in that same manner.

Students adapting to this change will themselves become better teachers of God's word.

Digging deep enables one to "Taste and see that the Lord is good..." (Ps. 34:8). This paradigm shift will afford more effective spiritual applications to life.

3. There is a need for reviving a spirit of restoration. Restoration of New Testament Christianity cannot be a thing of the past. Those good brethren of past restoration efforts did the best they could with what they had. Efforts

to restore New Testament Christianity must continue in every generation. This is necessary in order to achieve balance in the belief and practice of the faith. The manifold (many-sided) wisdom of God must be emphasized in our messages (Eph. 3:8-11). It might have been that during the restoration movement, and years immediately following, coming out of the darkness of denominationalism, the dire need to emphasize apologetics was most needed in order to show the difference between truth and error. That has been done very well, and must be continued, however, in order to have balance, emphasis like teachings on grace, mercy, forgiveness, love and others must also be sounded in abundance from every pulpit. A failure to do so will create a shift in one direction, and therefore give rise to falling away again, and movements not loyal to Christ and His words will be given birth.

Habits become customs, customs form cultures and then cultures frame theologies. Therefore, if Jude's exhortation to contend must be relevant today (Jude 3), our contending necessitates the ability to differentiate between cultural residue and inspired revelation.

4. Evangelistic efforts must take on greater meanings. Evangelism and mission efforts must be an integral part of our existence (John 12:31, 10:16; Heb. 2:9-10). It is not enough to haphazardly engage in sporadic door knocking simply for the purpose of preventing accusation of stagnation. Our evangelistic efforts must be of such where saints are willing and glad to share their faith in the Savior, for the express purpose of bringing glory to God through conversions to Jesus Christ (John 15:8). And when sinners have become saints, genuine efforts must be planned and organized to assimilate these new members into the local family of God.

Seekers of Jesus must see our undying love and deep concern for their spiritual development and eternal comfort in the place God has prepared for those who love Him.

CONCLUSION

Since we are in the business of winning the world to Christ, our emphasis cannot be judgment and condemnation. We have to look at people the way God does. He is perfect (mature) in His dealings. Some people hated God's Son, yet He died to save their souls. Others are not even thankful, yet He sends His sun and rain to provide their needs. As true sons of God let us look for the good in people and love them into changing their undesirable ways.

God's people cannot do just enough to exist. Sacrifices have to be made. Some radical ideas must be visited and allowed. Some conveniences ought to become inconveniences. Drastic changes must be made. Going above and beyond basic expectations, such as loving a neighbor to loving one's enemy, causes the world to see us in better light and will conclude we are truly perfect (mature) sons of God.

Citizens of the twice born community must always run to win, become all things to all men, and change for the better so the world could be led to the best – Jesus.

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ANCIENT FAITH / MODERN WORLD – A CASE STUDY

THOMAS MILLER

It is inevitable that our ancient faith and our modern world collide. The reason is obvious. The ancient faith came into the world—ancient to us now, but modern at that time—to confront it and expose its darkness. It still does! John wrote of this conflict, “And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it” (John 1:5). [All quotations from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted.]

The results of this conflict vary. Sometimes the light does what it is intended to do; it dispels the darkness. There are occasions when the ancient faith impacts the modern world in a very positive way. This is not always the case, however. Often the ancient faith is mocked, or compromised, by the modern world.

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Examples

Examples come readily to mind. For instance, this is what has happened in regard to the matter of origins. Our ancient faith gives us an inspired account of creation. After all, the Holy Spirit was present and revealed to Moses

exactly what happened. Moses wrote it down, and it has been preserved for us. We can read that account today in the opening chapters of Genesis. For me—and for you, I trust—that is the end of the story.

Our modern world, however, largely accepts organic evolution as the answer for the question of origins. Our ancient faith answer is generally ridiculed. In some rare cases, the modern world is impacted and people come to see the errors of evolution. In many other cases, however, the ancient faith does not impact the modern world at all. In fact, the modern world impacts the thinking of those who once held the ancient faith. Their faith is either destroyed completely or compromised greatly. Theistic evolution is an example of that needless, but often seen, compromise.

The matter of worship styles is another example. Church wars rage over this very thing. Should our worship be traditional or contemporary or a little bit of both? What kind of songs should we sing? Should the preacher stand in the pulpit or on the floor when he delivers his message? How should those who attend dress? These, and other questions, bring people into conflict.

Our ancient faith gives us parameters for our worship. It is to be “in spirit and truth” (John 4:24). It is to be carried on “decently and in order” (1 Cor. 14:4). For many of us, that is enough. We understand these parameters, and we respect them. We want to do no more—or less—than what is authorized in Scripture.

Sadly, for others, this is not enough. Our modern world, after all, has a show time mentality. We have become used to glitz and glamour. We like big productions—the bigger and more spectacular the better. We like the hair to stand up on the back of our necks from the special

effects. We want loud music and strobe lights. It's all about the feeling.

Will our ancient faith influence our modern world, or will our modern world influence our ancient faith? Unfortunately, we are seeing more of the latter than the former. Many churches are patterning their worship more after Broadway than the Bible. The spirit is there, but the truth has taken a backseat. And, decency is not much of a concern. People like to come as they are and leave as they came.

A Case Study

The purpose of this study, however, is not to look at a variety of examples of this conflict between the ancient faith and our modern world. It is to present a case study of this conflict from 1 John. In this little New Testament book, we find what happens when the ancient faith and modern, worldly thinking collide. The modern thinking, in this case, was incipient Gnosticism.

THE CIRCUMSTANCES

To understand the message of 1 John, we must look at the circumstances which prompted its writing. Fortunately, John gave us four purpose statements in the book. In the first chapter, he said he wrote the book “that your joy may be full” (1:4). Whatever was happening, the joy of the original recipients of this letter—probably Christians living in Ephesus—was being taken away. In the second chapter, he said he wrote the book “that you may not sin” (2:1). Whatever was happening, there was a gross misunderstanding of sin. In the second chapter, he said he wrote the book “concerning those who try to deceive you” (2:26). Whatever was happening, false teachers were

leading people into error. Finally, in the last chapter, he said he wrote the book “that you may know that you have eternal life” (5:13). Whatever was happening, the people were being robbed of their confidence and assurance.

I maintain that what was happening had to do with the beginnings of the Gnostic heresy.

This is fairly easy to see when we look at Gnosticism, how it would affect the church, and what John has to say in this book.

The Roots of Gnosticism

Guy N. Woods defined Gnosticism as an “admixture of paganism and corrupt Christianity” (199). It was clearly syncretistic. Dodd called it “a theosophical hotchpotch.” It had elements of Western intellectualism and Eastern mysticism.

Though it had ancient roots, it was modern and gaining steam. Would it not be natural to expect that it would soon affect the church? Scott wrote, “An attempt was made on the part of this philosophical religion to effect an alliance with Christianity. A section of the church was dissatisfied with the simplicity of the gospel, and sought to advance in something higher by adopting the current speculation” (14).

Emphasis on Knowledge

The term Gnostic comes from *gnosis*, which is the Greek word for “knowledge.” As the term suggests, there was an inordinate emphasis on knowledge in this heresy. The Gnostics were “the knowing ones.” They believed they possessed a secret knowledge which was not available

to others. It was seen as deeper and more genuine than that of ordinary Christians. Furthermore, this mystical and special enlightenment was more important to them than anything else, even faith.

As Lanier stated it, “The gospel was very good, as far as it went, but the Gnostics had ‘a more excellent way.’ They understood the gospel better than the apostles themselves”(xiv). This view fostered an intellectual pride, which was certainly detrimental to life and fellowship in the church.

Dualism

Gnosticism’s theological basis was rooted in a dualism which held the essential separation of spirit and matter. To them, spirit was intrinsically good and matter was intrinsically evil. This view threw them into conflict with some major biblical doctrines.

For instance, they could not accept the biblical account of creation, for it had Spirit creating matter, or good creating evil. They attempted to deal with this by a convoluted system of emanations. John Stott explained it as follows: “The Gnostics posited a series of “aeons” or emanations from the Supreme, each more removed from Him than its predecessors, until One emerged sufficiently remote to create the material world” (45).

This final emanation, or demiurge, is generally understood as the Jehovah of the Old Testament. He was far enough removed from the supremely good God, according to the Gnostics, that He could create matter, or evil.

The doctrinal matter under consideration in 1 John, however, was not creation but the incarnation of Jesus

Christ. The Gnostics could not understand how God could become flesh (cf. John 1:14). To them it was inconceivable that God could indwell a human body of flesh and blood. Jesus could not be God in the flesh, as far as they were concerned.

As with the matter of creation, the Gnostics had a rather bizarre explanation of what actually happened. They were, however, not all in agreement. Some, the Docetics, said Jesus only appeared to be flesh. They believed Christ's body was not flesh and blood but only a phantom. Stott wrote: "He 'seemed' to the eyes of the witnesses to be truly human, but it was a disguise similar to that of the Old Testament theophanies when God (or the angel of the Lord) appeared in the form of a man" (Ibid, p. 44).

One group, the Cerinthians, went a step further. Cerinthus was trained in Egypt but lived in Ephesus. He held that Jesus was the son of Mary and Joseph and was endowed with greater goodness and wisdom than other men. He was not the Christ, but the Christ Spirit entered his body at his baptism in the form of a dove (cf. Matt. 3:16) and left his body just prior to his death on the cross (cf. Luke 23:46).

Alexander M. Renwick explains as follows: "...Christ acted in the man Jesus but was never incarnate. He could not be, because matter was so evil. The heavenly Christ returned to heaven before the crucifixion, so it was only a man who died on the cross" (238).

It is well established that Cerinthus and John knew one another and John considered him to be an enemy of the truth. Irenaeus, in *Against Heresies*, recorded a story relayed by Polycarp about John and Cerinthus meeting in a

public bath in Ephesus. When John learned that Cerinthus was inside, he ran from the bath, exclaiming that he could not remain there while the enemy of God and man was there.

The convoluted explanations seem bizarre to us, but they illustrate what happens when you start from a false premise. Everything has to be made to fit, even if it is forced.

The Matter of Sin

Gnosticism produced some very real ethical problems. How would the matter of sin be dealt with? As might be expected, not every Gnostic dealt with it in the same way. Cerinthus, for instance, held that sin was committed only in the flesh and did not affect the spirit. This approach left people unfettered by law. It fostered libertinism. Instead of seeking to avoid sin, it embraced it. Irenaeus linked the error of Cerinthus with the Nicolaitans in Revelation 2 and the sin of immorality.

It is difficult to consider this approach and not mention that people today still use it. “If it feels so good, how can it be so wrong?” “If it feels good, do it.” “You only go around once in life, so grab all the gusto you can.” “Who are you to tell me this is wrong?” “I’m not perfect, but I am a very spiritual person.” Ever hear any of these?

At the other extreme, some tried to deal with the matter of sin by abusing their bodies. They reasoned that the body was evil and had to be rigorously disciplined. This was the approach of the ascetics. It was the beat-sin-out-of-yourself approach. Through this mortification of the flesh, the Gnostics believed they could become like God.

Again, we notice this approach to the matter of sin is still around. It is not uncommon to hear about people who beat themselves with switches, do without food or drink for prolonged periods of time, stand in the rain, wind and snow, have themselves nailed to a cross, or exhibit some similar behavior. We do not challenge the sincerity of such people, but we do challenge this as a suitable way to deal with the problem of sin.

Still others believed they had reached a state of sinlessness. This was the perfectionist approach. They didn't have to do anything about the problem, for they had risen above it.

Believe it or not, this approach is still around, too. In a Bible study, a man asked me if I still sinned. I confessed that I did. He said he did not. He said he had risen above it. I read some verses in 1 John to him, but he still professed his state of perfectionism.

It is against the background we have just outlined that John wrote. A heresy was beginning to make inroads. It had profound implications. He could not allow it to go unchecked.

THE CONFLICT

This brings us to a discussion of the conflict Gnosticism caused in the church, conflict that precipitated this book. Once Gnosticism is understood, it is easy to see how it would adversely affect a congregation.

Polarization

For instance, the intellectual pride of the Gnostics polarized the church. To be sure, the special knowledge

of the Gnostics was only imagined. Paul described it as “what is falsely called knowledge” (1 Tim. 6:20). Whether the knowledge was real or imagined, Paul’s words ring true, “Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies” (1 Cor. 8:1).

This intellectual pride was stealing the joy the rank-and-file members of the church had. Renwick explained: “Here was one of the worst features of Gnosticism, the elevating of a limited number into a specially privileged class, and the consigning of the vast majority to unredeemable destruction. This was totally contrary to the teachings of Christianity (Ibid. p. 237). No wonder John wrote this book “so that your joy may be full” (1:4). Gnosticism was a polarizer and a joy stealer!

I cannot help but make the point that those who believe they have a superior knowledge can still have this affect on the church. Knowledge is wonderful, and we all need to know more than we do. That is one reason we attend functions like this one. On the one hand we have some who do not know as much as they think they do, and on the other hand we have those whose knowledge has gone to their heads. Both of these are detrimental to the church.

By way of illustration, I was in a graduate course in church growth a number of years ago. The professor was one of the leading church growth “experts” among us. He was arguing for two worship services; one that was traditional and one that was contemporary. He made this argument based upon the supposed fact the chasm between the likes and needs of young members in the church and older members in the church was so great they could not satisfactorily worship together.

Thinking I saw a flaw in the argument, I asked about

the Jews and the Gentiles of the first century. I observed that they were very different in their backgrounds, and yet they were never told to worship separately. In fact, the New Testament is clear in stating what divided them was taken away and they were to be one in Christ. I would think this involved their meeting together for meaningful worship.

The professor said, "That's different." I asked how it was different, and he summarily dismissed my objection by saying, "You just don't understand." Maybe I didn't, but my observation deserved a thoughtful and respectful answer—which it did not receive.

Lovelessness

Coupled with the intellectual pride of Gnosticism was the fact that it was loveless. John Rutherford wrote:

Gnosticism was distinguished by an unethical, loveless intellectualism. ...The apostle describes the dry head-knowledge which left the heart and life untouched by love, and which led men, while they professed to love God, nevertheless to remain destitute of love for their fellow-men (International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, "Entry for Gnosticism").

Quoting Ignatius, J.W. Roberts wrote:

Mark those who have strange opinions concerning the grace of Jesus Christ which has come to us and see how contrary they are to the mind of God. For love they have no care, none for the distressed, none for the

afflicted, none for the prisoner, or for him, released from prison, none for the hungry or thirsty (48).

These people would see a brother in need and refuse to help him (5:17). It is not surprising, then, that John would have so much in this little book to say about love. It is one of the tests of being “of God” (3:10). Even today, we need to hear John’s words again. We must love the brethren, and we must let them and others know that we do. To borrow John’s words, “My little children, let us not love in word or tongue, but in deed and truth” (3:18).

It is easy to say, “I love you, brother,” but it is much harder to treat our brothers—and sisters—in a loving way. For example, when someone says, “I’m only telling you this, because I love you,” you may have reason to doubt that love when it is clothed in such terse, unkind words.

Prevalence of Immorality

Another consequence of Gnosticism was the prevalence of immorality it fostered. Since many of the Gnostics taught that the spirit was unaffected by what happened in the flesh, it is rather easy to see the danger of unrestrained sin was very real. If the choice was between asceticism and licentiousness, we can only imagine which choice was more prevalent.

John’s message is that sin is lawlessness (3:4) and that Christians don’t continue to practice it (3:6-9). No matter what the Gnostics claimed, a sinful lifestyle was evidence that they were not in fellowship with God.

Does this message also need to be heard today? Is sin taken lightly? Are people, even members of the church,

living unrestrained lives? Do we sometimes teach a kind of grace that is nothing more than a giant cosmetic stick with which to cover all of the blemishes of sin?

THE CONFRONTATION

Knowing the nature and consequences of Gnosticism, John confronted this heresy in 1 John. And, I would say that it is not hard to understand what he wrote. He was not ambiguous. His words are direct and had a sting to them. Remember that one of his purposes in writing the book was to warn the brethren “concerning those who try to deceive you” (2:26). I would say, however, that his words were loving and exactly what was needed.

Identifying the False Teachers

Clearly, John identified the false teachers who were threatening the church. They denied the incarnation, thus denying that Jesus was the Christ (2:22). John labeled them as “antichrists” (4:3). He described them as “false prophets” (4:1). He said they were “liars” (2:22). He warned the original readers against being deceived by these false teachers (3:7).

Confronting the False Teaching

It is one thing to label someone a false teacher, and it is another thing to confront the false teaching itself. We seem to be better at one than the other. Labels are often carelessly applied, but that was not the case in 1 John. The false teaching was identified and clearly refuted.

For instance, the chief claim of the Gnostics had to do with the person of Jesus. They denied that the human Jesus was the divine Christ. This came from their dualistic view

that flesh was essentially evil and spirit was essentially good. They could not fathom how the two could come together. How would John deal with this false view? He begins by stating the testimony of the witnesses. They—including himself—had seen, heard, and touched Him (1:1-3). He was no apparition. He did not just seem to be human. He was fully human; just as He was fully divine.

John's strongest argument in regard to Jesus being the Christ is made in 5:6. Jesus Christ came by water and blood. "Water" refers to His baptism, and "blood" refers to His death. Remember the Gnostics taught that the Christ spirit descended upon the human Jesus at his baptism and departed from Him at His death. John affirms, however, Jesus was the Christ before and during His baptism and during and after His death on the cross. It was Jesus Christ who was baptized, and it was Jesus Christ who died and shed His blood.

Furthermore, John called them back to what they had heard in the beginning (2:24). The Gnostics would have seen themselves as progressive thinkers, but John encouraged them to hold fast to the basic teachings of the gospel. Roberts comments:

This advice is suggested pointedly to John's readers by a personal pronoun placed forward in the Greek: "You, let what you heard...abide in you." The force is this: Others may deny or be in doubt, but you, you cannot be if you hold fast to the teaching given you when you first learned the gospel (Op. Cit., p. 69).

This is not to say that we should out-of-hand reject everything that may be new to us, but it is to say that

we must always remain rooted and grounded in the truths of the gospel. So called progressive thinking can be dangerous.

John also made simple, yet profound, arguments against the basic behavior of the Gnostics. They claimed to have fellowship with God, yet they walked in darkness (1:6). They claimed to know God, yet they did not keep His commandments (2:4). They claimed to love God, yet they did not love the brethren (3:16-19). Christ appeared to put away sin, yet they continued to practice sin (3:4-6). They claimed to have special knowledge, yet they did not know that obedience to God and ethical behavior was necessary.

Do we still need to hear these things today? Have we fallen victim to saying and not doing? Have we placed more emphasis on saying the right things than doing the right things? Do we need to be reminded that ethical behavior is always the test of what we say?

THE CONFIDENCE

In addition to confronting the false teachers and exposing their teachings, John lifts up the beaten down Christians and gives them confidence. He knew they needed it. He wanted them to have confidence before the Lord at His appearing (2:28).

John's Purpose

In his last purpose statement in the book, John wrote: "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God" (5:13).

If this is why John wrote the book, I would think two questions are in order. First, did he accomplish what he set out to do? Second, if we read his book, would we be able to know whether we have eternal life or not? The answer to both questions is an emphatic “Yes!”

Isn't this all very ironic? The Gnostics claimed to be “in the know,” but John clearly says they did not know as much as they thought they did. The regular folks were being told they did not know, but John says they did (2:20-21). They did not know everything there was to know, as the Gnostics claimed for themselves, but they knew the truth about the person of Jesus. Furthermore, by listening to John, they could come to full confidence that they had eternal life. As is often stated, “They could know that they could know that they could know.”

This knowledge was not based upon some supposed special revelation or endowment. It was based upon the writings of an inspired apostle of Jesus Christ. Even so today, our knowledge comes from that which inspired men have written down for us in the Bible (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

But, upon what facts does our confidence rest? In 1 John 1:7-2:2, we find three things that—when properly understood—fill us with assurance. These three truths are presented in an “if, then” format, i.e., if you do these things, then this will happen.

Confidence in the Blood of Jesus

First, John writes: “But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin” (1:7). Those who walk in the light have fellowship with all others who are also walking in the light, and they have the continual cleansing of the blood of Jesus.

But, what does it mean to walk in the light? In the previous verse, John equates walking in darkness with not practicing the truth. Walking in the light, then, is practicing the truth. It is striving each day to live righteously. The Psalmist wrote, “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” To walk in the light is to walk according to the Word, which is truth (John 17:17). In Ephesians 5:8, Paul encouraged Christians to “Walk as children of light,” and so should we.

This daily walking in the light gives us daily cleansing. “The present tense ‘cleanseth’ (katharizei) in the Greek is deeply significant. It states that which goes on continually, constantly for the benefit of man” (Lanier 16). This is a profound and wonderfully assuring truth. The blood we contact as we are united with Christ in baptism (Rom. 6:3-5) continues to flow for our cleansing.

This would have been a blow to the teaching of the Gnostics. Their dualistic theology denied that Jesus Christ died at Calvary and shed His blood. If only the human Jesus died, what efficacy would there have been in that blood? But, if He was the Son of God, there could be sufficient power to wash sins away. The New Testament is clear in stating that the blood of Jesus Christ is all that is needed to cleanse mankind (Eph. 1:7; 1 Pet. 1:18-19).

It is not to be understood, however, that this cleansing is automatic or that the Christian has nothing to do. As great as this verse is, it does not tell the whole story. The apostles had other things to say.

Confidence in the Veracity of God

Listen to John again, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1:9). The blood of Jesus will not

keep the person clean who will not confess his sins. But, if we confess our sins, a faithful God will forgive our sins.

Here again the teaching of the Gnostics is challenged. Many of them believed they had risen above sin and reached a state of perfection, or that sins committed in the body could not be helped and did not matter. John denies this in two verses (1:8,10). Instead of denying their sins, John writes they should confess them. How could a person who was walking in the light do anything else?

The confessing he has in mind is a full admission of one's weakness and sinfulness. The word used here, *homologomen*, demands continuous confession and literally mean "to say the same thing." Lanier points out, "It is a full acknowledgement of errors, mistakes, and wrongs, with pious and humble appeal to God for mercy" (Op. Cit., p. 19),

A good example of this kind of confession is found in Luke 18:13. There, the publican who went up to the temple to pray "would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God be merciful to me a sinner!'" This man was agreeing with God. He realized his sinfulness and admitted it completely.

John says God will forgive the person who demonstrates this attitude. To think otherwise is to cast reflection upon the faithfulness and justness of God. We may have a hard time forgiving ourselves, and others may not forgive us, but God will!

Confidence in the Advocacy of Jesus Christ

Consider these words from John, the last ones we will notice today: "My little children, these things I write

to you, so that you may not sin. And, if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (2:1). We must not allow the chapter division here to keep us from seeing John's point.

John does not want the readers of this book to sin one single time. But, he knows they would. He had already pointed out the folly of denying sin. All is not lost, however, when a person sins. As we have just noticed, confession is required. The advocacy of Jesus Christ is also involved.

Again, it is important to understand that the present tense verbs are used in the original language. As we sin, we keep on having an Advocate. This word refers to "one who is called along side." John uses the same word (paraclete) in the Gospel of John to refer to the Holy Spirit (John 14:26).

Jesus is our lawyer, the One who pleads our case. "The author of 1 John reveals him in the heavenly office of high priest making intercession for the sins of the believers for whom he had died" (Roberts, p. 37). His righteousness qualifies Him as the One Who can do this effectively.

What confidence these things inspire in us. The blood of Jesus continues to flow to keep us clean, as we walk in the light. When we do sin, we confess out sinfulness, and God forgives us. And, God's own Son represents us in heaven.

CONCLUSION

Looking back over this study, what have we learned?

First, our ancient faith and our modern world often

collide. There is a basic antagonism between the two.

Second, 1 John gives us a case study of this collision. The Gnostic philosophies of the modern world of John's day were brought into the body of believers and threatened the ancient faith.

Third, when this was done, the result was negative. It always is. Truth is compromised. Harm is done to the church.

Fourth, the cure for any false teaching is always a straight forward, logical, loving defense of the truth. Too much is at stake to allow such to continue.

Fifth, while we may not know everything, we can know our standing before God, and this gives us blessed assurance.

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FELLOWSHIP ISSUES

EDWIN JONES

INTRODUCTION

There is a very real sense in which every biblical topic serves as the window through which we view every other. God's love, for example, can rightly serve as the vantage point through which we examine not only every other attribute of God, but every aspect of man's nature, the scope of salvation history and the divine kingdom.

Our present goal is to examine the spiritual landscape from the perspective of biblical fellowship. An exhaustive treatment of the matter would be interesting but time-consuming, so for the moment we will narrow our focus and look specifically at what we often identify as fellowship "issues." Can we have fellowship with the general religious

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world in all things? Can we worship with anyone regardless of their system of beliefs and practices? Are there any limits on fellowship? What can we (or can't we) do and be in fellowship with God and others? More importantly, how do we determine the answer to these questions?

The extreme limits of fellowship are: one, see how many we can include (open fellowship) and two, see how

many we can exclude (closed fellowship). Principles of inclusion and exclusion abound not only in our illustrations and arguments, but (more importantly) within scripture. In Matthew's account of the parable of the wedding feast (Mt. 22:3ff) we see what might appear to be a contradictory approach. The host goes out of his way to invite as many guests as possible to a wedding after the original invitees spurned his invitation (inclusion). But, in what seems to be a stunning turn of events, the host chastises and dismisses a guest for not wearing proper attire (exclusion). Let's include as many as possible, but you—you—are excluded.

Biblical principles of fellowship are similar. God wants all men to be saved (1 Tim 2:3-4). If all men were saved then all would be in fellowship. But we know that although many are called, few are chosen and fewer still are faithful (Mt. 22:14; Rev. 17:14). Obviously, biblical fellowship excludes some. As was the ill prepared wedding guest, we are invited to the wedding but the invitation does not say "come as you are." To be part of God's wedding party (cf. Rev. 19:7ff), we must not only be invited—the gospel invitation is extended to all—we must also wear the appropriate attire. In other words, we must meet God's conditions (cf. Rev 17:8).

The original invitees to the wedding feast might have thought they had more important things to do. They may have rejected the invitation in principle, not because they were busy but because they rejected the one who invited them. In the case of the invitation inherent in the good news, that equals rejecting God himself.

We want everyone to be in fellowship with us, but if we follow all of God's guidelines—not just those that please us—we must admit that some souls simply will not be in fellowship with us or God. Some never acknowledge

God's gracious invitation. I want everyone to be saved because God does, but I can no more fellowship everyone than God can save them in their sins or save them against their will. Salvation, being "in Christ" and fellowship go together (cf. Acts 2:38-47; Eph. 1:1ff). If I am to respect God, then I am honor-bound to respect God's boundaries. I can not call evil "good" and good "evil" and expect God to accept me (Is. 5:20). I can not consistently teach others to do what I am unwilling to do (Rom. 2:1ff; Mt. 23:2). If I am to follow in the paths of righteousness, then I must know where and what they are (Pr. 2:9).

ARE THERE LIMITS OF FELLOWSHIP?

Years ago a brother in a distant state gently chastised me for not getting involved in a particular brotherhood controversy. In response, I asked him whether or not he knew certain preachers in my area who taught the same error. He acknowledged that he did not. But I did. Although I was not taking part in the controversy he mentioned on a brotherhood-wide scale, I was doing just what he was doing, just in a different area and on a different scale.

When and where I know of issues that are within my ability to affect and impact, I have a responsibility to act. But are there limits to our individual responsibility?

Are you in fellowship with the elders of the Lord's church in the largest congregation of the body of Christ meeting in Nairobi, Kenya or in Stockholm, Sweden? Do you even know that congregations exist in those places? Do they have elders? Are you in fellowship with them? How can I have fellowship with the leaders or members of the church on the other side of the globe when I do not know who they are, what they do, what they believe or anything else about them?

If biblical fellowship inherently involves some sense of working together for the cause of Christ on an ongoing basis, to what extent am I in fellowship with a brother that I rarely see and never work with?

It seems that we use the term fellowship rather broadly sometimes, and in so doing distort the term to the point that it no longer conveys what it did in the new testament.

While two Christians living in opposite corners of the world are both "in Christ," saying so does not mean that they are in fellowship in every sense. To be sure, if they are faithful in Christ, they are both in fellowship with God and, to that extent, have some semblance of fellowship with each other (cf. 1 Jn 1:1-4; 1 Cor. 1:9). But if they do not know of each other, have never met, and do not correspond in any way, there is a crucial aspect of fellowship that they simply do not have. They have never been co-workers together, even though each continues to be faithful in Christ. And if they never jointly participate in working together, then there is at least one major aspect of fellowship missing in their relationship.

Fellowship involves a relationship between at least two Christians, each of which has a distinct, obedient-faith-relationship with God. But fellowship is not fully explained by these broad parameters. It must be more to be the full-orbed, fellowship revealed in scripture. It must entail more than two faithful Christians who are both in a proper relationship with God. It consists of an obedient faith-relationship with each other that involves some sort of working together in a more direct fashion.

We can misrepresent truth and teach error by: (1) using a term too broadly and (2) using a term too restrictively.

A denominational “pastor,” attempting to show me that Saul was converted before arriving in Damascus, offered as proof Ananias’ calling Saul “brother” when he first met him. To be sure, Saul was a brother to Ananias: they were both Jews. But Saul was not a brother to Ananias in a very key way. He was not yet a brother “in Christ.” To assume that “brother” in this context implied Saul was already saved is to use the term “brother” too broadly.

There must be some way in which we can more clearly and carefully distinguish between overly broad and overly narrow ways of defining fellowship. To affirm that I am in fellowship in every sense of the word with Christians I do not know seems to be a misuse of the term. Furthermore, to affirm fellowship in every sense of the word with Christians I do know, but whom I rarely see and thus rarely have any means of actually working together, also seems to be a misuse of the term.

Do we teach error by noting this distinction? Are we equivocating on the use of the term by using it too broadly or too narrowly ourselves? To be sure, critics will declare: “He’s redefining fellowship to suit himself.” My awareness of the problem does not necessarily mean that I have not been caught up in it myself. But let’s examine the matter further to determine whether or not such a mistake has actually taken place.

In another time and place, a noted brother defined two levels of fellowship, which he simply designated as “Big F” and “little f” fellowship. He distinguished between them as follows: Big “F-fellowship” issues are those focusing on essential-to-salvation matters and “little-f fellowship” issues are those focusing on tangential, non-essential-to-salvation matters. Big “F-Fellowship” issues are directly salvation-connected. Little f “fellowship” issues are not.

What those “Big-F and “little-f” issues are will vary depending on who is defining them. In this case the role of women in the church, instrumental music, marriage/divorce/remarriage, etc., were all deemed “little-f” fellowship issues by this brother.

The distinctions noted above capitulate nothing in key doctrinal areas. No quarter is given to those who pitch key biblical doctrines into the abyss of “little-f” issues.

In addressing fellowship issues in the body of Christ we find the same challenges we face in defining the term fellowship itself. We can misrepresent fellowship issues by (1) being overly broad in identifying what constitutes an issue or (2) being overly restrictive in our identification. The problems are further compounded by differences in practice. We can also muddle fellowship issues by being (1) overly broad in our practice or (2) overly restrictive in our practice.

THREE KEY AREAS

There are, then, at least three broad areas that are subject to either too-restrictive or too-loose views of fellowship matters:

(1) Defining fellowship—how we define and explain what we believe to be the biblical meaning of fellowship;

(2) Identifying fellowship issues—how we define and explain what we believe to be a biblical “issue” of fellowship;

(3) Fellowship practice—how we actually practice fellowship

We find a wide range within these three areas. It is possible not only to manipulate each but also to be inconsistent in moving from one to another. We might define fellowship too broadly, be too restrictive in identifying whether or not something is an “issue,” and finally, be either too restrictive or too loose in practice. These variables alone allow for at least 27 different combinations, not counting the varying degrees within each area.

To be biblically consistent we should be able to (1) define fellowship the way God defines it, (2) identify issues as God identifies them and (3) practice fellowship as God intends.

There are, of course, plenty of biblical examples that demonstrate how things can go wrong. Some religious leaders of Jesus’ day were quite restrictive in their understanding of fellowship. The Sadducees and the Pharisees were known for their contempt for each other, some thinking that only members of their party were right (cf. Acts 23:6ff). But we suspect that within their party, some may have demonstrated a rather wide latitude in what they allowed fellow party members to believe. In practice, it is obvious that inconsistencies prevailed. It was all right to save your animal on the Sabbath day, but whatever you do, do not allow this Jesus to get away with healing someone on that day (Mt. 12:9-14). They were quite forgiving when it came to oxen and donkeys but rather restrictive when it came to their fellow man.

Obviously, how we define fellowship, identify fellowship issues and practice fellowship is critical. Because there are so many ways to fail, how should we think and act concerning those whose perception of these three key areas differs from ours? How will we define, identify and practice fellowship with those who are trying to do

the same thing we are trying to do yet come to different conclusions?

The significance of getting these things acceptably can not be over emphasized. Fellowship issues, like doctrinal issues and issues of conscience are often sin issues. Note the term “often.” The nine-and-a-half tribes of the children of Israel on the western side of the Jordan assumed that the two-and-a-half tribes on the other side were guilty of idolatry when they erected a memorial to commemorate God’s faithfulness (Josh. 22:21ff). In the three key areas noted here—defining fellowship, identifying an issue and practice—the eastern tribes were consistent. They knew what fellowship was. They knew that idolatry was a fellowship issue. And finally, they were right to take their brethren to task if idolatry was in fact being practiced.

But the western tribes failed in a crucial point: their belief was mistaken. The eastern tribes had built a memorial, not an altar. The western tribes were consistent in all three areas, but in one critical area they assumed something that simply was not true. Thinking that others are wrong does not make them wrong.

We find a similar challenge in dealing with issues of conscience, such as those addressed in Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 8 and 10. Those who refused to eat meat because it might have been part of a pagan sacrifice made a critical assumption—that God cared whether or not their meat came from a pagan source. Obviously, God does not approve of pagan sacrifices, and we know that we should never do anything that condones any belief or practice contrary to God’s will. Therefore, wouldn’t it be true that God must not approve of anything that might appear to condone those sacrifices—such as eating the meat?

The apostle Paul pointed out where this line of thinking falters: Idols are nothing. Offering a sacrifice to a non-existent god should not be encouraged, but eating meat from that sacrifice does not commend the practice.

The issue of whether or not some belief or practice is sinful does not depend on any person's say-so. The western tribes' belief did not make the eastern tribes' memorial an altar, and conscientious objections to the practice of eating meat from pagan sources did not make it sinful. Thinking or believing something is sinful does not make it so.

THREE FELLOWSHIP CONNECTIONS

Biblical marriage entails three separate relationships. The horizontal relationship between one man and one woman comprises only the first of the three. From a worldly perspective it might be recognized as the only one that exists, therefore the only one that matters. Ultimately it is neither the only one that exists nor the only one that matters. Two other relationships exist: the vertical one between God and the woman and the vertical one between God and the man. If either or both of these relationships are flawed, then in spite of what anyone thinks about the husband/wife relationship, the marriage will be less than perfect. This does not mean that marriage cannot exist unless each party in the horizontal relationship recognizes and respects their own relationship with God, but it does mean that failure to do so will yield something less than what God wants.

So it is with fellowship. Fellowship involves three separate but equally important relationships. The horizontal relationship between two Christians comprises only the first of the three. Unless, and until, we fully fathom all that's involved in the remaining two elements, we will

always be myopic in our understanding of fellowship. We must understand what it means for each Christian to be in fellowship with God in order to fully understand what it means for both Christians to be in fellowship with each other. This does not mean that failure to fully grasp everything about our respective connections to God demands that we will have no appreciation at all for our horizontal fellowship. It simply means that we will not grasp the importance of that connection as thoroughly.

While there are numerous issues and sub-issues related to the subject of fellowship, we will address only the three broad ones mentioned above: (1) the definition (usage) of fellowship; (2) the identity of “issues” and (3) the practice of fellowship.

The first element appears straightforward. What does the Bible say about fellowship? How does it define fellowship and, more specifically, how does it use the term? Can we, by examining the term “fellowship” in all of its contexts, determine its meaning for us today?

The second element could not be more confusing and troublesome. Understanding what fellowship meant in new testament times does not necessarily produce a neatly defined set of “fellowship issues” of equal import for all Christians at all times. What, exactly, does the Bible identify as an “issue” in the new testament context, and how does it relate to what we call an issue today? Are they the same or even remotely similar? Few today wrestle with whether or not to eat meat offered in pagan sacrificial rituals, so how can 1 Corinthians 8, 10 and Romans 14 relate to contemporary practices?

Finally, what does our practice show about the meaning of fellowship and identifying fellowship issues?

Are we consistent? Are we even trying to be consistent? Have we, rather than beginning with a biblical definition and biblical parameters of fellowship, started with practice first and then defined fellowship? Have we forced Biblical principles to fit our practices after the fact? Have we put the cart before the horse, or perhaps forgotten the horse entirely?

Starting with the third element, our practice of fellowship, we note only the following: that our contemporary practice reflects a hodgepodge of ideas and usage. Thirty years ago a published work noted that numerous conflicting positions on marriage, divorce and remarriage were in vogue, yet the church had not divided over them. More recently similar observations have been made about the disparate ways Christians define and practice fellowship itself, creating in effect multiple mini-fellowships.

While it is certainly legitimate to criticize the status quo for allowing and defending conflicting ideas, criticisms often seem to be based on a similar assumption: a wide range of opinions and inconsistencies “proves” that some truth can not be consistently known or practiced. This assumes too much, and in the end, proves to be a major flaw. Is every topic about which controversy swirls inherently unknowable by virtue of the controversy? Do multiple viewpoints always militate against the existence and knowledge of objective truth? Two obvious thoughts here: Some problems exist first, because far too many are far too restrictive in the positions they maintain and second, because critics often provide “solutions” that are just the opposite, far too oblique.

We generally follow this principle: we must believe and practice today what Christians did in new testament

times to be in fellowship with God. If we employ a biblical definition/usage of the term “fellowship,” drawn from the contexts in which the term appears in the New Testament, then we will know the parameters of what is and is not a fellowship issue today. This assumes that biblical usage determines biblical meaning and that the delimiting facts built into such usage will yield an understanding of the boundaries for our practice today.

We must note in advance, that some elements of what a biblical issue is will vary from person to person. This can occur not just because some disagree with biblical teaching, but rather because of conscience issues that arise when we explore certain areas of faith and practice. Eating meat offered to idols and the observance of Jewish holy days, all issues addressed in Romans and 1 Corinthians, are doctrinal in that they are definitely issues that scripture addresses, but the nature of the biblical teaching here differs.

Rather than a clear cut “thou shalt” or “thou shalt not,” God addresses these matters as “thou mayest” or “thou mayest not.” The issue of personal conviction, conscience and preference come to the fore here. This does not mean that the former matters (“thou shalt” and “thou shalt not”) do not involve and demand personal conviction, conscience and preference; they do, but not in the same way.

For example, God says that we must assemble (Heb. 10:24ff). This is a doctrinal and practical matter about which we must maintain personal conviction, conscientious observance and a consistent preference for following. But it is not a matter of conscience in the sense that the eating meat issue is. When must we assemble? In brief, we must do so on the Lord’s day. But when must we assemble on the Lord’s Day? And where must we do so?

God's mandates for Lord's day assemblies simply do not address the last two questions. Who determines the specific when and where? We do, but only within the parameters of other God-given instructions. To that extent we are free to determine how to obey God. To make a "fellowship issue" out of areas where God has not mandated specifics is to define fellowship, fellowship issues and fellowship practices in a way not desired by God.

WHAT IS AN ISSUE

Something becomes an "issue" when someone attributes the matter to one of making or breaking fellowship with another Christian. That attribution might be real, and consistent with revelation, or imagined, and inconsistent with revelation. The critical concern is that "issues," real or imagined, divide Christians.

Some might assume that we can all be out of fellowship with each other and somehow still maintain fellowship with God. To be sure, there are circumstances that allow breaks in fellowship with some Christians while allowing others to continue in fellowship with God.

The church at Corinth, in order to maintain their proper relationship/fellowship with God, was told to put away a brother involved in immorality. The break in fellowship was not to break their connection with God, but to maintain it. So, there are two sides to this fellowship coin: there are times when we are in fellowship with God because we maintain fellowship with others and there are times when we are in fellowship with God because we break fellowship with others. The first case mandates faithful fellowship with others to remain faithful to God. The second case mandates that we break fellowship with those who do not believe or practice what God wants. In

this regard we recognize and honor their break with God by breaking with them ourselves.

Fellowship issues are fundamentally sin issues. If we are in fellowship with God, then God does not impute sin against us. When we have lost fellowship with God or his children, God imputes sin. In either case, in or out of fellowship, we do commit sin—but in the first situation we are “walking in the light” and the blood of Christ cleanses us (1 Jn 1:7). This is the crux of the matter concerning sin and fellowship: to assure that God does not count our sin against us we must remain in fellowship with him and with his children.

Is fellowship with God’s children really possible? It is obvious from John’s remarks in his first epistle that fellowship was indeed possible in the first century (cf. 1 Jn. 1:1ff). John said he was writing so that his readers “may also have fellowship with us.” The greater context demonstrates that fellowship “with us” involved “fellowship with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ.” Two aspects of fellowship are presented here, the first involving Christians with one another, and the second involving their respective fellowship with God. The overall teaching appears to be bi-directional: first, you must have fellowship with us to be in fellowship with God and second, you must have fellowship with God to be in fellowship with us.

Fellowship matters, therefore, are not trifling. But as significant as they are, we must exercise caution in categorizing our differences. Not every “issue” has to be a fellowship issue. Some of the issues noted earlier, such as eating meat sacrificed to idols and respecting days, divided the early church. That should not have been. The issues of eating in meetinghouses, drinking from multiple cups and having Bible classes divide the contemporary

church. This should not be either. Issues are not all equal in importance. Whether or not one ate meat sacrificed to idols pales in comparison, in one sense, to whether or not one observed the Lord's supper properly. Both can divide a congregation, but the latter carries more far more weight than the former.

Regardless of the gravity of any particular issue, we must not ignore sin, take it lightly, or flaunt it. Every issue has the potential to become a sin issue. If the meat-eating matter remained a matter of private conscience, Paul would never have written the church at Corinth about it. Apparently, someone in Corinth voiced concern about the practice, and what was once private became public. What was once a matter of individual conscience escalated to the point of potentially dividing the Corinthian church. If someone wants to use a single container to observe the Lord's supper, that's fine. But if the matter progresses to be more than a matter of individual conscience, and in the process becomes one where parties are pressing everyone to practice what they believe about "cups," then an initially innocent matter transforms into a damning and dividing one. This occurs not because God inherently damns or divides relative to the issue, but because we do.

We must not label beliefs and practices as sin or sinful that are not so labeled by God. Paul states this in principle in Romans 14:14 when he says "that there is nothing unclean of itself." God determines what is and is not sin; we do not.

You can believe and teach error, even Calvinistic error, without respect to the translation you prefer. The translation should not be an issue, but Calvinism should be. Jesus rebuked scribes and Pharisees for being more concerned about what went into their bodies than what came out of

their mouths (Mt 15:16-18). We sometimes demonstrate greater concern for what goes into our buildings—meat and drink—than what comes out of them—preaching, teaching, godly living and light to the world.

When we make an issue out of something that God has not made an issue (e.g., hand washing, Mt. 15:2), we raise our opinions and traditions—just as they did—to the point that we demote God’s word (Mt. 15:6-9).

Clearly, what defines the issues we debate defines us. Are those issues substantive, or have we elevated nonessentials to matters of greater importance than they deserve?

FELLOWSHIP AND GOD

The natures of all three members of the Godhead are equal. If we were to picture them, we might employ three concentric circles, all of which contained the same sets of data. To what extent are all three in fellowship? Every aspect of the will, word and work of the Godhead is consistent within each person as well as among all three persons.

In the beginning Adam and Eve enjoyed a level of fellowship that we might not fully appreciate. Though they did not know all that God knew, and had not existed as long as God, Adam and Eve enjoyed an unparalleled fellowship with God. Why? In part because there was no sin. Where there is no sin, there are no fellowship issues, only fellowship. As noted before, fellowship issues are sin issues. The assumption is that wherever sin exists, some aspect of fellowship is missing. Is it the case, then, that fellowship can not exist wherever sin exists? Does this position hold water?

First, does it apply from God's perspective toward us? Being cleansed by the blood of Christ as we walk in the light does not mean we have no sin (I Jn 1:7ff). Obviously, if walking in the light cleanses us, it cleanses us of sin. To be cleansed of sin demands that we had sin that needed washing. We are, then, even as we walk in the light, still far from sinless. If we say we do not sin we contradict the word (I Jn 1:6). Yet, via this "light walking" process, we are counted as sinless. In this relationship God not impute our sins to our account (Rom. 4:8).

Question: Is there any parallel process between men that reflects this same sort of fellowship between man and God? Is there some means by which we are "light walking" with regard to the fellowship we enjoy with each other? That is, fully aware that we are far from sinless, yet within the confines of this "light walking" paradigm, not only not having our sins imputed to us by God, but also not having our sins counted against us by fellow Christians?

Obviously, we are not sinless. Can we still have fellowship with one another? To ask is to answer. It is impossible to be in fellowship with God based on sinless perfection. If we are in fellowship with God it must be on the basis of something else—that is, someone else. Fellowship with God exists only because of the perfect Son of God.

Since no Christian obtains fellowship with God based on their own perfection, it follows that no two Christians have fellowship with each other based on their sinless perfection. If fellowship between Christians exists in spite of our imperfections, it must exist on the basis of something outside of ourselves. The basis of mutual fellowship between Christians, like individual fellowship with God, is the perfection of Christ.

Again, if fellowship ever exists as something more than a theoretical or imaginary relationship—that is, if fellowship has substantial and real existence—then it must exist in spite of our own sins and our awareness of the sins of others. There must be some means whereby we, in following the divine example, do not “impute” sins against each other. And, this means must be one where emphasis on holiness, righteousness, godliness, etc. remains central to our “light walking,” and not one where they are de-emphasized or totally ignored.

Can we find evidence for this line of reasoning? Consider Luke 6:37. We are told to forgive so that we might be forgiven. The term forgive is present active imperative. We must forgive. God’s forgiveness (“you will be forgiven”) is future active indicative. God will forgive us, but only as we forgive others. God’s forgiveness toward us reflects, therefore, the forgiveness we demonstrate toward others. If God shows tolerance toward us, allowing us to be in fellowship with him even though we are far from sinless, must we not also demonstrate similar tolerance toward others who are just as far from sinlessness as we are? The scriptures say “yes.”

This precept exists throughout God’s revelation. Our willingness to show mercy and forgiveness towards others must be like God’s mercy (Mt. 6:14-15; 18:35; Mk. 11:25-26; Lk. 7:50-48). All these passages reflect the will of the Father, but also that of the Son from whose lips they fell. Additionally, both Matthew’s and Luke’s account of the “model prayer,” also taught by Christ, express this thought. God will forgive us as we are willing to forgive others (Mt. 6:12, 14; Lk. 11:4).

Paul reiterated Christ’s teaching in Ephesians 4:32 and Colossians 3:12-13, but not as a quotation from the Lord.

Paul stated that Christ himself showed forgiveness toward us, thus necessitating our forgiveness toward each other. In fact, when we forgive in response to genuine repentance (Lk 17:1ff), we are said to do so in the presence of Christ (2 Cor. 2:10). In what might be the lengthiest passage presenting this principle, Jesus answers Peter's question concerning "how many times" we are to forgive our brethren (Mt 18:21-35). His reply tacitly affirmed that we must do so without limit. Why? Because God ("the lord" in vs 33) does so.

Does this make the issues of fellowship so open-ended that everyone simply determines for himself what is and is not a matter of fellowship? Do we all do simply do what is right in our own eyes (Deut. 12:8)?

DETERMINING RIGHT AND WRONG

First, we must note that difficulty in determining right and wrong does not determine what is right or wrong. Peter said that Paul addressed some matters that were hard to understand (II Peter 3:16). That did not mean that they could not be understood. Nor did it mean that because they are difficult we are excused from trying to understand them. It might simply mean that they are difficult to understand only because we are too far away from them theologically and/or practically (cf. Is 55:7).

Second, something is not right or wrong based on whether or not we have heard of it before. The Athenians yearned to learn new things (Acts 17:21). That did not mean they believed every new thing they heard.

Third, something is not right or wrong based on whether or not we have believed it before. The apostles did not believe that the Messiah should die (Mt. 16:18ff),

but the scriptures plainly declared it (Lk. 24:25-26; 44ff).

Fourth, something is not right or wrong based on whether or not we like, appreciate, grasp, understand or want the consequences associated with it. For whatever reason, Agrippa believed the prophets but was unwilling to act on that belief (Acts 26:27-28).

FELLOWSHIP ISSUES, GOD, AND CHRIST

“Fellowship” means to “share or hold in common,” therefore, biblically speaking, all truth relating to fellowship issues must share common ground with God. It must derive from his divine nature. Conversely, whatever fails to be rooted in God’s nature cannot receive divine approval.

We must come to know the character of God to resolve fellowship issues. More specifically, we must develop an appreciation for, and an understanding of, the fellowship that exists between God the Father and God the Son. This most visible demonstration of divine fellowship must be our primary model. John’s gospel in particular presents the Father-Son fellowship as fundamental to our own.

What can we learn from Jesus’ principles and practices?

- His relationship to the Jews and the Mosaic law mirrors our relationships with one another under the perfect law of liberty. He was a Jew living in a covenant relationship with His fellow Jews (Mt. 5:17-19; Jn. 4:34). We are Christians living in a covenant relationship with our fellow Christians (Heb. 2:1-4; 8:7-13).

- He understood that though Jews who were led astray were not guiltless, those led them astray were guilty of a more serious offense (Mt. 17:7-10).

- He kept company with sinners to the extent that it became a major point of contention with the Pharisees (Mt. 9:9-13). But he also kept company with the Pharisees while simultaneously rebuking them in public and private (Lk. 7:36-50; Mt. 23:1-39).

- Through it all, Jesus knew there were times when His disciples should part company with certain individuals (Mt. 10:13-15).

Jesus' life and practice presents an instructive paradox. He demonstrated that he could both condemn and counsel his fellow Jews, and that he could advise others to avoid certain individuals even as he engaged in social contact with them.

We can be in proximity to someone, even in a social setting, but not in fellowship with them so as to violate God's nature. It is this apparent contradiction that will prove most interesting in sorting out a variety of fellowship issues. In short, one can share space and other things with an individual, but not share with him a fellowship relation with God. This appears true even when others mistakenly believe we tacitly endorse their behavior (Mt. 11:16-19).

God, as seen in the person of Jesus, goes to great lengths to seek and save the lost. But he did so exercising considerable latitude in his various associations (Jn. 4:1-29). Latitude, however, does not mean ignoring problems. Jesus responded to sin with varying degrees of patience and severity, but He always responded.

DEALING WITH ISSUES

In our investigation of fellowship issues, we want to know whether or not someone is, at this moment or in this situation, in fellowship with God. We want to know what responses are consistent with God's nature when a fellow Christian lives in a manner that creates fellowship problems (1 Jn. 1:7). In exploring these matters, 1 John 1:7 shows that every brother or sister who walks in the light also sins. Christians in fellowship with God are not always doing what manifests His nature. The atoning death of Jesus, however, keeps those who walk in the light in fellowship with God. How can this be so?

Our fellowship with, and salvation because of, God is a relative thing. It is not relative in the sense of existing without foundations or boundaries; it is not relative as in cultural or moral relativism. It is relative in that it is relational. The saved are imperfect in their walk with God, but because of our relationship to a perfect Savior we are forgiven (Heb. 4:14-16). Every Christian relates to God's nature in a flawed way (Rom. 3:9-20). We share this incongruence because we all sin (Rom. 3:23). This being true, no saved person should have a prideful attitude when addressing fellowship issues (Lk. 17:10). Self-righteous judgment is forbidden (Matt. 7:1-4). We are what we are by the grace of God (1 Cor. 15:10).

Shared sinfulness with all humanity does not, however, mean shared fellowship in salvation. There are many conditions that create fellowship issues. Some issues can be remedied easily, some with difficulty and, in cases where we simply can't know all circumstances, we must leave judgment to God.

Since we have seen that the Bible teaches all Christians still sin (1 Jn. 1:7b), we must ask what level

of sin takes a believer out of fellowship with God? And, because fellowship with God serves as the foundation of our fellowship with each other, what level of sin breaks our relationship with other Christians (I Jn. 1:1-3)? Are there sins that do not remove a Christian from the grace of God, but still call for action from brethren (cf. Matt. 7:1-5)?

The Bible offers several interesting contrasts in the area of fellowship issues. Note the following combinations of contrasting verses:

- II Timothy 2:24-26 and II John 9-10: The first passage encourages us to be gentle, patient and meek so that we can recover lost souls, and the latter admonishes us not to bid godspeed to those in error. Can we do both? Yes. Must we do both? Yes.

- Galatians 1:8-9 and Acts 18:24-28: The first passage informs us that those who teach or follow another gospel are accursed, and the latter provides an example of someone who taught error (Apollos) being shown the way of the Lord more perfectly. Are both possible? Of course. Must we do both? The answer is obvious.

- Matthew 9:10-13 and I Corinthians 5:11-13: Matthew shows that Jesus ate with publicans and sinners and incurred the disdain of many Jews; 1 Corinthians 5 indicates that Corinthian Christians were not to eat with the brother in Corinth. What difference exists between these two passages? Evidently, it is not wrong to eat with sinners in every situation, but clearly wrong in others. What factors determine which practice we are to follow in a given situation?

Rather than picking the verses we prefer, we must look to context to find harmony in the "big picture." God's

nature is consistent even when it might appear that it is not (cf. Job 7:20-21).

Notice also how Scripture provides differing approaches to differing kinds of fellowship issues. The contrasting approaches illustrate how fellowship issues can possess varying levels of severity. Our level of patience should be appropriate to the nature of the offense. Scriptural examples include:

- A brother who refuses to make things right with a brother (Matt. 18:15-17)
- A person who causes divisions (Rom. 16:17-18; Titus 3:9-10).
- A Christian who commits a gross public sin, and persists (I Cor. 5:1-8).
- A Christian who continues in behavior that is against God's standards of righteousness (I Cor. 5:11-13).
- A leader who continues in sin (I Tim. 5:19-20).
- A person of the world who behaves in an openly perverse manner (Eph. 5:11-12).
- People of the world in general (I Cor. 5:9-10).

What factors account for the differences in the appropriate responses to these scenarios? They would include:

- The intentions of a person.
- The severity of the problem.
- How a person deals with a problem.
- The amount of time a person has been a Christian (Heb. 5:11-14).

In the seemingly unending variety of fellowship issues, whether or not we remove ourselves from a certain type of association and the process we follow in such cases must be based on scriptural principles. These principles

are in turn reflections of the nature of God—which we see clearly in the way Jesus dealt with sinners during His walk among us.

Citing passages out of context simply will not do. Ignoring the lessons we learn from actually seeing God in action as Jesus dealt with sinners is even more inexcusable. As we delve into and sort out fellowship issues, we must first orient ourselves to the nature of God.

We began by noting that “there is a very real sense in which every biblical topic serves as the window through which we view every other.” That line could also read “there is a very real sense in which every biblical topic serves as the window through which we view God.” How we view the biblical teaching on fellowship, more significantly, how we “do” the biblical teaching on fellowship, reflects our understanding of, and our willingness to implement, the character of God in our lives. We have not attempted to answer every issue that divides us—but by refocusing the discussion on how fellowship relates to the character of God, we will come closer to answering those issues than not.

RESTORATION PRINCIPLES

GONE WRONG – 1906

ANCIL JENKINS

The year 1906 saw many significant events. Perhaps most remembered was the earthquake, which destroyed much of San Francisco, California. This natural calamity killed at least 3,000 people with 225,000–300,000 others left homeless. The property damage came to over \$350,000,000 dollars. [When adjusted for inflation the loss was over 79 billion dollars. Ancil Jenkins]

An event that made significant changes in society was Reginald Fessenden making the first radio broadcast: a poetry reading, a violin solo, and a speech. Among those born in 1906 were two men who made opposite impacts on the world: Dietrich Bonhoeffer, German religious

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leader and resistance, and Adolf Eichmann, German war criminal.

A. G. Freed, president of Southwestern Christian College, Denton, Texas, suffered a severe case of typhoid. The next year he returned to Henderson, Tennessee to unite with N. B. Hardeman to begin the college that eventually became Freed-Hardeman University.

Deaths that year included Susan B. Anthony, American civil rights and women's suffrage activist, as well as Paul Cézanne, French painter. Likewise significant was Theodore Roosevelt's receiving the Nobel Prize for Peace.

The most significant event among Churches of Christ was the United States Census recognizing difference in churches of Christ and the Christian Church. For the first time, a government accepted this fact, which had begun over a half century before. What had begun so gloriously produced two, later three groups that differed significantly. The principles that had begun the Restoration Movement continued to influence some but were variously interpreted by others.

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

Several years ago an acquaintance and I were waiting in line together. He said to me, "There is not much difference in the Church of Christ and the church of which I am a member." "Yes," I replied, "But that little bit of difference makes all the difference in the world." Though the three groups, which are descendents of the Restoration Movement, are very similar in many ways, their differences make all the difference in the world.

One often finds congregations of each group are found in the same city where many in each group do not know the reasons for this division. Even more tragic are those who do not think the differences are very important.

The Disciples of Christ (Christian church) are the smallest in number. They are characterized by a liberal spirit in the interpretation of the Scriptures. They consider themselves a denomination.

The Christian Church uses a hermeneutic that allows for instrumental music as well as other departures from New Testament authority. They are sometimes called Churches of Christ, more often in the North. This presents difficulties for members of the Church of Christ who visit and expect singing without an instrument. Likewise, the same applies for members of the Christian church who come expecting instrumental music and find acappella.

Churches of Christ differ from the other two groups in commitment to New Testament authority that is sustained by the Scriptures and illustrated by the principles of the Restoration Movement. Instrumental music has no part in worship because the Bible authorizes only vocal music (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16).

CAUSES OF THE DIVISION—THE MISSIONARY SOCIETY

The American Christian Missionary Society was founded in 1849. This organization was designed to select missionaries and receive money to send to them to preach and establish churches. Alexander Campbell, who once strongly opposed such societies, was a leader in its establishment. Jacob Creath, Jr., close friend of Campbell opposed the society from its inception. This beginning grew into an opposition that continued until the 20th century.

At the October 1861 meeting a resolution was introduced which supported the Union and condemned the South in the War Between the States. L.L. Pinkerton seconded the resolution and James A. Garfield, in full military uniform, spoke in favor of the resolution, which passed. An even stronger resolution was delivered in 1863. Tolbert Fanning reacted strongly, he informed his readers that the Society had "...passed strong resolutions, approving

most heartily of the wholesale murder of the people" in the South. The Society was encouraging "professed servants to cut the throats of their southern brethren." Fanning wondered how such men could ever again associate with the southern Christians "for whose blood they are now thirsting (Cutter, 1986). He also said that as long as one part of the brotherhood believed in missionary work through a human society, ...an irrepressible conflict will exist." Attempts by the society after the war to bring reconciliation met with little success. Fanning said "...no Christian should support it until it had repented of the evil of calling for the blood of fellow Christians" (Wilburn).

By 1869 revenues supporting the society had dropped to the point where little mission work could be supported. In the annual meeting in Louisville, the society changed its name to The General Christian Missionary Convention and formulated a plan they thought would be more acceptable. This was called the Louisville Plan, which allowed for support from churches, as well as individuals. The financial state of the society was so desperate that several times serious consideration was given to disbanding it.

David Lipscomb and Jacob Creath, Jr. opposed this revision of the original missionary society; Benjamin Franklin first approved but then changed his views and again opposed the Louisville Plan. This plan joined other plans as a financial failure.

The reality of a division between those supporting the missionary society and instrumental music and those in opposition was becoming clearer. In 1884 James A. Harding stated the undeniable fact that there were two wings to this reformation and that they were drifting apart."

The events of 1874 and following years marked a dramatic change in the missionary society. The Women's

Christian Board of Missions founded for the purpose of supporting foreign mission work, and the Foreign Christian Missionary Society formed the next year. This led to a renewed interest in the societies, which led to increased mission work.

In 1919 the Christian Church formally merged five missionary societies within its fellowship. The result was the United Christian Missionary Society. A growing dissatisfaction of the more conservative members led to the establishment of the North American Christian Convention in 1927. This was not a missionary society but an annual gathering for teaching and edification. This growing division was formalized as the independent Christian churches began to emerge as a distinct group from the Disciples. This break was finalized in the late 1960's. The reorganization of the Disciples of Christ in 1968 precipitated a formal break. In 1971 the Disciples requested the Yearbook of American Churches to list them as a separate religious body.

In 1968 the liberal Disciples reorganized, now calling themselves the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). They assumed the status of a denomination.

CAUSES OF THE DIVISION: INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC

L. L. Pinkerton of Midway, KY introduced the first musical instrument into worship at Midway, Kentucky in 1859. This was taken out shortly afterward. Instrumental music in worship became more of an issue of controversy as Benjamin Franklin, in answer to a letter, strongly opposed the instrument through the pages of the American Christian Review.

Alexander Campbell wrote:

[Instrumental music in worship] was well adapted to churches founded on the Jewish pattern of things and practicing infant sprinkling. That all persons singing who have no spiritual discernment, taste or relish for spiritual meditation, consolations and sympathies of renewed hearts should call for such an aid is but natural. So to those who have no real devotion and spirituality in them, and whose animal nature flags under the opposition or the oppression of church service I think that instrumental music would... be an essential prerequisite to fire up their souls to even animal devotion. But I presume, that to all spiritually-minded Christians, such aid would be as a cowbell in a concert.

Benjamin Franklin gave five situations when instrumental music could be used, all of which would be offensive to faithful Christians. His fifth conclusion was it would be when a church has given up all idea of trying to convert the world.

In 1867 the church in St. Louis, Missouri bought an Episcopal building, which had an organ. However, the majority opposed its use. Those in favor started a new congregation but did not have an organ, at that time. The next year, Benjamin Franklin, editor of the American Christian Review, estimated that there were about 10,000 churches in the brotherhood and no more than 50 used the instrument.

In 1870 Isaac Errett, editor of the liberal Christian Standard, stated he did not favor use of the instrument in worship. But his reasoning was that it was a cause of division. He said he opposed it because of the law of love,

not scripture. If a situation occurred where the instrument did not cause division, he would not oppose it.

Knowles Shaw introduced the instrument into the church at Henderson, Tennessee during a revival meeting in 1877. This small organ was taken out after he left but was brought back in later. This may have been as a result of Shaw's sudden death in a train wreck in McKinney, Texas in 1878 (Jenkins).

CAUSES OF THE DIVISION— LIBERAL TEACHINGS AND ACTIONS

L. L. Pinkerton established and edited the *Independent Monthly* in 1869 with John Shackelford as co-editor. Through this magazine, Pinkerton renounced plenary inspiration of the Bible and argued for the acceptance of the un-immersed into membership of the church. Pinkerton and Shackelford are acknowledged as being among the first liberals of the Restoration Movement in Kentucky.

An event in 1872 provided further grounds for division. The Central Christian Church, Cincinnati, Ohio built a new building, which cost \$140,000 (This is \$2,396,558 in 2007 dollars.) The building included an \$8000 organ, equal to nearly \$136,946 in today's money. This was considered most extravagant since the average wage was close to \$100 a month (Humble 61).

R. L. Cave introduced open membership in the Central Christian Church at St. Louis and openly advocated German rationalism. This included teachings such as a denial of the virgin birth and resurrection of Christ. It stated the Bible is not truly a revelation, there exists no plan of salvation and there is no water baptism in the Great Commission. A Baptist preacher posed a question regarding Cave: "Why he

remains in the church while holding and preaching these views I do not know." J. S. Lamar also openly declared his acceptance of the un-immersed.

The spirit of Biblical legalism was furthered in 1884 with the establishment of the Disciples Divinity House at the University of Chicago. Many young men from there began graduate work at liberal Harvard, Yale, etc. In 1908, the grandson of Alexander Campbell, P. Y. Pendleton, preached at the Vine Street Christian church in Nashville. It is reported that in his sermon he supported both infant sprinkling and open membership.

The statistical division became fact in 1906 when the United States Census Bureau recognized the difference in the Church of Christ and the Christian Church. When this census was published in 1910 it showed that the Christian church had 8,293 congregations and churches of Christ only 2,649. However, by the next census in 1916, the churches of Christ had become larger. This one showed the Church of Christ had grown to 5,570 and the Christian Church only had 8,408. The 1926 census showed the instrumental group had declined to 7,648 while the Lord's church had 6,226.

CAUSES OF THE DIVISION— SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL CONDITIONS

In the first half of the nineteenth century slavery divided the country, as well as many churches. The major denominations split over this issue before the War Between the States, which began in 1861. Though Churches of Christ did not formally divide at this time, seeds of division were sowed by the controversy. Linked with this were the differing economies of the North and South. The War Between the States was a catalyst that poured fuel on the

fires of division. After the war, the oppressive Reconstruction policies of the North further alienated the South.

Yet, the real cause was a growing difference in understanding of how to establish New Testament authority. An authority that accepted instrumental music almost always accepted the missionary society. Their contention was these were not forbidden in the Scriptures.

Opposing was the view of Churches of Christ that biblical principles were in the Scriptures, which made these innovations unscriptural.

WHO CAUSED THE DIVISION?

No doubt there were wrong attitudes on both sides of the issues. Those possessing these are long dead. However in determining who caused the division one must answer these questions.

1. Who founded the missionary society in 1849? This organization was a source for disagreement and division from its beginning. One must consider that opposition in its early years led to the considering of its abandonment.

In the latter part of the 20th century, some in the society became most aggressive in introducing the missionary society into churches. This is clearly seen in Tennessee. In 1889 the Woodland Street church raised money to hire A. I. Myhr as local evangelist. Shortly thereafter he was appointed the state evangelist. J. H. Garrison boasted that the society would take Tennessee for organized mission work within five years. In a similar vein A. I. Myhr wrote, "Tennessee was a great mission field." He obviously referred to the lack of support in the state for the society and not the number of churches. Probably

only Indiana and Texas at that time had more members of the church than Tennessee.

The next year Myhr called a meeting in Chattanooga for the purpose of founding a state society. Representatives from only five churches were present. David Lipscomb attended and was allowed to speak. He voiced his objections but these had little effect.

Numerous churches had a membership divided on these two questions. Some compromised while others opposing the society and instrumental music were forced to leave to start new congregations. Quite often, the majority favoring the instrument and the society overrode the wishes of an opposing minority.

2. Who introduced instrumental music into the worship of the church? From the beginning many opposed this. A number opposed this innovation for several reasons, the most telling was that this was a departure from the authority of the Scriptures and was not suited for spiritual worship.

3. Who left the original grounds upon which unity existed from 1832-1849? Who left Campbell's original teaching on the missionary society? Who formed an organization completely foreign to the New Testament church?

Which group must produce New Testament authority for using instrumental music and founding and using a missionary society?

J. W. McGarvey wrote, "In the earlier years of the present day Reformation there was an entire unanimity in the rejection of instrumental music from our public worship,

it was declared unscriptural, inharmonious with Christian institutions, and a source of corruption" (Morro).

Who caused the division? Most of us have seen the church sign, "If you are not as close to God as you once were, who moved?" If unity does not exist and a group is no longer following the New Testament pattern, who moved?

We dare not glory in division since unity is Jesus' desire (John 17:20-21). Yet, unity is not possible when there are calls for a compromise of convictions. Unity is not possible when New Testament teaching is watered down or ignored. Unity can never be possible as long as one party forces its will on a brother so that he violates his conscience.

CONCLUSION

The glorious Restoration Movement began with great promise. The decline of progress can only be explained by neglecting or misusing the original principles. Despite innovations and divisions, the Restoration Principle remains valid. What do you think when your lights go out? Do you deny the scientific principles on which our electoral system is based? No, we know there has been a disturbance between your light and the source of electricity. This same truth applies in the Restoration Principle.

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MAKING THE ANCIENT FAITH A MATTER OF THE HEART

BILL BRYANT

“Then all the disciples forsook Him and fled” (Matt. 26:56b). [All scripture quotations are from the NKJV.] To the casual reader, this lack of courage on the part of the disciples at Jesus’ arrest is stunning. The disciples had the unique privilege of seeing firsthand the Incarnate Word in their midst. No man who ever walked on earth could preach like He preached or live as He lived. They had witnessed a vast array of miracles and a measure of love and compassion that surely left them spellbound. The Lord had even told them a few hours earlier, “All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night” (Matt. 26:31a). Peter and the other disciples denied that it would happen (Matt. 26:35), but it did! Why? Their faith was lacking. Their own lives were now on the line as well. The conspiracy

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against their Master would not end with Him. They, too, were wanted men in harm’s way.

Such is the nature of faith that has not yet matured in the human heart. Peter had just boasted, “Even if all are made to stumble because of You, I will never be made

to stumble” (Matt. 26:33). Peter’s denial a few hours later clearly demonstrates the weakness that can be seen in all of mankind, that boldly talking about faith and living it are entirely separate matters. Then how does one internalize the ancient faith that will keep him from falling apart and enable him to stand boldly at the Savior’s side when the storms of life come? Correctly answering that question is of the greatest importance because eternity hangs in the balance. As we consider the perilous times in which we live, we must understand at the outset that faith is still the quality that saves the lost, strengthens the saved, involves people, and builds churches. The gospel, God’s plan of redemption, is not something merely to be stated and defended, but the precious gift that is to be taken into our hearts through true faith and fully lived.

WHAT FAITH IS NOT

Unknown to many who claim to be religious today is the fact that the overwhelming majority of people will be lost eternally. The Lord Himself said so in the concluding chapter of His Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 7:13-14). Why is this true? The Lord answers that probing question in the remaining verses of His sermon. He first warns of false prophets that come in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves (Matt. 7:15-20). They are self-deceived and sinful men who live and abound in every generation. They prey on the ignorant and the unlearned in the Scriptures who are unwilling and unable to identify them by their bad fruit. Along with false prophets, there are also false professors of faith who are also self-deceived. They call Jesus “Lord” and involve themselves in religious activities, but they fail to do the will of the Heavenly Father (Matt. 7:21-23). Even though they professed faith, they will still be lost and cast out at the Final Judgment.

They claimed they had faith, but in what or in whom? In reality, there was little interest in what the Lord wanted or how one should live. Their concept of the Lord's existence was to be this "great Assistant in the Sky" to help them along their self-chosen path. Their allegiance and trust were not in the Lord, but in people, positions, and possessions. Outwardly, such people major in externals. They concentrate on the outward show of religion, but ignore the true condition of their heart. The scribes and Pharisees of Jesus' day are good examples. Jesus said of them, "Woe to you...for you pay tithe of mint and anise and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith" (Matt. 23:23). The Lord condemned their charitable deeds and long prayers because their motive was to be seen of men, not to say or do those things that would render true glory to the Lord God. Their counterparts exist today and can be identified by their love of "show time religion" and a lifestyle no different than the world around them. They are merely professors of faith who are self-deceived. They say, but do not do the Father's will (Matt. 7:21).

There are also those who hear the Father's will, but do not do it. Jesus identified this group in His parable of the two builders in His conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 7:24-27). The foolish builder built his house on the sand, but the wise builder built his house on the rock. The point of this memorable parable is that we are wise only when we build our lives on the foundation of Jesus and His Word. True faith weathers the storms of life when they come. The pretense of faith is drowned by the flood waters of life.

WHAT FAITH IS

The Hebrew writer defines faith as "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Heb.

11:1). What follows in Hebrews 11 is inspired commentary on the true identity and profession of Biblical faith. The word translated “substance” is from the Greek word *hupostasis*, which is derived from *stasis* (to stand) and *hupo* (under). It refers to a foundation, the ground on which one builds something. Faith is not based on something or someone that is unsure and untrue. It is a level of trust and confidence that leads to a measure of hope that arises from strong desire for and full expectation of what is promised. This kind of faith is rooted in strong conviction. It enables people to truly live what they believe. Their lives reflect what their minds and hearts are assured to be true. It is an intellectual faith of the mind coupled with an internal faith of the heart. It is head knowledge that has grown and matured into heart knowledge.

A good example of the distinction between an intellectual faith and an internal faith is the incident where the Lord appeared to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus following His resurrection (Luke 24:13-32). The eyes of the two disciples were restrained to keep them from initially recognizing the Lord. As He conversed with them, their sadness was apparent. Jesus had died and their hope, and that of the remaining eleven disciples, had died with Him. One of the two disciples named Cleopas summed up their despair, “But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel” (Luke 24:21). He went on to share his confusion about the report that Jesus might possibly be alive.

But why should there be any confusion in the hearts of these two disciples or the hearts of the “official disciples” of the Lord that remained? They would have witnessed the miracles that Jesus performed. They would have surely heard of the Lord’s oft-mentioned prediction that He would suffer many things at the hands of the elders and chief priests

in Jerusalem, and be killed, and be raised the third day (Matt. 16:21; 17:22-23; 20:17-19). They must have had at least a head knowledge about Who Jesus was and what would happen in Jerusalem, but His conversation with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus proves that they had never fully internalized what the Lord had repeatedly taught. The Lord rebuked them by saying, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets had spoken" (Luke 24:25). Jesus here identifies their problem. They were "slow of heart to believe" the Scriptures. Again, they had not internalized the Scriptures to the point that they could properly interpret the amazing events of that weekend. So instead of being filled with joy and peace that God's glorious plan of redemption was finally being realized, they left Jerusalem deficient in hope, a major essential of true faith.

The Lord then closed the gap between what they knew intellectually and what they could internalize in their heart with the Scriptures. "And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself" (Luke 24:27). The Lord vanished from them a short while later, but enough had been said for them to draw the proper conclusion. They said to each other, "Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?" (Luke 24:32). Their perception of their heart burning is proof of their finally internalizing the ancient faith that is only possible, and still possible, through the Word of God.

The Lord later met with His disciples and extended the same privilege to help them close the gap between their intellectual faith and an internalized faith. He told them, "These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which

were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me" (Luke 24:44). What did He accomplish by such? The next verse tells us that this process opened their understanding that they might comprehend the Scriptures. With an internalized faith, the disciples could then go forth into all the world making disciples and laying the foundation for the Lord's church. Their faith now made sense. The disciples who possessed only an intellectual faith forsook the Lord and fled at His arrest. The disciples now possessed an internalized faith that filled their hearts. From that point onward they were bold, fearless, and ready to lay down their lives for the Master.

DEVELOPING AN INTELLECTUAL FAITH

How does one gain both an intellectual faith and an internalized faith? The Scriptures are the key to the development of both. As Paul said, "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (Rom. 10:17). True faith corresponds to what is true. True faith is not a blind leap into the dark and void of reason. It is believing the evidence that God has provided. Notice the reason stated by Luke for his gospel account of the Lord's life. He wrote, "It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed" (Luke 1:3-4). True faith has a certainty to it. It is believing the facts because they are true. It is believing evidence that is reasonable and logical because it is true. The Lord God invited Israel to come and reason with Him (Isa. 1:18). The apostle Paul pleaded with King Agrippa to listen to him because he spoke "words of truth and reason" (Acts 26:25). Paul knew that King Agrippa had a measure of belief because he believed what the prophets had said concerning the Lord (Acts 26:27). But King Agrippa did not

allow enough of God's Word to penetrate his heart and fully internalize his faith. He stopped short of becoming a Christian because of it.

The Lord invites all to take His yoke upon them and learn of Him (Matt. 11:29). He invites all to examine the evidence of His life and miracles to instill faith (John 20:30-31). We truly serve a Savior, and an everlasting Father, and an eternal Spirit who want to be known and deserve to be known. That search for the true God cannot be a casual search. God can be found only when we search for Him with all our hearts (Jer. 29:13). He will not be found if we are looking only for a God to fulfill selfish requests and validate our self-chosen path to personal glory.

Dangers abound that will keep God's Word from being rooted and grounded in our hearts. The Devil, the wicked one, remains ready to snatch away the words sown in our hearts (Matt. 13:19). We can also follow the rebellious world around us and harden our hearts from hearing His voice (Heb. 3:8, 15; 4:7). We can also listen passively, instead of actively, and miss out on key lessons as did the disciples when they failed to truly listen to the Lord's warnings that He was going to Jerusalem to die and be raised on the third day. That's one of the reasons the Lord continued to implore people to listen when He was speaking. He said often, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear" (Matt. 11:15; 13:9, 43; Mark 4:23; 7:16; Luke 14:35). An intellectual faith is attainable, but it does not come accidentally. It is the fruit of a determined and disciplined heart.

DEVELOPING AN INTERNALIZED FAITH

An intellectual faith is essential, but it is not enough. Saving faith occupies the mind and the heart and that is what the Lord deserves. He deserves to be loved "with all

our heart, soul, and mind” (Matt. 22:37). An internalized faith says, “I am not only going to believe in the Lord God and believe what He says, I am also going to allow Him into my heart in such a way that He will affect my attitude and my actions.” The book of James illustrates beautifully an internalized faith that has filled one’s heart. When facing trials and persecutions due to one’s faith, an internalized faith will cause one to “count it all joy” when the various trials come, “knowing that the testing of one’s faith produces patience” (Jas. 1:2-3). One with an internalized faith wants to be like his Lord so he will “allow patience to have its perfect work that he might be perfect and complete, lacking nothing” (Jas. 1:4). He will be a “doer of the word and not a hearer only” (Jas. 1:22). An internalized faith in one’s heart will result in pure and undefiled religion that will cause him to provide for the needy and strive to remain unspotted from the world (Jas. 1:27). It will also keep him from being prejudiced and biased (Jas. 2:1-4). It will cause him to do more than just express concern for the needy, but actually provide for them (Jas. 2:15-16). An internalized faith enables one to control his tongue (Jas. 3:1-12) and allows his heart to be filled with true wisdom from above that is pure, peaceable, gentle, full of mercy and good fruits (Jas. 3:13-18).

Someone with an internalized faith in his heart realizes that he has been made by God for God. He, therefore, focuses on God’s purposes instead of his own problems. He is more interested in developing God’s character than settling for the world’s comfort. His passion is not earthly happiness, but God’s holiness. He does things for the Lord because he wants to, not because he has to do them. He loves the gifts the Lord God provides, but loves the Giver of the gifts far more. He is also able to love his enemies because he wants to be like his Heavenly Father and not like the world (Matt. 5:45).

But an internalized faith takes time and the Lord's disciples are proof of it. Even though the twelve were hand-picked by the Lord from all the available men in Israel, a lengthy learning process would be required. An example of this can be found in the story recorded in Luke 8:22-25 of the disciples' fear when a storm overwhelmed their boat while crossing the Sea of Galilee. Even though the Lord was with them in the boat, it was not enough. They believed they were going to perish. Jesus rebuked them by saying, "Where is your faith?" As we read the gospel of Luke leading up to his incident, numerous miracles were recorded that the Lord performed. Luke 4:31-37 tells of Jesus casting out an unclean spirit. Luke 4:38-39 tells of Jesus healing the mother-in-law of Peter from a high fever. Luke 4:40-41 tells of Jesus healing practically an entire town of their infirmities. Luke 5:12-15 tells of Jesus healing a leper. Luke 5:17-26 tells of Jesus healing a man who had been paralyzed. Luke 6:6-11 tells of Jesus healing a man with a withered right hand. Luke 6:17-19 tells of Jesus healing a multitude of diseased people and casting out unclean spirits. Luke 7:1-10 tells of Jesus healing a centurion's servant. Luke 7:11-17 tells of Jesus bringing back from the dead the only son of a widow. Was this not enough evidence for the disciples to properly conclude that the Lord had power over nature? Evidently not! They were fine as long as the personal challenges were being felt by other people. But when the storm blew in on them personally, their faith fell apart. They failed the crisis test. But they, no doubt, learned much from the storm.

As noted earlier, the Lord concluded His Sermon on the Mount by telling of the two builders. The wise builder built his house on the rock. The foolish builder built his house on the sand. Storms then blew on both builders. This is true for all of us. God allows the storms to activate our personal faith and to move it along from an intellectual

faith to an internalized faith of the heart. The storms and trials of life help us to see the true nature of our faith, be it great or small, and persuade us that we need a greater faith. The storms of life challenge our complacency. They give us a sense of purpose and direction in life. The storms cause us to empty our hands of those worldly things or people that we have clung to in faith to provide joy, peace, and happiness. An internalized faith enables one, in honesty and reflection, to thank God for the storms and trials of life. It enables one to finally believe what Peter wrote, "that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 1:7).

It is a great day in the life of a Christian when he realizes that his primary purpose is not to use God to solve his problems and to get what he wants, but to move through the problems and have a closer walk with the Lord God and to serve Him without conditions. This is the point that the Lord made when His disciples, on one occasion, made the request, "Lord, increase our faith" (Luke 17:5). I am convinced that His answer was not what they were expecting at all. Perhaps they thought that He would lay hands on them and confer the gift of a strong faith by His mere touch or at least give them a few simple steps that would quickly propel them to the pinnacle of faith. But instead the Lord teaches them that true faith is the result of a process and all they need to do is to fully engage the process. The Lord told them about the nature of faith. He said, "If you have faith as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be pulled up by the roots and be planted in the seas,' and it would obey you" (Luke 17:6). A mustard seed is a small seed, but it can grow into a mighty tree. And so it is with true Biblical faith. When the seeds of the gospel are planted into a fertile

soul and understood, it can bear fruit up to a hundred fold (Matt. 13:23). It grows quickly and mightily by seeing and believing the truth. It exposes the misconceptions of truth in our mind planted by the world and cleans it out. The Lord God then allows the tests and trials that will then help us to differentiate between God's truth and the world's lies. The more we use God's truth in our lives, the more our "senses are exercised to discern both good and evil" (Heb. 5:14).

This is why the Lord told those who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:31-32). Again, the Word of God is necessary to develop intellectual faith, and it is necessary to continue the process of internalizing one's faith in his heart. There must be a full commitment to diligent study followed by deep meditation on how this new found truth is to be applied to one's life immediately. Then prayer requests for God's wisdom must follow that will enable one to see things as God sees them. Many, unfortunately, stop actively listening and learning the Scriptures, thus preventing the process of faith to engage that will take one to an internalized faith in the heart. As Paul said, we are capable of being holy, and blameless, and above reproach in the Lord's sight "if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard" (Col. 1:22-23). This is the "mustard seed process of faith." It is not for the weak in heart.

The Lord then continued His answer to the disciples' request for a deeper faith by telling of a servant plowing or tending sheep that had come in from the field. The servant should not expect the master to wait on him now because he has done this work. Instead, the master expects the servant to wait on him and prepare his meal

because it is his duty to do so. The Lord then concluded His comments by saying, "So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, 'We are unprofitable servants, We have done what was our duty to do'" (Luke 17:10).

This indeed qualifies among many as a hard saying. What does this have to do with an increase of one's faith? The answer is that the Lord is dealing with one's basic attitude and motivation for serving Him. Many serve the Lord because of what they think they can get out of it. But true disciples who have an intellectual faith that has matured to an internalized faith serve because they know they belong to the Lord. They are willing bondservants who have, as we like to sing so well, truly surrendered all. They serve God without negotiation or conditions. They have been crucified for the sake of Christ (Gal. 2:20) and now live for Him in a life of full surrender. They have abandoned themselves in God. They will go wherever the Lord sends them. They will "endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ and not allow themselves to be entangled again with the affairs of life" (2 Tim. 2:3-4). They live as if their citizenship is in heaven and eagerly await the Lord's return (Phil. 3:20) instead of living like the locals. They exist for God, not the other way around.

CONCLUSION

Since the dawning of time, people have always had a tendency to major in the externals. This was certainly the problem that plagued Israel throughout its history. Micah 6:6-8 was the Lord's authorized response to such misguided religion:

With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the High God? Shall I come before Him

with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?

In the book of Micah, Israel has been judged by God and convicted of injustice and ingratitude. They had majored on the externals. Their faith had not penetrated their heart and changed the way they thought, lived, or worshipped. They now sought to be reconciled, knowing full well the consequences if they failed. The Lord's answer here in Micah 6 is good advice for all of us today.

Like Israel, our nation lives in perilous times. Though many claim America to be a Christian nation, it is far from it. Its religion is one of externals. It, too, is full of false prophets and false professors of faith. Though many uphold the Bible, few possess a true Biblical worldview. On March 6, 2009 the Barna Research Group, a research group that has studied cultural and spiritual trends in the United States for the past several decades, released a report that examined the worldview of self-identified Christians in America. The report compared current results to the outcomes from similar surveys conducted in 1995, 2000, and 2005. They defined a Biblical world view as follows:

For the purposes of the survey, a "biblical worldview" was defined as believing that absolute truth exists; the Bible is totally accurate in all the principles it teaches; Satan is considered to be a real being or force; not merely symbolic; a person cannot earn their way into Heaven by trying to be good or do good works; Jesus Christ

lived a sinless life on earth, and God is the all-knowing, all-powerful creator of the world who still rules the universe today. In the research, anyone who held all of those beliefs was said to have a biblical worldview (Barna).

The Barna reported that “overall, the current research revealed that only 9% of all Americans have a biblical worldview (Barna). They also reported that among “born again Christians,” only 19% had a biblical worldview (Barna). They also reported:

One-third of all adults (34%) believe that moral truth is absolute and unaffected by circumstances. Slightly less than half of the born again adults (46%) believe in absolute moral truth... Just one quarter of adults (27%) are convinced that Satan is a real force. Even a minority of born again adults (40%) adopt that perspective... A minority of American adults (40%) are persuaded that Jesus Christ lived a sinless life while He was on earth. Slightly less than two-thirds of the born again segment (62%) strongly believes that He was sinless (Barna).

The research discovered that the percentage of Americans holding a biblical worldview has changed little over the past 13 years (Barna). The results shouldn't surprise us. Most of us have known for years that there is a “disconnect” between what is professed and what is lived. Our nation's problem is that, by and large, its citizens failed to study the evidence enough to even develop an intellectual faith. This is evidenced by how little Bible knowledge most people have, even among those who attend worship services regularly. Their religion, as in generations and nations past, is limited to the externals.

Most members of the Lord's church today, fortunately, at least began the process of faith building and developed a good measure of intellectual faith. But there is still so much more to learn about faith that is "grounded and steadfast" (Col. 1:23). The true faith that is internalized in one's heart does not come easy. There are no shortcuts and the storms of life will blow in and the floodwaters will rise from time to time in our lives. Even though they are despised, they are necessary to drive out of our heads and hearts the world's thinking. The storms are necessary to expose the self trust, that is so addictive, as unwarranted and foolish. A renewal of mind is needed (Rom. 12:2) with the goal of "bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5). Each of us has the privilege and opportunity to begin to know now the One to whom we will worship and honor throughout eternity. We are able to sit at His table now, through the Word, and begin to feast on the riches of His grace. May this be a foretaste of the Great Supper that awaits us, if we so choose. Let us choose well!

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THE ANCIENT FAITH AND REPENTANCE

ROGER CHAMNESS

WHY THE CONFUSION?

There are various ways repentance is defined. I have discovered that man has skewed the biblical concept of repentance, just as with, baptism, faith, grace, and even sin. It is crucial for man to be aware of the true meaning of repentance, for without it, all other fundamentals of our Christian faith are unattainable. I asked people of various backgrounds and beliefs how they would define repentance. I received answers such as: sorrow, knowing your shortcomings, knowing you are wrong, believing, becoming a Christian, fear of punishment, and to turn.

Wendell Winkler wrote, “Repentance is the most difficult command in the Bible because it strikes at the very taproot of our troubles—pride! It is hard for man to

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say “I’ve sinned;” and, this is involved in repentance.” I believe that Brother Winkler is 100% correct in his statement. Man would simply rather redefine terms, than admit he is wrong. It is this way of thinking that always has been/will be detrimental to our souls. Man is the source of confusion.

COMPLETE REPENTANCE

Instructors at ETSPM have often defined repentance as a “turning of the mind.” If you have had classes with James Meadows, you have more than likely heard him define repentance as “a change of mind brought about by Godly sorrow, that results in a change of life.” In my studies this definition is in line with what I believe has been/always will be an accurate definition of repentance. “I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies. I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments (Ps. 119:59-60). [All scripture references are from the KJV unless otherwise noted.] I like the American Heritage Dictionary’s definition: “the act or process of repenting.” The idea is that there is a progression of conditions that make up repentance, which is what I read in the aforementioned Psalm, a process.

In actuality, there are three biblical concepts that complete repentance. These are conviction, repentance, and conversion. Man has difficulties grasping the concept that these three are not synonymous with one another. They are however, as closely related as bread, peanut butter, and jelly. You cannot have a peanut butter and jelly sandwich if you leave off the jelly; in reality you just have a peanut butter sandwich, and just try to have one without the bread, you will create a sticky situation for yourself! The same can be said for Christianity. You must have conviction (bread) in order to come to repentance (peanut butter), and repentance is a necessity for conversion (jelly). In the coming together of these three ingredients, you have a complete biblical definition of repentance and to omit any one of these three creates a sticky situation which is detrimental to your soul.

When I put my peanut butter and jelly sandwich together, it is something that is pleasing to me. I treasure

it as I consume each and every bite. When conviction and repentance lead to conversion it is pleasing to God. He treasures it as we continue to turn to Him for guidance in to what his will is for our lives. This is true from the very beginning of man's existence. God planned, from the foundation of time, a way for man to be reunited to Him due to the consequences of sin. The ingredients are the same today as they were in the time of Adam. Let us look to the Bible for examples of what the ideology that we as Christians should take on repentance.

"And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord. And Nathan said unto David, the Lord also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die" (2 Sam. 12:13). David knew that what he had done in order to gain Bathsheba had separated him from God and that God had forgiven him. When you read Psalm 51, you can tell how truly convicted David was for his transgressions. As you read the Psalm, you realize that his sin against God is the reason for his anguish. I picture David, red-faced, with tears streaming down each cheek, snot bubbles in his nose, and that "hard to breathe" feeling in his chest that you get while crying uncontrollably. He is getting a salty taste in his mouth as the tears keep streaming down his face as he cries:

Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgression. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest (Ps. 51:1-4).

Can you feel David's pain as he offers himself in submissiveness to God? "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit (Ps. 51:10-12). David reached the point in his life that we all should strive for: "none of self, and all of Thee. "For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise (Ps. 51:16-17). David was convicted by his sin against God. He repented and turned from the life of godlessness that he had lived. He looked forward to what God would have him to be.

On the road to Damascus, Saul is confronted by Jesus about the persecution of His church. As you read Acts 9, you can sense the fear and amazement that must have been going through Saul's mind as he said, "Lord, what do You want me to do?" That question undoubtedly shows that Saul felt the need to change. "And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink (Acts 9:9). These three days must have been agonizing for Saul. I wonder what I would have been thinking about if I was in his place. Would it be the faces of all those I persecuted? Would it be the fact that what I thought all along was God's will was actually against God's will? Or would it be, God, what do I need to do to be favorable in Your sight? I can envision Saul looking back at what he had done, but I can visualize Saul looking forward, even more so. One reason for this thought comes from the fact that Saul obeyed the Gospel that was shared with him by Ananias and was baptized (Acts 9:18). A second reason comes from Acts 9:19-22:

And when he had received meat, he was strengthened. Then was Saul certain days

with the disciples which were at Damascus. And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God. But all that heard him were amazed, and said; Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests? But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ.

I believe that Saul was looking forward to being the man that God would have him be, for the simple fact that he hit the ground running, teaching a totally different message than he had before. He went from Jesus as an imposter, and all that follow him are blasphemers, to, I have been wrong, Jesus is the Christ. Every time you read the apostle Paul's (Saul's) letters, you have to be impressed with his desire to look forward.

INCOMPLETE REPENTANCE

Repentance is not, simply knowing you are wrong. "And the Lord said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen? If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him, (Gen. 4:6-7). The very nature of the questions indicates that Cain knew that he was wrong in regards to the response to his rejected offering. It reminds me of a particular incident when I was a young boy about 6 years old. For some unknown reason (I would like to say the devil made us do it), my cousin Keith and I decided to climb up on to the roof of my house with a rock about the size of a basketball. Till this day, I'm not sure how we

managed to get it up there, but we did, and in a moment in which my parents must have thought was a result of demonic possession, we decided to see what would happen if we tossed that big rock off the roof and on to my mom's new Volkswagen. We both knew that what we had just done was wrong, but there was no sign of sorrow until the pedals started flying off the rose bush with which my mom was "correcting" me. Cain also knew what he did was wrong, but that alone was not enough to keep him from murdering Abel. It is interesting that it is only after God reveals to Cain what his punishment would be (Gen. 4:11-12) that you see any type of sorrow and even then, it seems to be more focused on the punishment he is to face, rather than the grasping of the seriousness of what he had done. Even though Cain knew he was wrong, his end result was that he was driven out from the presence of the Lord to the land of Nod (Gen. 4:12). Just knowing what is wrong has never been enough to reestablish man's relationship with God.

Repentance is not, just being regretful/remorseful or to simply turn. "Then Judas, which had betrayeth him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priest and elders" (Matt. 27:3). Judas was remorseful in the fact that he had betrayed Christ. "Saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood" (Matt. 27:4). This is an acknowledgement that he knew what he had done was wrong and he sincerely regretted his actions enough to turn against the elders and chief priest. Judas had two of our three ingredients going his way. He was convicted, and repentant, but he turned to the wrong thing, suicide. This could indicate that Judas' sorrow was more regret and emotional in nature, and not necessarily godly sorrow. When the turn is made, it must be made toward God, and on His terms only. Man has to quit turning to things rather than God!

Repentance is not, merely being sorry. Paul is empathic about this when he wrote to the Corinthians, "Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing" (2 Cor. 7:9). Often times, man decides to celebrate for the wrong reason, this most often seen in the world of sports. Many times the "underdog" will play a team a lot tougher than they are supposed to be and will celebrate a "moral" victory. The truth of the matter is, they still lost; it was just a matter of a smaller than expected margin of defeat. Paul was not into "moral" victories; he only wanted to celebrate victory in its true form and that was salvation. "For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death" (2 Cor. 7:10).

Repentance is not, belief, or a fear of punishment. "Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble" (Jas. 2:19). Even the demons believe in God to the point that they are horrified. The word "tremble," in this passage, carries the idea of extreme fear, to have your skin have goose bumps and your hair to stand on its end. We would agree they knew God's power, and believed it, to the extent that they shuddered at the thought of His eternal glory, yet not a one of us would dare say they repented.

Repentance is not temporary. The nation of Israel is an example of "yo-yo" repentance. The Old Testament shows that from their very existence they were in a repeated cycle of obedience, then disobedience. Whenever they were obedient to God, they were sorrowful for the way they had previously been, and turned to do what was pleasing to Him. When disobedient they were not penitent of their actions, which were contrary to God's will, but

were doing as they liked. This is seen time and time again in the books of Joshua and Judges. When they did things God's way victory was assured.

Too often, they did not look forward to God. This leads to one of the most profound statements in scripture, "In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Judg. 17:6). What makes that statement so profound is that it characterizes man in the ancient and modern world. The moment man ceases to be penitent is the day he ceases to be pleasing to God!

CONCLUSION

It does not matter how man has come to define biblical terms. What matters is how scripture determines their meaning. Biblically defined, repentance is thinking about our ways, turning our feet toward His word, and being obedient to God. It is conviction, repentance, and conversion. It was this way in the times of the patriarchs and will continue until the time when God decides to send His Son back for us. Ancient faith did not change for a modern world.

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THE ANCIENT FAITH IN MY LIFE

DAVID SHANNON

INTRODUCTION

Can you imagine not knowing who you are? Amnesia isn't common, but it is real. Just ask Edward Lighthart, who actually prefers to be called John Doe, if amnesia is real. On second thought, he might not remember. He wandered out of Discovery Park in Seattle at the end of July not remembering who he was or how he arrived at that location. He flagged down a bus whose driver called police. They found \$600 tucked in a sock of the neatly dressed man in a blue blazer and khaki pants. The only thing he could remember was gazing at trees in the park for several days. About a month later, he was identified by family and friends who read an article about him in the Seattle Times. After a month in the Swedish Medical

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Center he received counseling at Harborview Medical Center and lived in a respite home. As this temporary arrangement was ending he looked for another possible residence. When a shelter was suggested his answer was,

“I’ll probably go back to Discovery Park.” This man, who has been an international business consultant with an advanced education, who formally lived in Paris, Vienna, Sydney, Shanghai, and Slovakia, now feels safer living homeless. Also, since he doesn’t recognize his name, he feels superficial when called by Lighthart. Therefore he prefers the generic name of John Doe.

Think about it. Does it really matter if you know your past? Why can’t Edward Lighthart just walk out of the treatment center to live a normal life? What if you were disconnected totally from your past? Where would you live if you woke up this moment with amnesia and did not know your street address? Where would you work if you no longer remembered past skills and experiences? With whom would you feel connected if you couldn’t remember anyone? Your past literally forms your present. Your future is under construction right now. Where you buy your house today will greatly affect which streets you drive on tomorrow. The skills you develop today will guide you into various careers or positions down the road. The friends you have today will look much like the friends you have in the next phase of life, just older. The very same thing could be said about your past. You travel streets today, because of where you choose to live. You are working now where you developed skills in the past. Your friends today are much like your friends of ten years ago. Our past powerfully shapes our present and our present is a forecast of our future. Now it makes a little more sense why someone with amnesia doesn’t have the ability or even the desire to jump back into a life they can’t remember. Daily events are tied to past experiences. But Christians have a unique experience to be able to break away, in some aspects, from their past personal history and literally become a new creation because of their newfound tie to the ancient faith. Becoming a Christian isn’t just changing

the present person, but it involves coming into connection with a rich, vast and powerful past that reveals all God has done for us up to this very moment!

Simply put – Christianity gives us a new understanding of things done for us in the past by God. When one is converted they are being transplanted. Their roots of the past are often removed from past experiences, friendships and behavior from the world and transplanted into the Will of God. That individual now has a rich heritage; whose roots have never been nurtured in this loving way and have never had this kind of wisdom on which to rely. Instead of drawing wisdom from one's lifetime of experience, the Christian is able to glean from the Almighty's wisdom, which has been proven since the Garden of Eden. Meditate on that. Ancient faith is such a blessing. It helps us define our self, our God and our purpose. It causes us to talk openly and observe for each of us our "Ancient Faith in My Life."

AN ANCIENT FAITH TO LIVE

Too often we confuse faith with logic. Ancient faith doesn't lose its credibility when it can't be proven at the moment. Give it time and God always proves Himself to be faithful. Habakkuk struggled, in a good sense, to see the faithfulness of God. Like our Lord on the cross, Habakkuk asked the "why" question. He couldn't understand why God wouldn't answer his cries as sinners violently plundered the righteous. God seems to have no problem with us asking why as long as we are turning to Him when we ask. Habakkuk asked "why" then turned to the Lord to wait upon His response. Don't you believe that God wants His children to be honest? Don't you believe God wants us to turn to Him for answers? God must be thrilled when our questions drive us to Him. Habakkuk's

perilous time caused him to ask “why” and his great faith caused him to continue to say, “I will stand my watch and set myself on the rampart, and watch to see what He will say to me, And what I will answer when I am corrected” (Hab. 2:1). [All scripture is quoted from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted.] God’s answer is simply stated, “Behold the proud, His soul is not upright in him; But the just shall live by his faith” (Hab. 2:4). This statement speaks of the “just.” It also speaks of a life by which the just will “live.” How are the just going to live? By “faith” the verse explains. This short sentence is so significant the Holy Spirit chose to place it in the Holy Scriptures three more times. One of these is Romans 1:17. The first three chapters in Romans are like a crescendo that convicts the reader of sin, eventually bluntly saying, “There is none righteous, no not one” (Rom. 3:9). Once the reader feels hopeless, the veil is pulled back to show the necessity of Jesus as the only “justification” (Rom. 3:24). Sin separates us from God (Isa. 59:1-2). Jesus is the only answer to having sins forgiven so that God and man will not be separated. Separation is spiritual death. This paragraph in Romans closes with “that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus” (Rom. 3:26). God is the Justifier. Have you considered the cost of justification? It was offered freely by God’s grace which was paid for dearly by the blood of His Son. So as this verse says, “The just shall live by faith.” Consider who are the “just?” They are the ones who obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered” (Rom. 10:17). Where did they find “that form of doctrine” or faith? Later in the same epistle Paul answers this question by saying, “So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17). Let’s review briefly. Who are the just? They are the ones who heard the Word of God and obeyed from the heart His teachings. This faith led them to ultimately have their

sins forgiven as they were baptized (Acts 2:38). At this point, they were justified by the Justifier! That is how the “just” live. They were dead in sin, but now they are alive.

The just are alive. We have discussed how individuals become justified. Let’s spend a few moments studying how the just live. There are different ways to live upon this earth. We have a group who left for Ukraine to do mission work. For the next two weeks, they will live a little differently than they normally live in Tennessee. Next week my parents and youngest daughter will be traveling to the beautiful state of Pennsylvania for a short vacation where they will actually live with an old order Amish family for a few days. They will sleep in their house, eat meals with them, and even work beside them in their daily chores and farm labor. My youngest daughter will experience life without modern conveniences. There is a second angle to the study of this phrase, “the just shall live by faith.” You can read of both of these in Romans 6:4-5. It says, “Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection.”

Notice, in verse five, the new life is a result of the dead man of sin being buried and the Almighty restoring life. This refers to a resurrection. So like Christ’s resurrection, we, too, enter the watery grave dead and rise spiritually alive! But notice there is another life that is referred to at the end of verse four. Once our life is restored, we live a new life! Paul said, “we walk in newness of life.” Our walk is our conduct, or behavior. He says it is to be new. He describes this changed life later in this same book.

Consider this teaching, “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Rom. 12:2). Notice, that in order for the world not to shape our life, we must be transformed, metamorphosed, by the renewing of the mind. How is the mind renewed? Christianity is a life that demands learning. No where do we read that a follower must be a scholar, but nevertheless, the disciple of Christ must have a willingness to learn the faith and live it. The ancient faith demands a change of mind that ultimately leads to a change of life. Think about the teachings in the Sermon on the Mount found in Matthew chapter 5. If one allows these teachings to become his conduct, what changes would be made? Consider the change of attitude if the beatitudes become a person’s life. How different would life be for a person who stopped harboring anger (Matt. 5:21-26). How different would a man’s gaze be upon a woman if he removed lust from his heart (Matt. 5:27-30). Consider the increase of commitment toward marriage if couples obey the teachings of Matthew 5:31-32. Imagine the new life if one stopped swearing and simply told the truth at all times no matter what the consequences (Matt. 5:33-37). What if a man learned and developed a faith that practiced turning the other cheek, or even developed the willingness to give of his life not only for a mile, but to go the second mile also (Matt. 5:38-42). Think of the change from our human nature if a person genuinely loved his neighbor (Matt. 5:43-47). Or consider the new life of one who obeyed First Corinthians 13 to practice this greater love toward all. Or consider how the new life is described as a “fruit of the Spirit” in the fifth chapter of Galatians. If a person left behind the works of the flesh and began demonstrating love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control,” would this not be a new life that was impossible to

ignore (Gal. 5:22-23)? Consider the great list of Christian virtues listed by Peter in his second epistle. He describes salvation as, “escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust” (2 Pet. 1:4). Notice, this “escape” is just the beginning of the just living by faith. The new life that is born of faith will add to “faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love” (2 Pet. 1:5-7). Peter makes the powerful observation that if a person who was saved, or in other words the “just,” fails to “live” this new life, then he has “forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins” (2 Pet. 1:9). Interestingly, Peter observes the failure to live the Christian life as the result of forgetting that you were saved. Paul summarizes all this in a nutshell in Second Corinthians 5:17, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.” Remember we are “baptized into Christ” (Rom. 6:3; Gal. 3:27). Baptism is far from being the end; it is the joyous birth that is followed by the new life. At this point, we are to continue a life of repentance, living a life that glorifies the Father (Acts 26:20). All is to become new. We don’t even view people the same anymore (2 Cor. 5:16). Our heart and mind are renewed. Our actions and speech are changed. Our motive and relationships are all adjusted to Christ. Let’s summarize these thoughts. The “just” become just because they obeyed the faith. This gives them spiritual life. This newness is actually exhibited by a new life. The new life is lived by the Gospel – the faith. Yes, the faith is ancient, but it offers newness of life that is fresh and rewarding every day.

AN ANCIENT FAITH TO DEFINE AND DEMONSTRATE

One of the greatest texts in the Bible to study faith in action is the great hall of faith, Hebrews eleven. It

begins with the only definition of faith in the Bible; “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” Consider this two-part definition. Faith is the “substance” or the “assurance” (Revised Version) of things hoped for and it is the “evidence” or the “proving” (Revised Version) of things not seen. The “assurance” describes the confidence that we have because of our faith. The second aspect of the definition points to the “proving” which should develop our conviction. How do we develop faith which forms conviction of things not seen? What have we not seen? In the same chapter it is recorded in verse 27 that Moses “by faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible.” It was faith that caused him to move from Egypt. What gave Moses the conviction to believe such a significant move was necessary in his life? He made the decision as if he could see the invisible God. In other words, his faith was the “evidence of things not seen.” Earlier in this same chapter God is presented as a “rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (Heb. 11:6). Our seeking isn’t to physically see God, but it is to find the knowledge of Him that will form us into people of godly convictions. But for a moment go back to the first part of the definition. Faith isn’t only conviction; it is also assurance or substance. In other words our conviction isn’t based on “blind faith.” The real substance in our faith is formed in the things for which we hope. This hope is based on the expectation that God will fulfill His promises! Our faith finds substance in this hope! What if you asked people today to define hope, what answer would you get? Did you know that the most meaningful definition of hope is listed by Webster as [Archaic] “to have confidence; trust?” You see the most common usage of the word hope today actually has little substance. It is defined by “a feeling that what is wanted can be had or that events will turn out for the best.” For example, “Hope

you have happy holidays.” Or “Hope you don’t get the flu.” These are little more than wishes or desires, but nothing to guarantee it. Hope in the scriptures comes with a guarantee. God is faithful. He always keeps His promises. Each time you read a promise from God in the scripture you are receiving His invitation of hope. This hope offers substance, a footing or assurance on which our faith can stand. This faith forms our convictions because we want to hear our Lord, whom we have never seen, say to us on the Day of Judgment, which we have yet to experience, “Well done... enter into Heaven,” where we have never visited. Sure, there are many things never seen that create convictions. That is faith. Fifteen times the great hall of faith begins the stories of great assurance and conviction with the words, “by faith.” If we have the ancient faith as the assurance and conviction in our life, we, too, will offer excellent sacrifice in worship to God just as Abel did (Heb. 11:4; Rom. 12:1-2). By faith we will walk with God like Enoch (Heb. 11:5). By faith we will obey and save our families like Noah (Heb. 11:7). By faith we will go where God sends like Abraham (Heb. 11:8). By faith we will believe God’s promises like Sarah (Heb. 11:11). By faith we will believe in God’s continual providence like Joseph (Heb. 11:22). By faith we can leave the pleasures of sin for greater service to God like Moses (Heb. 11:25). By faith obstacles can fall like the walls of Jericho (Heb. 11:30). By faith harlots can be saved today like Rahab of old (Heb. 11:31). All these and more were examples given to motivate us to see what can happen when ordinary men and women live a life of faith. Let’s look to the one who is the “author and finisher of our faith” (Heb. 12:2). Let’s allow Him to begin a good work in us and complete it (Phil. 1:6). In other words, let’s allow Jesus to justify us. Then let’s allow Him to direct each step of our life until the end.

CONCLUSION

If we forget all the Lord has done for us we have experienced the worst amnesia of all – spiritual amnesia. As mentioned earlier in Peter, when Christians fail to live the faith it is as if “he has forgotten that he was cleaned from his old sins” (2 Pet. 1:9). Failing to live the faith is a result of forgetting the most important aspects of life and eternity. Spiritual amnesia is devastating. God’s ancient words take us back to an ancient faith and we can’t live today as we ought to live without it. Yes, truly, the ancient faith should form our present walk. After all “The just shall live by faith.”

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THE NEW SPIRITUALITY

CLARENCE DELOACH

The cultural climate in America has drastically changed. This is the age of postmodernism. Phil Sanders, in the December 2008 issue of Think Magazine, made the following observation.

The 1960s 'down with the establishment' crowd has come of age, and the rebellious youth of 40 years ago are now philosophical leaders demanding that we reinvent government, education and religion after their postmodern desires. We are living in a time of spiritual discontent. The number of adults who have had little or no spiritual training in life increases daily. The fastest growing religious group in America identifies

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itself as 'no religion' (15%). Nearly one in four Americans (23%) are unattached to any faith group. The number of adults who attended worship as children but now disdain it is growing rapidly. Six in ten so-called 'unchurched' people once attended church. Protestant America has become a concert

and a show. Seeker sensitive, it has often sold out to the desires of the crowds.

Such distrust and discontent breeds all kinds of movements. There is in our culture a revival of ancient, occultic and mystical thinking that is being called the new spirituality.

When Paul was dealing with human philosophies that could deceive believers, he said to the brethren at Colosse, "Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ" (Col. 2:8). [All scripture is quoted from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted.] God wants his people to be aware of the hollow heresies that could jeopardize our faith and take us hostage.

There is a kind of "new spirituality" that is becoming more popular in our pluralistic culture. It is really not new! It is a mixture of ancient religious tradition with eastern mysticism, pagan influences along with modern psychology, science fiction and positive thinking. It draws from many sources, even bits and pieces of Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism and Cultism. It is hard to define, but one thing stands out. It is centered in self-esteem and self-approval. All that man needs is within him! The result of this enthronement of self is the new spirituality attained through the "new age movement." It is the natural progression of humanism. It asserts that man has evolved biologically and now must evolve spiritually.

There is no hierarchy, doctrine, creed or membership. It is a hodge-podge of ideas with man at the center. God is in everything and everything makes up God. It is therefore a revival of ancient pantheism. Much in new age practice

is designed to push man through spiritual evolution to godhood. For example, astral projection is training your body to have out of body experiences, contacting spirit guides and using crystals to purify the body and mind's energy systems. Many new-agers believe in reincarnation and reaching karma.

Like all movements, there are certain key words that form a kind of vocabulary of the new spirituality. Words like holistic, synergistic, oneness, harmony, transformation, growth, human potential, awakening, cleansing and consciousness. The emphasis on self is to improve man so he can become one with nature.

The popularity of the new spirituality is influenced by celebrities who use the media as their pulpit. Their audience numbers into the millions. Sadly, our society has become obsessed by celebrity worship. Oprah Winfrey has been ranked as the fourth most influential woman in history. She has been recognized as "the most Important person," as the "People's Choice" and among the 25th Most Important Personalities in the world. Her talk show is heard by twenty million every day in America. She often speaks of "the inner light" and how to get in touch with the spiritual part of your life. Frequent guests on her show are new-age authors; and Oprah has contributed to the popularity and sales of their books. Her mission, in her own words: "I want people to see things on this show that makes them think differently about their lives, to be a light for people, to make a difference...to open their minds and see things differently, how to get in touch with the spiritual part of their life."

She grew up in a black Baptist church in Mississippi. Whether her experience there was healthy or distorted, one thing is clear; she has deconstructed what she knew

of Christianity and has reframed it into a new age form. She, like most new forms of religion, has reduced God to human limitations, dismissed objective truth and substituted emotional subjectivism as the criteria of truth. During one show, Oprah revealed that she doesn't think that God is hung up on what you believe about him. Whatever the "force" is, he does not have an ego problem. She stated, "I believe in the FORCE, I call it God." She commented, "If you believe in the rhythm of nature and in love, then you believe in God."

Another expression of the new spirituality is called scientology. This cultic religion was the brain-child of L. Ron Hubbard. Wayne Jackson called it a "religion" for the "non-religious." Hubbard was a science-fiction writer, explorer and a retired naval officer who served in World War II. He died in 1986. The holy book in scientology is Dianetics. This word was coined by minds burdened with chaos, mysticism and a generous portion of oriental mysticism and human philosophy. Hubbard's reflection on the human dilemma led to the ultimate self-help program designed to explore the science of the mind. By the age of nineteen, Hubbard had traveled to countries like China, Japan, Guam and the Philippines where he absorbed the philosophies of eastern cultures. The Church of Scientology claims that his unique background coupled with personal research resulted in a manuscript titled, "The Original Thesis" which laid the foundation for his book Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health, published in 1950. The book sold 150,000 copies the first year and continues to sell well. In 1953, Hubbard established the first Church of Scientology in Camden, New Jersey. Since that time Scientology churches have been established around the world.

Scientology asserts that the principles of Dianetics are

more helpful to man than all the traditional theories and therapies of modern psychology. Tom Cruise, the movie star, is one of the most vocal and visible spokesmen for scientology. He and Brooke Shields carried on a lengthy controversy relative to the best way to treat mental health problems.

The claim is made by scientology that there is no conflict with the basic beliefs of Christianity. Such claims are false. There is a wide chasm between its claims and Biblical faith. The worldview is miles apart, both in origin and destiny. Scientology leaves the nature of God undefined and open to any interpretation.

Critical students of scientology have observed that it is similar in many ways to ancient Gnosticism. Gnosticism was a combination of Jewish, Christian and pagan sources. It taught that the material universe is a mistake and evil. So, the focus was upon enlightened individuals (the knowing ones) who came to understand the physical world as an illusion. By discovering secret knowledge, one could help others to see the truth help to transcend the trap of this present world. Essentially, that is what L. Ron Hubbard has done. He claims that superior knowledge calling himself a "celestial mediator."

According to Hubbard, the problems humans face are educational, not moral. Our main dilemma is a lack of training, not rebellion against God. Consequently, sin has no place in their vocabulary. Rather than being morally deficient, man is ignorant of his true nature. It is claimed that man can improve himself through hard work and the application of Hubbard's principles to become God-like. By successful auditing, one can become an Operating Thetan, and wear the OT bracelet, a sign that he has reached total spiritual independence and serenity.

Hubbard was enthralled by creative people whom he placed at the pinnacle of culture. He built Celebrity Centres around the world for the special needs of artists. His publications are highlighted by celebrities like Tom Cruise, Kirstie Alley, and John Travolta who have become chief proselytizers in the church.

The weird and far-out claims of the science-fiction writer L. Ron Hubbard are not only ludicrous, they are unbiblical and anti-Biblical. Whether the New Age or scientology or other false claims to spirituality, it is a long shot from the Biblical use of spirituality.

Man is both a physical and spiritual being. Man-made religion has corrupted the spirituality of man. It is often used to describe that fuzzy, inner feeling that cannot be explained. But, how is it used in scripture?

The word is used twenty-six times in the New Testament, translating from the Greek adjective pneumatikos. Several false ideas about it have been advanced.

1. Some think that spirituality is attained through a monastic lifestyle. In about the fourth century some began to withdraw from society living in isolation thinking that it would produce greater spirituality. In time such thinking led to the rise of monasteries and ultimately to the holy orders in Roman Catholicism

2. Others have practiced deliberate acts of self-denial and even bodily abuse to produce spirituality. Celibacy was thought to produce a holier life. Apparently at Colossae some were deceived by that heresy, but Paul taught that such practices had no value against the indulgence of the flesh (Col. 2:23).

3. Pentecostalism and charismatic groups labor under the delusion that being spiritual comes with the exercise of miraculous gifts, in particular the gift of tongues. But, at Corinth that gift did not produce spirituality. In fact, there was more carnality at Corinth than any other church. (See 1 Cor. 3:1-3)

4. Many think that neighborly goodness and charitable acts constitutes spirituality and renders them acceptable to God. These individuals have no interest in the cross, or in hearing the gospel.

Biblically, the word “spiritual” is used in some contexts to denote “the spiritual forces of wickedness”, i.e., the influence of Satan and his agents (Eph. 6:12). It is used in other contexts to distinguish the spiritual from the material. Paul defines the “new spiritual body” that the redeemed will receive at the resurrection which will differ from the material, corruptible body that we have known.

It is used in 1 Corinthians 2:6-11 to denote the manner in which we access the wisdom and knowledge of God. We can know “spiritual things” of God through the Spirit’s revelation. He contrasts the “natural man” with the spiritual. One cannot, by his own intellectual faculties, or on the basis of human wisdom perceive the will of God. One, in this context, is spiritual when he is sensitive to divine revelation.

In some passages the word spiritual is used to denote what is not secular. For example our worship is to consist of “spiritual songs,” i.e. songs that are not secular and mundane.

Paul used the word to describe Christian maturity in 1 Corinthians 3. The Corinthians were called babes—

immature because of envy, jealousy and division. So Paul could not address them as spiritual, but carnal.

In Galatians 6:1, Paul used the word “spiritual” to describe the gentle and compassionate treatment of a wayward brother. The spiritual person will seek to restore a fallen brother. In the preceding chapter, Paul urged the Galatians to “walk in the Spirit” and they would not produce the “works of the flesh,” but would bear the “fruit of the Spirit” (Gal. 5:16-23).

True spirituality is not putting your mind in neutral just waiting to see what happens. It is not accidental or automatic. It is not produced through some inner light as claimed by the new age. It is not attained through the so-called enlightenment of scientology. It is not discovered through the self-help offered by deceived guru’s of false religion.

It comes through concentration upon divine truth and the implementation of that truth by submission to it. Jesus Christ is the only way to true spirituality. His way is the Spirit-controlled life of “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Gal. 5:22, 23).

True spirituality consists of “right attitudes” followed by “right actions.” In Galatians 6:1-10, Paul lists some:

- Restoring the fallen
- Bearing the burdens of others
- Doing your own work
- Sharing what you have received
- Sowing to the Spirit
- Perseverance
- Doing good to all men

ANCIENT FAITH AND OPINION

JAMES MEADOWS

The church we read about in the Bible is perfect on the divine side. It has God as its planner. "To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifest wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Eph. 3:10-11). [All scripture references are from the KJV unless otherwise noted.] It has Jesus Christ as its head. "And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all" (Eph. 1:22-23). It has the Holy Spirit as

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its director through the words revealed to the apostles (John 16:13). It has the Bible as its guide. "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).

The ignorance and frailties of mankind keeps the church from being perfect on the human side. One of the crying needs in the church today is to show the distinction between "faith and opinion." "Confusion and fragmentation result when a clear distinction is not made between what is taught in the Bible and what is not" (Gardner 230).

The pattern planned in this lesson is as follows: First, what is Bible authority and how is it established? Second, what are matters of opinion? Third, how does one decide in matters of opinion, methods, and expediency? Fourth, what is liberty and what are some principles that must regulate it? Fifth, to what does refusing liberty in matters of opinion always lead? Fifth, conclusion.

WHAT IS BIBLE AUTHORITY AND HOW IS IT ESTABLISHED?

Authority means the right to command and enforce obedience; the right to regulate. There are two kinds of authority: primary authority and delegated authority. Primary authority belongs to God. On one occasion Jesus refused to answer a question asked by Pilate. "Then saith Pilate unto him, Speakest thou not unto me? Knowest thou not that I have the power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee? Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above..." (John 19:10-11). The apostle Paul supports the Lord's statement, "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God" (Rom. 13:1). God delegated authority to Christ. "And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven

and in earth" (Matt. 28:18). Christ delegated authority to the apostles (Matt. 16:19; 18:18). The apostles did not delegate authority to anyone but are still ruling through the truths the Holy Spirit revealed unto them. "And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, that ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matt. 19:28).

Scriptural authority is established by an express command or statement, an approved example, a necessary inference and expediency. The Lord's Supper illustrates all four of these points. "This do in remembrance of me..." (1 Cor. 11:23-24) is an express command. An express command is a God-given obligation. "And upon the first day of the week when the disciples came together to break bread..." (Acts 20:7) is an approved example. An example is binding when there is a stated or necessarily inferred background command for their doing what they did. "The first day of the week... to break bread" is a necessary inference. It infers the frequency of observance. To expedite means to accelerate the process, to facilitate. There is no expediency where there is no obligation. In other words, I cannot seek to justify something by arbitrarily calling it an expedient.

We are obligated to sing. "Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord" (Eph. 5:19). "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord" (Col. 3:16). Songs are necessary to carrying out this obligation. The song book is an expedient in that it enables us all to sing the same song at the same time.

The word of God places upon us an obligation to assemble on the Lord's day. "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is, but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching" (Heb. 10:25).

Further, the obligation of Christians to assemble on the Lord's day is a matter of faith, but the matter of the hour of worship and/or place of worship are matters of opinion or expediency. In the former, the obligation is expressly enjoined, but in the latter, God has given no instruction; and brethren are left to determine the hour and place in keeping with the principle of Christian fellowship and orderliness (Turner 66).

WHAT ARE MATTERS OF OPINION?

An opinion is "an idea or notion arrived at by a process of deduction from facts and evidence not sufficient to produce a decided conviction or judgment" (Whiteside 1931).

According to the lexicons, an opinion is that which a man thinks, but does not know; it is a judgment that is formed upon circumstances, but does not have conclusive proof. In our view things that are revealed in God's word are matters of faith; that which is not revealed is a matter of opinion, or speculation. What God authorizes us to do we may do upon faith or by faith; what He does not authorize us to do, we must leave undone or do it upon opinion (Brewer 1932).

We must ever be careful to distinguish between matters of faith and matters of opinion. "Opinions should not be exalted into faith, and faith should not be lowered to opinions." We must realize that it is a violation of scriptures to try to persuade others to accept our opinion (Rom. 14).

If the anti-meat eater does not want to eat meat, he does not have to eat it; but he has no right to bind his preference on the rest of the church. And if he keeps the matter to himself and only exercises his own private right to abstain from meats, it is none of our business. Let him do as he pleases about it, and don't disturb him over the matter; it is a matter of indifference. He is no better (religiously) for abstaining from meats, neither are we any better off religiously for eating meats (Nichols, Words of Truth).

"Everyone has a right to his opinion, but he has no right to propagate it or force it upon others..." (Goodpasture). Men ought "...to maintain disturbing opinions as private property" (Kurfees).

It is not the right of any one citizen of Christ's kingdom to propagate any opinion whatever, either in public assembly or private; consequently it is not the duty of all nor anyone to listen to an opinionist in his efforts to establish his opinions. This is an important point, and we state it boldly and confidently...To walk by opinions rather than faith is effectually to make the book of God of no authority. Moreover, in the decisions of

that volume, he that propagates an opinion or seeks to attach persons to it, or to himself on account of it, is a factionist in embryo, in infancy, or in manhood...Hence said the apostle: 'Foolish and untaught questions avoid knowing that they do gender strifes.' These untaught questions are precisely questions about opinions; and that they do gender strife we have proof... (All the contentions and divisions, all the sects and parties in Christendom are as certainly and indisputably the effects of opinionism in religion as the love of money is the root of all evil (Campbell)).

"Private opinions and judgments, like our hobbies, should be kept to ourselves, and the peace of the brotherhood should not be disturbed with them. A great moral principle is involved here. We must not merely refuse to do what we are sure is wrong, but also we must refuse to do what we are not sure is right. The Christian must do only that which he is sure is right; he must draw the line clearly between right and wrong; and if there are places where he is unable to draw the line, there he must not tread. When a man does that which he does not believe to be right, he has sinned in his own heart. Whatsoever is not of faith is sin. A man may think that wrong which is not wrong in itself; and if he does it, he sins, for he tramples his conviction of right under foot." (Boles)

HOW DOES ONE DECIDE IN MATTERS OF OPINION, METHODS AND EXPEDIENCIES?

Christianity is a very personal religion and each one must have his convictions. It is not always easy to separate some of our personal convictions in matters of opinion from matters of faith. The very fact that one has strong convictions on a given subject means that he may confuse some things in this matter of opinion with things that do not belong there. One needs to learn to hold his convictions without stifling his own conscience, or seeking to bind it on others.

Hast thou faith? Have it to thyself before God. Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth. And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eatest not of faith; for whatsoever is not of faith is sin (Rom. 14:22-23).

But what are some guides that cannot be used? First, it cannot be decided on the basis of whether or not it has been done that way before. Second, it cannot be decided on the basis that it is different from the way it has been done before. Third, it cannot be decided on the basis of whether we like the preacher and the congregation that happens to be doing it. Fourth, it cannot be decided on the basis that it is getting tremendous results. Fifth, it cannot be decided on the basis of our likes and dislikes. Some of us judge people and actions on the basis of our likes and dislikes. Sixth, it cannot be decided on the basis of what the brotherhood as a whole thinks of it, although the advice and wisdom of well-grounded brethren ought not to be ignored.

In deciding the acceptance of an expediency or method before God, several truths need to be considered.

First, expediencies or methods are in the realm of human judgment, not in the realm of direct commands from God. To “expedite” means to accelerate the process. In “expedient” there is the inherent idea of advantage. It involves human judgment (what hour of the Lord’s day does the church meet). Common sense enables one to know certain things (a congregation without children would not need a class and a teacher for children).

Second, matters of expediency vary from generation to generation and from congregation to congregation; this distinguishes them from matters of faith which do not vary.

Third, the Bible does not regulate matters of expediency. If so, then one would find details of the methods of carrying out a command.

Since the Bible does not bind upon the church today methods of expediting general commands, it must follow that the Bible does not regulate matters of expediency. A matter of expediency, or method, cannot change, alter, an authorized act. One cannot scripturally expedite an unauthorized act. An expedient cannot be coordinated with an act; it is supposed to expedite it. Something that is coordinate with or equal to it is not an expedient; it is an addition (Camp).

Matters of expediency and matters of faith must be separated because when they are not, one either repudiates the Bible as his authority, or else he puts his own judgment on equality with the authority of the scriptures.

WHAT IS LIBERTY AND WHAT ARE SOME PRINCIPLES THAT MUST REGULATE IT?

The New Testament makes it very clear that liberty

gives one the right to do certain things or to omit certain things having no relation to salvation. "Conscience, I say, not thine own, but of the other; for why is my liberty judged of another man's conscience" (1 Cor. 10:29)?

First, liberty must not be used to confuse things that differ.

All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful unto me, but I will not be brought under the power of any. Meats for the belly, and the belly for meats: but God shall destroy both it and them. Now the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord; and the Lord for the body (1 Cor. 6:12-13).

When one obeyed the gospel and abandoned temple worship was he to refrain from meats offered to idols? Paul's reply was that one had the liberty to eat meat since it was a matter of indifference. "All things are lawful unto me." The general principle is that one has the right to do whatever is not sinful. On the other hand there may be some things that are not always expedient. "But all things are not expedient." Likewise it is possible to come under bondage in things that differ. Eating is right, but if one becomes gluttonous, then one is brought under bondage.

Fornication and eating of meats are not in the same category. Fornication is condemned everywhere in God's word (Exod. 20:14; 1 Cor. 6:9; Gal. 5:19). Eating of meats, on the other hand, was a matter of indifference. Liberty must not be used to confuse things indifferent with things that are unlawful.

Second, liberty must be regulated by love. Some Christians at Corinth knew that eating of meats offered to idols was nothing; others did not have that knowledge.

Now as touching things offered unto idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth. And if any man think that he knoweth anything, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know. But if any man love God, the same is known of him...Howbeit there is not in every man that knowledge..." (1 Cor. 1-3, 7a).

Christians disagreed. What should they do? Love must regulate liberty. One must not use his liberty at the expense of others. Where liberty and love cannot walk together, love must have the preeminence. "But meat commendeth us not to God: for neither if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse. But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to them that are weak" (1 Cor. 8:8-9).

Third, liberty must be regulated by its effect on preaching the gospel. Paul clearly shows in 1 Corinthians 9:1-11 that those who preach the gospel have the right to be supported by those who receive it. He did not question the right of others to receive support. "...Nevertheless we have not used this power; but rather suffer all things, lest we should hinder the gospel of Christ" (1 Cor. 9:12).

Fourth, liberty must be regulated by whether or not it will edify. "All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not" (1 Cor. 10:23). Edify, in this verse, "is used metaphorically, in the sense of edifying, promoting

the spiritual growth and development of character of believers, by teaching or by example, suggesting such spiritual progress as the result of patient labor" (Vine). "All things are lawful" refers to things that are not wrong within themselves. One would have the right to do these things, but it would not be expedient if it caused a weak brother into sin, or encourage one in sin to remain in it, we sin against Christ who died to save the weak and lost" (Lipscomb).

Fifth, liberty must be regulated by its effect on others.

Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth...whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God. Give none offense, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God: Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved (1 Cor. 10:24, 31-33).

REFUSING LIBERTY IN MATTERS OF OPINION ALWAYS LEADS TO POSITIONS AND ATTITUDES THAT ONE DOES NOT WANT TO ACCEPT

First, it leads to extremism or radicalism. Extremism means going to great or exaggerated lengths. It means going beyond the limits of reason, necessity, or propriety (uncompromising, fanatical). Radical means considerable departure from the usual or traditional. There is a tendency to make extreme changes in existing views, habits, conditions or institutions. Liberalism finds its basis of operation in the liberty that is found or set forth in the gospel, and then abuses it. The book of Galatians clearly

shows this. Radicalism or extremism finds its basis on the desire and understanding of people that we must follow the Bible. From this basis many jump into the radical or extreme positions that the Bible does not support. They have definite convictions about a certain scruple. They decide that in order to follow the Bible I must submit to their scruple. The honest desire on the part of people to follow the Bible, and then not being able to distinguish some things, leads to extremism.

Second, it leads to extremes in worship. We see the pendulum swing from a highly emotional setting to a cold legalistic approach. There is the faith healing, Pentecostal-type service. Then there is cold ritualism on the other hand.

To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or lambs, or of he goats. When you come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? Bring no more vain obligations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and Sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth; they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them (Isa. 1:11-14).

Churches can become “custom-bound” on the one hand to constantly changing on the other hand.

Third, it leads to extremes in discipline. The Bible clearly teaches church discipline. “Now we command

you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us" (2 Thess. 3:6; cf. 1 Cor. 5:1-13). Some go to the extreme of not practicing discipline at all. Some begin to practice discipline upon those that are not evangelistic enough (Pharr 5). Some may not actually withdraw, but practice withdrawal by "shunning" some, and asking others to do the same, to pressure them back in line.

Fourth, it leads to extremes regarding translations. Certainly we need to be careful regarding translations and warn of some dangers involved, but some brethren go to extremes. Some have the translation they like and feel others are liberal if they don't use the same translation. One should not be labeled liberal or conservative on the basis of the translation he uses, but what he teaches. Certainly we should be aware of the modernistic influence in the Revised Standard Version but, as Franklin Camp says, it clearly presents the thought of 1 Peter 3:21: "And baptism which this prefigured, now saves you – not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 3:21).

Fifth, it leads to extremes in defending the truth. Christians are to earnestly contend for the faith. "Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3). Some, by their actions, seem to feel that any attitude and method in defending the truth is justified. The proper attitude and proper method go together. "But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ" (Eph. 4:15).

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).

Sixth, it will end up in continual hair-splitting if followed to its logical conclusion. We will allow no one to think different from what we think and, if they do, we will have no fellowship with them. We fail to recognize the difference between things on which we must agree and things on which we can differ. If there can be no fellowship unless we completely agree on everything then a man and his wife can never have fellowship. On the question of circumcision, the brethren were of "one accord" (Acts 15:25), but when Paul and Barnabas disagreed over who would go with them they did not allow it to stop their work (Acts 15:36-41).

Seventh,

It causes people to develop an intolerant attitude toward opinions: There is a tolerance of differences which is not true tolerance but indifferent to the truth. Some individuals are so opinionated that they are of the intolerant opinion that no one has a right to any opinion if he is to stay in fellowship (Bales).

It is unscriptural to say that no opinions may be tolerated. "This does not mean that we fellowship the

opinion in that we endorse and encourage an opinion which we do not accept; but it does mean that all opinions, even when acted upon do not destroy fellowship" (Bales).

Eighth, it causes people to have an intolerance which binds their opinions on all others. He loves his opinions so much, that if you do not love them, he not only does not want to have anything to do with you, but he refuses those who accept any who refuse his opinions. He has the spirit of Diotrephes.

I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not. Wherefore, if I come I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church (3 John 9-10).

In his intolerance he makes and binds laws which God hath not bound.

CONCLUSION

One must always steadfastly hold to matters of Faith, be ready always to give liberty in matters of opinion, and must continually manifest charity, or love, in all things. To manifest sincere love to an enemy of the cross, or the truth, does not signify that we condone him in his activities, but rather we are striving to carry out the spirit of Christ to all men. Our attitude and bearing, though firm, should always be permeated with love and kindness, realizing that misunderstandings arise and can be overcome, and that we, ourselves, are weak and human.

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AN ANCIENT SERMON FOR A MODERN WORLD

LONNIE SMITH, JR.

Jesus' Sermon on the Mount addresses these modern times against materialism and worrying that come from not prioritizing our lives. In these modern times, many people focus on material things more than spiritual and eternal things. The modern world is either in denial or does not understand that life without God and doing His will leads to worry and anxiety. Jesus tells us, "But seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6:33).

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This discussion will focus on the causes of worrying, the cure to worrying, and the common practices to overcome it.

CAUSE OF WORRYING

Matthew 6:19-34 is a good commentary on worrying and anxiety. Jesus begins in verses 19-21 conversing that one should seek the spiritual and the eternal more than the physical. Jesus went through the test of the spiritual versus the physical. He told Satan "...man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4). In Luke 12:15, Jesus said:

"...Take heed, and beware of covetousness; for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth."

"And in my prosperity I said, I shall never be moved" (Ps. 30:6).

"The prosperity of fools shall destroy them" (Prov. 1:32).

Our society is being destroyed because of its focus on things other than God. The consequence is focused in worrying. Jesus in Matthew 6:24 lets us know that worrying comes not only from putting the material things before God but also from trying to serve both. He said "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...."

Man cannot live life in worrying but occupying our hearts on glorifying Him. The key here is we will have many concerns during our life times about things, but our lives should never be overtaken with worrying about food, raiment, and shelter. Paul gives us a very good merciful prayer in 1 Corinthians 6:12, "All things are lawful unto

me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any." God and His grace, mercy, promises, and His will should capture our lives more than anything.

Jesus then looks at God's creation order. God takes care of the birds and even the lilies. How more will He take care of the crown of His creation: man.

Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin. And yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which today is and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? (Matt. 6:26-30)

What a lesson of faith that we should believe God will not forsake us or leave us. "Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, the Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me" (Heb. 13:5-6).

Jesus got to the real problem: that is the lack of faith in God in Matthew 6:30, "Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which today is and tomorrow is cast

into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?" Little faith means a faith that does not grow in trusting God's promises. It is a faith that trusts in self. Proverbs 3:5-6 says, "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him and he shall direct thy paths."

This question has been asked many times: is worrying a sin? When you look at Jesus' explanation, worrying is a result of not fully putting your trust in God and His promises. Worrying becomes a result of little faith. Jesus gives us a principle in Luke 21:34, "And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares." Our lives can be overcome with things where there is no place for God. This will result in a life of anxiety and worry.

THE CURE FOR WORRYING

Jesus gives us a list of things that will help us stay focused on God's purpose and promises. We find these solutions in Matthew 6:25-34 and Luke 12:22-34. Consider God's creations and how he takes care of them (Matt. 6:26-29; Luke 12:24-27). We are to observe how God takes care of the birds and the lilies. We mentioned earlier, in this discussion, that man is the crown of God's creation. Paul said, "But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:19).

"But seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6:33). God has given us in one verse the purpose of our lives. Resistance to this only leads to problems and more problems. This "seek" means to desire and pursue

God's will continuously. If we are always seeking God's purpose and his will, there will be no time to be occupied with self and material things (Matt. 6:33; Luke 12:31).

Jesus, in Luke's account, lets us know it is God's good pleasure that we seek the kingdom and enjoy the blessings of the kingdom. We don't have to worry about anyone throwing us out of the kingdom of God. Jesus said, "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32).

"Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth" (Luke 12:33) is probably the most interesting one. This could mean that Jesus wanted Christians to not be totally dependent on our possessions. The early church in Acts 2:45 exemplifies, "And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need." The rich young ruler could obey all the other commandments except selling what he had and giving it to the poor. The scripture said he had great possessions (Matt. 19:16-22).

The modern world is so about their things. This is the reason why anxiety is the most common emotional disorder today.

OVERCOMING WORRYING

Worry or anxiety symptoms fall into three categories: physiological, cognitive, or emotional. A major factor of anxiety issues is being overstressed. Common symptoms include:

1. Physiological – Do you feel:
 - Weak all over?

- Rapid, pounding heartbeat or palpitations?
 - Tightness around your chest?
 - Hyperventilation (a feeling that you cannot get enough air)?
 - Periodic dizziness and sweating?
 - Muscle tension, aches, or tremors?
 - Chronic fatigue?
2. Cognitive – Do you think:
- I can't carry on. I've got to get out of here.
 - What if I make a fool of myself?
 - People are looking at me all the time.
 - I'm having a heart attack.
 - I'm going to faint.
 - I'm going crazy.
 - I can't go on alone; no one will help.
 - I can't go out; I will lose control.
 - I feel confused and can't remember things.
3. Emotional – do you think:
- I'm full of fears that I can't get out of my mind.
 - I feel like something terrible is going to happen.
 - I worry excessively.
 - I feel uneasy and alone a lot of the time.
 - I often feel isolated, lonely, down in the dumps, and depressed.
 - I feel I have no control over what happens to me.
 - I feel embarrassed, rejected, and criticized.
 - I often feel like screaming with anger.

The above checklist is not designed to be a diagnostic tool. It is intended to communicate the variety of symptoms experienced by people with high anxiety. If you experience at least three symptoms in each category, this could signify that your anxiety level is becoming a problem, particularly if the symptoms are experienced often. If you experience

more than three symptoms in each category and are not in treatment, I suggest you consult a professional right away.

One must have a balanced approach in treating anxiety disorders. Some anxiety problems require medication, while others do not. In either case, life-long changes must be made. Concerns about medications include:

1. Are they all addictive? The answer is no. The person should not become dependent on medication.

2. Do I have to take medication for the rest of my life? The answer is no. Treating anxiety requires a change in lifestyle. Counseling should be included in the treatment. The key to treating anxiety is getting to it at the early stage.

The Bible addresses the anxiety that causes worry in Matthew 6:24-34, Matthew 13:22; 2 Timothy 2:4; and Luke 21:34. There are several treatment myths:

1. Commit yourself to God.
2. If you try harder, you will feel better.
3. Just snap out of it.
4. Take a holiday, and all your problems will go away.
5. Just have more faith.

Suggestions to overcome worrying are:

1. Face the situation. The hardest thing for many people to do is just face the problem head on. "And it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up, he stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem" (Luke 9:51). Jesus teaches us how to face life and death.

2. Take action: make the needed changes. “Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:13-14).

3. Change your thinking (Phil. 4:4-9).

- Draw near to God. “Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say Rejoice” (v. 4)
- Pray for all your cares. “Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God” (v. 6). “Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you” (1 Pet. 5:7). “Cast your burden on the Lord, and he will sustain you” (Ps. 55:22).
- Guard your heart. “And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:7).
- Think on these things. “Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things” (Phil. 4:8).
- Do what is right. “Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you” (Phil. 4:9).

4. Relax – control the tension level in your mind.

And the apostles gathered themselves together unto Jesus, and told him all things, both what they had done and what they

had taught. And he said unto them, Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while: for there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat. And they departed into a desert place by ship privately (Mark 6:30-32).

5. Take one step at a time. "Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof" (Matt. 6:34).

6. Set priorities. "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6:33).

7. Accept what you cannot change

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. For to this end also did I write, that I might know the proof of you, whether ye be obedient in all things. To whom ye forgive any thing, I forgive also: for if I forgave any thing, to whom I forgave it, for your sakes forgave I it in the person of Christ (2 Cor. 2:7-10).

CONCLUSION

The purpose of man is to glorify God. God will take care of us in order to do his will. We should pray, as 1 Timothy 2:2 states, "For kings and all that are in high places; that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness

and gravity. Jesus gave us the remedy for worrying.

1. Look how God takes care of his creation.
2. Seek God's kingdom first, and He will supply your needs.
3. Sell what you have, depending on God to take care of you.

It is all about our attitude toward God and his will. Jesus is our perfect example. He knew God would take care of him. This is why he said, "My food is to do the will of Him that sent me and to accomplish His work" (John 4:34).

FELLOWSHIP ISSUES

EDWIN JONES

INTRODUCTION

There is a very real sense in which every biblical topic serves as the window through which we view every other. God's love, for example, can rightly serve as the vantage point through which we examine not only every other attribute of God, but every aspect of man's nature, the scope of salvation history and the divine kingdom.

Our present goal is to examine the spiritual landscape from the perspective of biblical fellowship. An exhaustive treatment of the matter would be interesting but time-consuming, so for the moment we will narrow our focus and look specifically at what we often identify as fellowship "issues." Can we have fellowship with the general religious

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world in all things? Can we worship with anyone regardless of their system of beliefs and practices? Are there any limits on fellowship? What can we (or can't we) do and be in fellowship with God and others? More importantly, how do we determine the answer to these questions?

The extreme limits of fellowship are: one, see how many we can include (open fellowship) and two, see how

many we can exclude (closed fellowship). Principles of inclusion and exclusion abound not only in our illustrations and arguments, but (more importantly) within scripture. In Matthew's account of the parable of the wedding feast (Mt. 22:3ff) we see what might appear to be a contradictory approach. The host goes out of his way to invite as many guests as possible to a wedding after the original invitees spurned his invitation (inclusion). But, in what seems to be a stunning turn of events, the host chastises and dismisses a guest for not wearing proper attire (exclusion). Let's include as many as possible, but you—you—are excluded.

Biblical principles of fellowship are similar. God wants all men to be saved (I Tim 2:3-4). If all men were saved then all would be in fellowship. But we know that although many are called, few are chosen and fewer still are faithful (Mt. 22:14; Rev. 17:14). Obviously, biblical fellowship excludes some. As was the ill prepared wedding guest, we are invited to the wedding but the invitation does not say "come as you are." To be part of God's wedding party (cf. Rev. 19:7ff), we must not only be invited—the gospel invitation is extended to all—we must also wear the appropriate attire. In other words, we must meet God's conditions (cf. Rev 17:8).

The original invitees to the wedding feast might have thought they had more important things to do. They may have rejected the invitation in principle, not because they were busy but because they rejected the one who invited them. In the case of the invitation inherent in the good news, that equals rejecting God himself.

We want everyone to be in fellowship with us, but if we follow all of God's guidelines—not just those that please us—we must admit that some souls simply will not be in fellowship with us or God. Some never acknowledge

God's gracious invitation. I want everyone to be saved because God does, but I can no more fellowship everyone than God can save them in their sins or save them against their will. Salvation, being "in Christ" and fellowship go together (cf. Acts 2:38-47; Eph. 1:1ff). If I am to respect God, then I am honor-bound to respect God's boundaries. I can not call evil "good" and good "evil" and expect God to accept me (Is. 5:20). I can not consistently teach others to do what I am unwilling to do (Rom. 2:1ff; Mt. 23:2). If I am to follow in the paths of righteousness, then I must know where and what they are (Pr. 2:9).

ARE THERE LIMITS OF FELLOWSHIP?

Years ago a brother in a distant state gently chastised me for not getting involved in a particular brotherhood controversy. In response, I asked him whether or not he knew certain preachers in my area who taught the same error. He acknowledged that he did not. But I did. Although I was not taking part in the controversy he mentioned on a brotherhood-wide scale, I was doing just what he was doing, just in a different area and on a different scale.

When and where I know of issues that are within my ability to affect and impact, I have a responsibility to act. But are there limits to our individual responsibility?

Are you in fellowship with the elders of the Lord's church in the largest congregation of the body of Christ meeting in Nairobi, Kenya or in Stockholm, Sweden? Do you even know that congregations exist in those places? Do they have elders? Are you in fellowship with them? How can I have fellowship with the leaders or members of the church on the other side of the globe when I do not know who they are, what they do, what they believe or anything else about them?

If biblical fellowship inherently involves some sense of working together for the cause of Christ on an ongoing basis, to what extent am I in fellowship with a brother that I rarely see and never work with?

It seems that we use the term fellowship rather broadly sometimes, and in so doing distort the term to the point that it no longer conveys what it did in the new testament.

While two Christians living in opposite corners of the world are both "in Christ," saying so does not mean that they are in fellowship in every sense. To be sure, if they are faithful in Christ, they are both in fellowship with God and, to that extent, have some semblance of fellowship with each other (cf. 1 Jn 1:1-4; 1 Cor. 1:9). But if they do not know of each other, have never met, and do not correspond in any way, there is a crucial aspect of fellowship that they simply do not have. They have never been co-workers together, even though each continues to be faithful in Christ. And if they never jointly participate in working together, then there is at least one major aspect of fellowship missing in their relationship.

Fellowship involves a relationship between at least two Christians, each of which has a distinct, obedient-faith-relationship with God. But fellowship is not fully explained by these broad parameters. It must be more to be the full-orbed, fellowship revealed in scripture. It must entail more than two faithful Christians who are both in a proper relationship with God. It consists of an obedient faith-relationship with each other that involves some sort of working together in a more direct fashion.

We can misrepresent truth and teach error by: (1) using a term too broadly and (2) using a term too restrictively.

A denominational “pastor,” attempting to show me that Saul was converted before arriving in Damascus, offered as proof Ananias’ calling Saul “brother” when he first met him. To be sure, Saul was a brother to Ananias: they were both Jews. But Saul was not a brother to Ananias in a very key way. He was not yet a brother “in Christ.” To assume that “brother” in this context implied Saul was already saved is to use the term “brother” too broadly.

There must be some way in which we can more clearly and carefully distinguish between overly broad and overly narrow ways of defining fellowship. To affirm that I am in fellowship in every sense of the word with Christians I do not know seems to be a misuse of the term. Furthermore, to affirm fellowship in every sense of the word with Christians I do know, but whom I rarely see and thus rarely have any means of actually working together, also seems to be a misuse of the term.

Do we teach error by noting this distinction? Are we equivocating on the use of the term by using it too broadly or too narrowly ourselves? To be sure, critics will declare: “He’s redefining fellowship to suit himself.” My awareness of the problem does not necessarily mean that I have not been caught up in it myself. But let’s examine the matter further to determine whether or not such a mistake has actually taken place.

In another time and place, a noted brother defined two levels of fellowship, which he simply designated as “Big F” and “little f” fellowship. He distinguished between them as follows: Big “F-fellowship” issues are those focusing on essential-to-salvation matters and “little-f fellowship” issues are those focusing on tangential, non-essential-to-salvation matters. Big “F-Fellowship” issues are directly salvation-connected. Little f “fellowship” issues are not.

What those “Big-F and “little-f” issues are will vary depending on who is defining them. In this case the role of women in the church, instrumental music, marriage/divorce/remarriage, etc., were all deemed “little-f” fellowship issues by this brother.

The distinctions noted above capitulate nothing in key doctrinal areas. No quarter is given to those who pitch key biblical doctrines into the abyss of “little-f” issues.

In addressing fellowship issues in the body of Christ we find the same challenges we face in defining the term fellowship itself. We can misrepresent fellowship issues by (1) being overly broad in identifying what constitutes an issue or (2) being overly restrictive in our identification. The problems are further compounded by differences in practice. We can also muddle fellowship issues by being (1) overly broad in our practice or (2) overly restrictive in our practice.

THREE KEY AREAS

There are, then, at least three broad areas that are subject to either too-restrictive or too-loose views of fellowship matters:

(1) Defining fellowship—how we define and explain what we believe to be the biblical meaning of fellowship;

(2) Identifying fellowship issues—how we define and explain what we believe to be a biblical “issue” of fellowship;

(3) Fellowship practice—how we actually practice fellowship

We find a wide range within these three areas. It is possible not only to manipulate each but also to be inconsistent in moving from one to another. We might define fellowship too broadly, be too restrictive in identifying whether or not something is an “issue,” and finally, be either too restrictive or too loose in practice. These variables alone allow for at least 27 different combinations, not counting the varying degrees within each area.

To be biblically consistent we should be able to (1) define fellowship the way God defines it, (2) identify issues as God identifies them and (3) practice fellowship as God intends.

There are, of course, plenty of biblical examples that demonstrate how things can go wrong. Some religious leaders of Jesus’ day were quite restrictive in their understanding of fellowship. The Sadducees and the Pharisees were known for their contempt for each other, some thinking that only members of their party were right (cf. Acts 23:6ff). But we suspect that within their party, some may have demonstrated a rather wide latitude in what they allowed fellow party members to believe. In practice, it is obvious that inconsistencies prevailed. It was all right to save your animal on the Sabbath day, but whatever you do, do not allow this Jesus to get away with healing someone on that day (Mt. 12:9-14). They were quite forgiving when it came to oxen and donkeys but rather restrictive when it came to their fellow man.

Obviously, how we define fellowship, identify fellowship issues and practice fellowship is critical. Because there are so many ways to fail, how should we think and act concerning those whose perception of these three key areas differs from ours? How will we define, identify and practice fellowship with those who are trying to do

the same thing we are trying to do yet come to different conclusions?

The significance of getting these things acceptably can not be over emphasized. Fellowship issues, like doctrinal issues and issues of conscience are often sin issues. Note the term “often.” The nine-and-a-half tribes of the children of Israel on the western side of the Jordan assumed that the two-and-a-half tribes on the other side were guilty of idolatry when they erected a memorial to commemorate God’s faithfulness (Josh. 22:21ff). In the three key areas noted here—defining fellowship, identifying an issue and practice—the eastern tribes were consistent. They knew what fellowship was. They knew that idolatry was a fellowship issue. And finally, they were right to take their brethren to task if idolatry was in fact being practiced.

But the western tribes failed in a crucial point: their belief was mistaken. The eastern tribes had built a memorial, not an altar. The western tribes were consistent in all three areas, but in one critical area they assumed something that simply was not true. Thinking that others are wrong does not make them wrong.

We find a similar challenge in dealing with issues of conscience, such as those addressed in Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 8 and 10. Those who refused to eat meat because it might have been part of a pagan sacrifice made a critical assumption—that God cared whether or not their meat came from a pagan source. Obviously, God does not approve of pagan sacrifices, and we know that we should never do anything that condones any belief or practice contrary to God’s will. Therefore, wouldn’t it be true that God must not approve of anything that might appear to condone those sacrifices—such as eating the meat?

The apostle Paul pointed out where this line of thinking falters: Idols are nothing. Offering a sacrifice to a non-existent god should not be encouraged, but eating meat from that sacrifice does not commend the practice.

The issue of whether or not some belief or practice is sinful does not depend on any person's say-so. The western tribes' belief did not make the eastern tribes' memorial an altar, and conscientious objections to the practice of eating meat from pagan sources did not make it sinful. Thinking or believing something is sinful does not make it so.

THREE FELLOWSHIP CONNECTIONS

Biblical marriage entails three separate relationships. The horizontal relationship between one man and one woman comprises only the first of the three. From a worldly perspective it might be recognized as the only one that exists, therefore the only one that matters. Ultimately it is neither the only one that exists nor the only one that matters. Two other relationships exist: the vertical one between God and the woman and the vertical one between God and the man. If either or both of these relationships are flawed, then in spite of what anyone thinks about the husband/wife relationship, the marriage will be less than perfect. This does not mean that marriage cannot exist unless each party in the horizontal relationship recognizes and respects their own relationship with God, but it does mean that failure to do so will yield something less than what God wants.

So it is with fellowship. Fellowship involves three separate but equally important relationships. The horizontal relationship between two Christians comprises only the first of the three. Unless, and until, we fully fathom all that's involved in the remaining two elements, we will

always be myopic in our understanding of fellowship. We must understand what it means for each Christian to be in fellowship with God in order to fully understand what it means for both Christians to be in fellowship with each other. This does not mean that failure to fully grasp everything about our respective connections to God demands that we will have no appreciation at all for our horizontal fellowship. It simply means that we will not grasp the importance of that connection as thoroughly.

While there are numerous issues and sub-issues related to the subject of fellowship, we will address only the three broad ones mentioned above: (1) the definition (usage) of fellowship; (2) the identity of “issues” and (3) the practice of fellowship.

The first element appears straightforward. What does the Bible say about fellowship? How does it define fellowship and, more specifically, how does it use the term? Can we, by examining the term “fellowship” in all of its contexts, determine its meaning for us today?

The second element could not be more confusing and troublesome. Understanding what fellowship meant in new testament times does not necessarily produce a neatly defined set of “fellowship issues” of equal import for all Christians at all times. What, exactly, does the Bible identify as an “issue” in the new testament context, and how does it relate to what we call an issue today? Are they the same or even remotely similar? Few today wrestle with whether or not to eat meat offered in pagan sacrificial rituals, so how can 1 Corinthians 8, 10 and Romans 14 relate to contemporary practices?

Finally, what does our practice show about the meaning of fellowship and identifying fellowship issues?

Are we consistent? Are we even trying to be consistent? Have we, rather than beginning with a biblical definition and biblical parameters of fellowship, started with practice first and then defined fellowship? Have we forced Biblical principles to fit our practices after the fact? Have we put the cart before the horse, or perhaps forgotten the horse entirely?

Starting with the third element, our practice of fellowship, we note only the following: that our contemporary practice reflects a hodgepodge of ideas and usage. Thirty years ago a published work noted that numerous conflicting positions on marriage, divorce and remarriage were in vogue, yet the church had not divided over them. More recently similar observations have been made about the disparate ways Christians define and practice fellowship itself, creating in effect multiple mini-fellowships.

While it is certainly legitimate to criticize the status quo for allowing and defending conflicting ideas, criticisms often seem to be based on a similar assumption: a wide range of opinions and inconsistencies “proves” that some truth can not be consistently known or practiced. This assumes too much, and in the end, proves to be a major flaw. Is every topic about which controversy swirls inherently unknowable by virtue of the controversy? Do multiple viewpoints always militate against the existence and knowledge of objective truth? Two obvious thoughts here: Some problems exist first, because far too many are far too restrictive in the positions they maintain and second, because critics often provide “solutions” that are just the opposite, far too oblique.

We generally follow this principle: we must believe and practice today what Christians did in new testament

times to be in fellowship with God. If we employ a biblical definition/usage of the term “fellowship,” drawn from the contexts in which the term appears in the New Testament, then we will know the parameters of what is and is not a fellowship issue today. This assumes that biblical usage determines biblical meaning and that the delimiting facts built into such usage will yield an understanding of the boundaries for our practice today.

We must note in advance, that some elements of what a biblical issue is will vary from person to person. This can occur not just because some disagree with biblical teaching, but rather because of conscience issues that arise when we explore certain areas of faith and practice. Eating meat offered to idols and the observance of Jewish holy days, all issues addressed in Romans and 1 Corinthians, are doctrinal in that they are definitely issues that scripture addresses, but the nature of the biblical teaching here differs.

Rather than a clear cut “thou shalt” or “thou shalt not,” God addresses these matters as “thou mayest” or “thou mayest not.” The issue of personal conviction, conscience and preference come to the fore here. This does not mean that the former matters (“thou shalt” and “thou shalt not”) do not involve and demand personal conviction, conscience and preference; they do, but not in the same way.

For example, God says that we must assemble (Heb. 10:24ff). This is a doctrinal and practical matter about which we must maintain personal conviction, conscientious observance and a consistent preference for following. But it is not a matter of conscience in the sense that the eating meat issue is. When must we assemble? In brief, we must do so on the Lord’s day. But when must we assemble on the Lord’s Day? And where must we do so?

God's mandates for Lord's day assemblies simply do not address the last two questions. Who determines the specific when and where? We do, but only within the parameters of other God-given instructions. To that extent we are free to determine how to obey God. To make a "fellowship issue" out of areas where God has not mandated specifics is to define fellowship, fellowship issues and fellowship practices in a way not desired by God.

WHAT IS AN ISSUE

Something becomes an "issue" when someone attributes the matter to one of making or breaking fellowship with another Christian. That attribution might be real, and consistent with revelation, or imagined, and inconsistent with revelation. The critical concern is that "issues," real or imagined, divide Christians.

Some might assume that we can all be out of fellowship with each other and somehow still maintain fellowship with God. To be sure, there are circumstances that allow breaks in fellowship with some Christians while allowing others to continue in fellowship with God.

The church at Corinth, in order to maintain their proper relationship/fellowship with God, was told to put away a brother involved in immorality. The break in fellowship was not to break their connection with God, but to maintain it. So, there are two sides to this fellowship coin: there are times when we are in fellowship with God because we maintain fellowship with others and there are times when we are in fellowship with God because we break fellowship with others. The first case mandates faithful fellowship with others to remain faithful to God. The second case mandates that we break fellowship with those who do not believe or practice what God wants. In

this regard we recognize and honor their break with God by breaking with them ourselves.

Fellowship issues are fundamentally sin issues. If we are in fellowship with God, then God does not impute sin against us. When we have lost fellowship with God or his children, God imputes sin. In either case, in or out of fellowship, we do commit sin—but in the first situation we are “walking in the light” and the blood of Christ cleanses us (1 Jn 1:7). This is the crux of the matter concerning sin and fellowship: to assure that God does not count our sin against us we must remain in fellowship with him and with his children.

Is fellowship with God’s children really possible? It is obvious from John’s remarks in his first epistle that fellowship was indeed possible in the first century (cf. 1 Jn. 1:1ff). John said he was writing so that his readers “may also have fellowship with us.” The greater context demonstrates that fellowship “with us” involved “fellowship with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ.” Two aspects of fellowship are presented here, the first involving Christians with one another, and the second involving their respective fellowship with God. The overall teaching appears to be bi-directional: first, you must have fellowship with us to be in fellowship with God and second, you must have fellowship with God to be in fellowship with us.

Fellowship matters, therefore, are not trifling. But as significant as they are, we must exercise caution in categorizing our differences. Not every “issue” has to be a fellowship issue. Some of the issues noted earlier, such as eating meat sacrificed to idols and respecting days, divided the early church. That should not have been. The issues of eating in meetinghouses, drinking from multiple cups and having Bible classes divide the contemporary

church. This should not be either. Issues are not all equal in importance. Whether or not one ate meat sacrificed to idols pales in comparison, in one sense, to whether or not one observed the Lord's supper properly. Both can divide a congregation, but the latter carries more far more weight than the former.

Regardless of the gravity of any particular issue, we must not ignore sin, take it lightly, or flaunt it. Every issue has the potential to become a sin issue. If the meat-eating matter remained a matter of private conscience, Paul would never have written the church at Corinth about it. Apparently, someone in Corinth voiced concern about the practice, and what was once private became public. What was once a matter of individual conscience escalated to the point of potentially dividing the Corinthian church. If someone wants to use a single container to observe the Lord's supper, that's fine. But if the matter progresses to be more than a matter of individual conscience, and in the process becomes one where parties are pressing everyone to practice what they believe about "cups," then an initially innocent matter transforms into a damning and dividing one. This occurs not because God inherently damns or divides relative to the issue, but because we do.

We must not label beliefs and practices as sin or sinful that are not so labeled by God. Paul states this in principle in Romans 14:14 when he says "that there is nothing unclean of itself." God determines what is and is not sin; we do not.

You can believe and teach error, even Calvinistic error, without respect to the translation you prefer. The translation should not be an issue, but Calvinism should be. Jesus rebuked scribes and Pharisees for being more concerned about what went into their bodies than what came out of

their mouths (Mt 15:16-18). We sometimes demonstrate greater concern for what goes into our buildings—meat and drink—than what comes out of them—preaching, teaching, godly living and light to the world.

When we make an issue out of something that God has not made an issue (e.g., hand washing, Mt. 15:2), we raise our opinions and traditions—just as they did—to the point that we demote God’s word (Mt. 15:6-9).

Clearly, what defines the issues we debate defines us. Are those issues substantive, or have we elevated nonessentials to matters of greater importance than they deserve?

FELLOWSHIP AND GOD

The natures of all three members of the Godhead are equal. If we were to picture them, we might employ three concentric circles, all of which contained the same sets of data. To what extent are all three in fellowship? Every aspect of the will, word and work of the Godhead is consistent within each person as well as among all three persons.

In the beginning Adam and Eve enjoyed a level of fellowship that we might not fully appreciate. Though they did not know all that God knew, and had not existed as long as God, Adam and Eve enjoyed an unparalleled fellowship with God. Why? In part because there was no sin. Where there is no sin, there are no fellowship issues, only fellowship. As noted before, fellowship issues are sin issues. The assumption is that wherever sin exists, some aspect of fellowship is missing. Is it the case, then, that fellowship can not exist wherever sin exists? Does this position hold water?

First, does it apply from God's perspective toward us? Being cleansed by the blood of Christ as we walk in the light does not mean we have no sin (1 Jn 1:7ff). Obviously, if walking in the light cleanses us, it cleanses us of sin. To be cleansed of sin demands that we had sin that needed washing. We are, then, even as we walk in the light, still far from sinless. If we say we do not sin we contradict the word (1 Jn 1:6). Yet, via this "light walking" process, we are counted as sinless. In this relationship God not impute our sins to our account (Rom. 4:8).

Question: Is there any parallel process between men that reflects this same sort of fellowship between man and God? Is there some means by which we are "light walking" with regard to the fellowship we enjoy with each other? That is, fully aware that we are far from sinless, yet within the confines of this "light walking" paradigm, not only not having our sins imputed to us by God, but also not having our sins counted against us by fellow Christians?

Obviously, we are not sinless. Can we still have fellowship with one another? To ask is to answer. It is impossible to be in fellowship with God based on sinless perfection. If we are in fellowship with God it must be on the basis of something else—that is, someone else. Fellowship with God exists only because of the perfect Son of God.

Since no Christian obtains fellowship with God based on their own perfection, it follows that no two Christians have fellowship with each other based on their sinless perfection. If fellowship between Christians exists in spite of our imperfections, it must exist on the basis of something outside of ourselves. The basis of mutual fellowship between Christians, like individual fellowship with God, is the perfection of Christ.

Again, if fellowship ever exists as something more than a theoretical or imaginary relationship—that is, if fellowship has substantial and real existence—then it must exist in spite of our own sins and our awareness of the sins of others. There must be some means whereby we, in following the divine example, do not “impute” sins against each other. And, this means must be one where emphasis on holiness, righteousness, godliness, etc. remains central to our “light walking,” and not one where they are de-emphasized or totally ignored.

Can we find evidence for this line of reasoning? Consider Luke 6:37. We are told to forgive so that we might be forgiven. The term forgive is present active imperative. We must forgive. God’s forgiveness (“you will be forgiven”) is future active indicative. God will forgive us, but only as we forgive others. God’s forgiveness toward us reflects, therefore, the forgiveness we demonstrate toward others. If God shows tolerance toward us, allowing us to be in fellowship with him even though we are far from sinless, must we not also demonstrate similar tolerance toward others who are just as far from sinlessness as we are? The scriptures say “yes.”

This precept exists throughout God’s revelation. Our willingness to show mercy and forgiveness towards others must be like God’s mercy (Mt. 6:14-15; 18:35; Mk. 11:25-26; Lk. 7:50-48). All these passages reflect the will of the Father, but also that of the Son from whose lips they fell. Additionally, both Matthew’s and Luke’s account of the “model prayer,” also taught by Christ, express this thought. God will forgive us as we are willing to forgive others (Mt. 6:12, 14; Lk. 11:4).

Paul reiterated Christ’s teaching in Ephesians 4:32 and Colossians 3:12-13, but not as a quotation from the Lord.

Paul stated that Christ himself showed forgiveness toward us, thus necessitating our forgiveness toward each other. In fact, when we forgive in response to genuine repentance (Lk 17:1ff), we are said to do so in the presence of Christ (2 Cor. 2:10). In what might be the lengthiest passage presenting this principle, Jesus answers Peter's question concerning "how many times" we are to forgive our brethren (Mt 18:21-35). His reply tacitly affirmed that we must do so without limit. Why? Because God ("the lord" in vs 33) does so.

Does this make the issues of fellowship so open-ended that everyone simply determines for himself what is and is not a matter of fellowship? Do we all do simply do what is right in our own eyes (Deut. 12:8)?

DETERMINING RIGHT AND WRONG

First, we must note that difficulty in determining right and wrong does not determine what is right or wrong. Peter said that Paul addressed some matters that were hard to understand (II Peter 3:16). That did not mean that they could not be understood. Nor did it mean that because they are difficult we are excused from trying to understand them. It might simply mean that they are difficult to understand only because we are too far away from them theologically and/or practically (cf. Is 55:7).

Second, something is not right or wrong based on whether or not we have heard of it before. The Athenians yearned to learn new things (Acts 17:21). That did not mean they believed every new thing they heard.

Third, something is not right or wrong based on whether or not we have believed it before. The apostles did not believe that the Messiah should die (Mt. 16:18ff),

but the scriptures plainly declared it (Lk. 24:25-26; 44ff).

Fourth, something is not right or wrong based on whether or not we like, appreciate, grasp, understand or want the consequences associated with it. For whatever reason, Agrippa believed the prophets but was unwilling to act on that belief (Acts 26:27-28).

FELLOWSHIP ISSUES, GOD, AND CHRIST

“Fellowship” means to “share or hold in common,” therefore, biblically speaking, all truth relating to fellowship issues must share common ground with God. It must derive from his divine nature. Conversely, whatever fails to be rooted in God’s nature cannot receive divine approval.

We must come to know the character of God to resolve fellowship issues. More specifically, we must develop an appreciation for, and an understanding of, the fellowship that exists between God the Father and God the Son. This most visible demonstration of divine fellowship must be our primary model. John’s gospel in particular presents the Father-Son fellowship as fundamental to our own.

What can we learn from Jesus’ principles and practices?

- His relationship to the Jews and the Mosaic law mirrors our relationships with one another under the perfect law of liberty. He was a Jew living in a covenant relationship with His fellow Jews (Mt. 5:17-19; Jn. 4:34). We are Christians living in a covenant relationship with our fellow Christians (Heb. 2:1-4; 8:7-13).

- He understood that though Jews who were led astray were not guiltless, those led them astray were guilty of a more serious offense (Mt. 17:7-10).

- He kept company with sinners to the extent that it became a major point of contention with the Pharisees (Mt. 9:9-13). But he also kept company with the Pharisees while simultaneously rebuking them in public and private (Lk. 7:36-50; Mt. 23:1-39).

- Through it all, Jesus knew there were times when His disciples should part company with certain individuals (Mt. 10:13-15).

Jesus' life and practice presents an instructive paradox. He demonstrated that he could both condemn and counsel his fellow Jews, and that he could advise others to avoid certain individuals even as he engaged in social contact with them.

We can be in proximity to someone, even in a social setting, but not in fellowship with them so as to violate God's nature. It is this apparent contradiction that will prove most interesting in sorting out a variety of fellowship issues. In short, one can share space and other things with an individual, but not share with him a fellowship relation with God. This appears true even when others mistakenly believe we tacitly endorse their behavior (Mt. 11:16-19).

God, as seen in the person of Jesus, goes to great lengths to seek and save the lost. But he did so exercising considerable latitude in his various associations (Jn. 4:1-29). Latitude, however, does not mean ignoring problems. Jesus responded to sin with varying degrees of patience and severity, but He always responded.

DEALING WITH ISSUES

In our investigation of fellowship issues, we want to know whether or not someone is, at this moment or in this situation, in fellowship with God. We want to know what responses are consistent with God's nature when a fellow Christian lives in a manner that creates fellowship problems (I Jn. 1:7). In exploring these matters, I John 1:7 shows that every brother or sister who walks in the light also sins. Christians in fellowship with God are not always doing what manifests His nature. The atoning death of Jesus, however, keeps those who walk in the light in fellowship with God. How can this be so?

Our fellowship with, and salvation because of, God is a relative thing. It is not relative in the sense of existing without foundations or boundaries; it is not relative as in cultural or moral relativism. It is relative in that it is relational. The saved are imperfect in their walk with God, but because of our relationship to a perfect Savior we are forgiven (Heb. 4:14-16). Every Christian relates to God's nature in a flawed way (Rom. 3:9-20). We share this incongruence because we all sin (Rom. 3:23). This being true, no saved person should have a prideful attitude when addressing fellowship issues (Lk. 17:10). Self-righteous judgment is forbidden (Matt. 7:1-4). We are what we are by the grace of God (I Cor. 15:10).

Shared sinfulness with all humanity does not, however, mean shared fellowship in salvation. There are many conditions that create fellowship issues. Some issues can be remedied easily, some with difficulty and, in cases where we simply can't know all circumstances, we must leave judgment to God.

Since we have seen that the Bible teaches all Christians still sin (I Jn. 1:7b), we must ask what level

of sin takes a believer out of fellowship with God? And, because fellowship with God serves as the foundation of our fellowship with each other, what level of sin breaks our relationship with other Christians (I Jn. 1:1-3)? Are there sins that do not remove a Christian from the grace of God, but still call for action from brethren (cf. Matt. 7:1-5)?

The Bible offers several interesting contrasts in the area of fellowship issues. Note the following combinations of contrasting verses:

- II Timothy 2:24-26 and II John 9-10: The first passage encourages us to be gentle, patient and meek so that we can recover lost souls, and the latter admonishes us not to bid godspeed to those in error. Can we do both? Yes. Must we do both? Yes.

- Galatians 1:8-9 and Acts 18:24-28: The first passage informs us that those who teach or follow another gospel are accursed, and the latter provides an example of someone who taught error (Apollos) being shown the way of the Lord more perfectly. Are both possible? Of course. Must we do both? The answer is obvious.

- Matthew 9:10-13 and I Corinthians 5:11-13: Matthew shows that Jesus ate with publicans and sinners and incurred the disdain of many Jews; 1 Corinthians 5 indicates that Corinthian Christians were not to eat with the brother in Corinth. What difference exists between these two passages? Evidently, it is not wrong to eat with sinners in every situation, but clearly wrong in others. What factors determine which practice we are to follow in a given situation?

Rather than picking the verses we prefer, we must look to context to find harmony in the "big picture." God's

nature is consistent even when it might appear that it is not (cf. Job 7:20-21).

Notice also how Scripture provides differing approaches to differing kinds of fellowship issues. The contrasting approaches illustrate how fellowship issues can possess varying levels of severity. Our level of patience should be appropriate to the nature of the offense. Scriptural examples include:

- A brother who refuses to make things right with a brother (Matt. 18:15-17)
- A person who causes divisions (Rom. 16:17-18; Titus 3:9-10).
- A Christian who commits a gross public sin, and persists (I Cor. 5:1-8).
- A Christian who continues in behavior that is against God's standards of righteousness (I Cor. 5:11-13).
- A leader who continues in sin (I Tim. 5:19-20).
- A person of the world who behaves in an openly perverse manner (Eph. 5:11-12).
- People of the world in general (I Cor. 5:9-10).

What factors account for the differences in the appropriate responses to these scenarios? They would include:

- The intentions of a person.
- The severity of the problem.
- How a person deals with a problem.
- The amount of time a person has been a Christian (Heb. 5:11-14).

In the seemingly unending variety of fellowship issues, whether or not we remove ourselves from a certain type of association and the process we follow in such cases must be based on scriptural principles. These principles

are in turn reflections of the nature of God—which we see clearly in the way Jesus dealt with sinners during His walk among us.

Citing passages out of context simply will not do. Ignoring the lessons we learn from actually seeing God in action as Jesus dealt with sinners is even more inexcusable. As we delve into and sort out fellowship issues, we must first orient ourselves to the nature of God.

We began by noting that “there is a very real sense in which every biblical topic serves as the window through which we view every other.” That line could also read “there is a very real sense in which every biblical topic serves as the window through which we view God.” How we view the biblical teaching on fellowship, more significantly, how we “do” the biblical teaching on fellowship, reflects our understanding of, and our willingness to implement, the character of God in our lives. We have not attempted to answer every issue that divides us—but by refocusing the discussion on how fellowship relates to the character of God, we will come closer to answering those issues than not.

MISSION METHODS FOR THE MODERN WORLD ROD RUTHERFORD

Shortly before His ascension to Heaven our Lord gave marching orders to His disciples. He commanded them to preach the Gospel to the whole world, every nation, and every creature (Matt. 28:19,20; Mark 16:15,16; Luke 24:46,47). In obedience to the Divine injunction, the early Christians with little money, primitive means of transportation, and under constant threat of persecution, carried the Gospel to Africa, Asia and Europe. Paul indicated the extent of evangelization in his letter to the Romans when he asked, "But I say, have they not heard? Yes, indeed: 'Their sound has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the end of the world'" (Rom. 10:18). (All Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version unless otherwise stated). No other generation has been as

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successful or as far reaching in preaching the Gospel as this first generation of Christians!

What methods did the early Christians use? How did they reach so many of their contemporaries so quickly? They

did not have the advantage of the internet. The printing press had not been invented and copies of the Scriptures were made slowly and laboriously by hand. They had no jet planes, trains, cars, or engine-propelled ships. Instead they traveled on foot, by horseback, by oxcart or by sailing ship. They had few prosperous, well-established churches to send missionaries out. There were no Christian universities, Bible colleges, or schools of preaching to ground men in the Bible and train them in the latest means of evangelism and cross cultural communication. When we consider how much they did with how little they had to work with, we stand in awe of our first-century brethren!

The first-generation Christians did have many things to their advantage. First, they had a burning vision of a world hopelessly and helplessly lost in sin. They knew that “all had sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). They understood that sin alienated man from God (Rom. 6:23; Isa. 59:1,2). They were absolutely convinced that Jesus Christ is “the Way, the Truth, and the Life” (John 14:6). They believed that apart from Jesus Christ there is no salvation (Acts 4:11,12; 1 John 5:11,12). The first generation of Christians clearly comprehended the fact that the Gospel of salvation had been committed to them and that the salvation of the world, as well as their own, depended upon their faithfulness in proclaiming that Gospel to others (1 Cor. 9:16; 2 Cor. 4:7). It may safely be said of these intrepid soldiers of the cross that they had an unquenchable love for lost souls and a flaming zeal to take the Gospel to them. Is it any wonder they were accused of “turning the world upside down” (Acts 17:6)?

What methods did the early Christians use to attain such phenomenal results with such limited material resources? Are these methods viable today? First, we must

point out that in giving the Great Commission, our Lord used both generic and specific commands. When He said, "Go," He did not specify how to go. He did not mention a means of transportation nor a particular way of communication. We are not bound therefore to first-century technology in travel or ways of making the message known. "Go" is a generic command with the way of going not specified. We may go on foot, but we can also fly on a jet plane. We may preach to a few individuals in person or we can preach to multiplied millions via radio, television, the internet and the printed page. However, when we go, we must preach the Gospel. This is specific. There is only one Gospel and it must be preached without addition, subtraction or alteration in any way (Gal. 1:6-9; 2 John 9; Rev. 22:18,19).

Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, surely stands in the front rank of all missionaries of all times. No one can deny Paul's boundless zeal, willingness to sacrifice for the Cause of Christ, or the amazing success that attended his labors. What are some of the methods that Paul used to achieve his results? Can his methods and approach be utilized today?

First, it appears that Paul concentrated his labors on strategic cities. He did not attempt personally to reach every soul in every community, no matter how small or remote. Instead, Paul concentrated on building up strong churches in large, influential, centrally located cities from which the Gospel could radiate forth into the surrounding areas and to the territories beyond. When one studies Paul's missionary journeys as recorded in Acts, he will note the areas where Paul spent extended time teaching were the chief cities in their districts. Philippi, Thessalonica, Corinth, and Ephesus are examples of such cities. Paul also usually chose cities where Jewish synagogues were located. On at

least one occasion, he seems to have deliberately passed by two fairly large cities because there was no synagogue of the Jews in them (Acts 17:1). The Gospel was “to the Jew first” (Rom. 1:16). Synagogues provided places where people met to worship the one true God. They believed in the Old Testament Scriptures and were looking forward to the coming of the Christ. Paul would be given an invitation to teach, a courtesy commonly extended to visiting rabbis. It afforded a wonderful opportunity to begin the work of evangelization of an area.

Second, Paul was a team worker. Jesus had sent His apostles out two by two following the ancient principle of strength in numbers (Mark 6:7; Eccles. 4:9,10). Paul went out on his first missionary journey accompanied by Barnabas, an early Christian evangelist, who like Paul, was specifically chosen by the Holy Spirit. They had John Mark, a younger relative of Barnabas as their assistant and traveling companion (Acts 13:1-5). Silas accompanied Paul on his second missionary journey (Acts 15:40). Paul also picked up co-workers along the way such as the young man, Timothy (Acts 16:1-3), Luke, the beloved physician (Acts 16:6 ff.; Col. 4:14) and others. Long lists of fellow laborers with Paul often occur at the end of his epistles (Col. 4:7-14; 2 Tim. 4:9-12). Paul was well aware of the dangers of discouragement and depression when one is alone and beset by problems (2 Cor. 7:5-7).

Third, Paul did not take financial support from churches he established at the same time he was preaching to them. He stoutly maintained the right of preachers to be supported by those among whom they labored (1 Cor. 9:1-18). Paul, however, chose not to avail himself of this right. By making this deliberate choice, he removed the possibility of an accusation that he was a religious charlatan making merchandise of the Gospel. After he had

established a church and moved on, Paul did allow them the privilege of supporting him in his work, if they chose to do so (Phil. 1:3-5; 4:10-16).

Fourth, Paul maintained contacts with the churches he had planted. A common complaint I have heard from converts on the mission field is that the missionary who originally taught them the Gospel and had moved on never communicated with them again. Paul, however, often returned to visit and encourage his converts. It seems too that it was his custom to leave co-workers behind to aid the struggling young church when he had to move on. The “we passages” in Acts suggest that Luke remained behind in Philippi when Paul and Silas left but later rejoined the apostolic party (Acts 16:10-20:6). Silas and Timothy apparently stayed behind in Berea when Paul found it necessary to leave (Acts 17:14). Paul also frequently sent co-workers to various congregations to carry messages or to assist them in needs and difficulties (1 Cor. 4:17; 1 Tim. 1:3; Tit. 1:5). He also kept in touch with churches he had founded with a steady stream of letters to teach, ground, encourage, and deal with issues and problems. We are blessed with Paul’s epistles in the New Testament as a result of this practice.

Fifth, Paul did not consider his work done until the churches he had established were fully organized with qualified elders and deacons. He appointed elders in the churches he and Barnabas had established on the first missionary journey (Acts 14:23). The Philippian church had bishops and deacons (Phil. 1:1). Paul sent Titus to Crete that he “should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city” (Tit. 1:5). Few churches on mission fields have elders today. Few missionaries stay long enough to train Scripturally qualified elders. Many churches are now in their second generation and

have never been able to have a Scripturally qualified leadership.

Sixth, Paul did not supply financial aid to churches he had established to enable them to support their preachers, build meeting houses, or carry on any other work they could do for themselves. When this fact is pointed out to present day elders, they are usually shocked for it has long been standard practice for American congregations to support native preachers, build meeting houses, operate training schools, and fund many works of a material nature on the mission field. There is no instance in the New Testament of Paul raising money for such projects. It seems he expected the churches he established to be self-supporting from the beginning. In fact, Paul actually raised money from the churches he had established on his missionary journeys to aid the older, well-established churches back home when they were in need (Acts 11:27-30; 2 Cor. 8 and 9). This is the very opposite of present day practice!

Seventh, Paul was flexible in matters of opinion and judgment, but uncompromising when it came to matters of doctrine. Paul stood steadfastly against those Jewish Christians who attempted to bind circumcision and the keeping of the Law of Moses upon Gentile converts to Christ (Acts 15:1-29; Gal. 2:1-5). The old law had been "nailed to the cross" and was no longer binding upon either Jew or Gentile (Col. 2:14). Yet Paul had Timothy circumcised (Acts 16:3). However, he strongly refused to have Titus circumcised when some brethren wished to make a test case of him (Gal. 2:1-5). In Timothy's case, his circumcision was a matter of expediency. Since his mother was a Jew and he had not been circumcised as an infant, his circumcision would allow him entrance to the synagogue as a Jew thereby affording him opportunities to teach the Gospel. In Titus' case, he was a Gentile and

had never been subject to the law of circumcision. If Paul had allowed him to be circumcised it would have been taken as an admission that Gentile Christians must be circumcised to be saved.

Missionaries and teachers of missions frequently debate missions philosophy. One's missions philosophy will determine the methods he uses to teach the Gospel and plant churches in the mission fields of the world. Missiologists (Missions scholars) commonly place all mission methods under two major headings: (1) Paternal (2) Indigenous.

The Paternal philosophy (commonly referred to as "paternalism") sets forth the missionary as a father over the work. Just as a human father provides for all the needs of his children, so the missionary is responsible for the needs of his spiritual children. He must raise funds to support the native preachers and provide for their needs in the work such as for bicycles and motorcycles for them to ride to appointments. He must build church buildings on the mission field for the local churches may lack the resources to build modern, well-equipped meeting houses such as the missionary is used to back home. Just as a human father makes decisions for his immature, dependent children so the missionary must make the decisions for the advancement of the work.

The philosophy of Paternalism has been widely practiced by the denominations in their mission work over the past two hundred years. Churches of Christ have fallen in step and followed this approach without questioning whether it is the most effective approach in the long run, or even whether it is in harmony with the Scriptures. As a result, we have churches on the mission field still receiving outside support after twenty, thirty or

even forty years with no end in sight. Instead of becoming part of “the team” to take the Gospel to those who still have not heard, many mission churches become permanent “welfare cases,” always receiving but never giving. Thus, they tie up funds that could be used to take the Gospel to those still untaught.

The Indigenous philosophy of mission work is the direct opposite of Paternalism. One definition of the term “indigenous” is “existing, growing, or produced naturally in a region or country, belonging to, as a native” (Webster 716). For example, a banana tree grows naturally in South Florida and will produce a harvest of delicious fruit. However, if the same tree were dug up by the roots, carefully transported to East Tennessee, and planted with due care and concern here, it would not grow naturally. It would not survive the first winter. In order for a banana tree to live here, it would have to be carefully nurtured in an artificial environment such as a greenhouse. Indigenous churches are churches which are taught from the very beginning that they have the responsibility to grow into self-supporting, self-governing, and self-propagating churches of Christ so that they can join in the great world harvest of lost souls. The New Testament churches were indigenous churches. The methods followed by Paul are correctly classified under the Indigenous philosophy.

Under the Paternal philosophy, the missionary is expected to provide leadership and the supporting churches supply funds with no end in sight. Under the Indigenous philosophy, churches are taught to rely on their resources even if it means it will take longer to have their own local meeting place. They are taught to have a part in the work from the beginning. A personal example from the writer’s own experience in a mission field in Africa illustrates the point. In an older work in the country, the missionary

built a very nice, large church building. After some years of use, it began to fall into disrepair. It was especially in need of a coat of paint. On a visit to the congregation, the missionary suggested to the brethren that they needed to paint the building. The response he received was, in essence, "Paint it yourself. You built it. It is your building." They felt no ownership and no responsibility.

Contrast this with the experience of the writer and his co-worker who had determined to follow the Indigenous principle in a new work they had begun. The church soon outgrew the brother's home where it met for mid-week services. The public hall rented by the church for Sunday services was frequently not available at times when we needed it. The brethren (not the missionaries) decided they needed their own meeting place. They approached my co-worker and me with their decision. We agreed with them. There was a long silence and then they asked, "We want you to write letters to America to get the funds for us to build." They seemed stunned when we asked, "What are you going to do?" They had never been taught they needed to do anything. It was all done by the missionary and his supporting churches. We suggested they open a building fund account at the bank and start saving. One brother suggested we could approach the city council for a free plot of ground upon which to build. This was done. We were given two years to begin building or forfeit the free plot. A brother who was a bricklayer asked his employer for the bricks from a building which had been demolished which were simply going to be hauled away. The members met on Saturdays to haul those bricks and clean them. Within a few months, a nice little building was erected. This building has served the church well for the past 35 years. The church has taken good care of it and added on to it to meet the needs of growth. Except for a gift of one hundred dollars given by a visiting Christian from

America, every part of the meeting house was provided by local labor, materials and money. The hundred dollar gift was used to purchase metal for the roof.

Churches of Christ have been truly blessed that the post World War Two prosperity of the United States has made it possible for congregations to send missionaries to the four corners of the globe. We are equally blessed that modern means of transportation have made travel faster and less expensive enabling many Christians to go on short mission trips to assist growing works around the world. We are also blessed that modern means of communication such as the print media, radio, television, the internet, videos, DVDs, CDs, etc. facilitate the rapid spread of the Gospel to the most remote areas of the earth. The world's population is the largest it has been since man began keeping records of it. Surely, God in His providence, has permitted man to advance in technology to make it possible to reach every soul on earth with the Gospel in our generation and in every generation until the Lord comes again.

The Gospel never changes! It must never be altered in any way! However, the means of carrying the Gospel to the world may vary according to the advancement in travel and technology. The Gospel must be preached. The methods that we use should be the most sensible and effective in order to do the greatest good in the long run. It is not the number that a missionary baptizes that determines his success, but the number who remain faithful after he leaves the field! It is not the number of congregations he establishes that determines his ability as a missionary, but the number of congregations that become a part of the program of evangelizing and continue from generation to generation.

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ANCIENT FAITH AND “BAPTISM”

RALPH CLEVINGER

One can scarcely read the gospel accounts in the New Testament without thinking about baptism and how it relates to those who desire to follow Christ. In fact, each gospel writer, by inspiration, felt it necessary to discuss Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist. This should make one with an honest and contrite heart search diligently to understand how baptism relates to the faith which was delivered to all the saints (c.f. Jude 3). Since we are to be conformed to the image of Jesus (c.f. Rom. 8:29) and Jesus is the one who has the words of everlasting life (c.f. John 6:68), it is necessary to study Jesus' view of baptism.

JESUS' BAPTISM

According to Mark 1:4, John the Baptist preached a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. There

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were many who desired to be baptized by him. In fact, they came from all the land of Judea, Jerusalem, and the entire region around the Jordan to hear his preaching and to be baptized (Mark 1:5; Matt. 3:5). According to Luke's

gospel, there were multitudes of people who came to him (Luke 3:7).

Jesus came to John in order to be baptized by him. In Matthew's account, John tried to prevent Him and said that he needed to be baptized by Jesus (Matt. 3:14). Jesus' response is of grave importance. He said, "Permit it to be so now for this it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness" (Matt. 3:15). Then John baptized Jesus.

One has to take note of Jesus' response. He felt the need to be baptized in order to fulfill all righteousness. According to Thayer's definition, the word for righteousness, in a broad sense, is the condition acceptable before God. Therefore, Jesus felt it necessary to be baptized by John to be acceptable by God. One only needs to read the Father's statement, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17; c.f. Mark 1:11, Luke 3:22) to gain understanding of what He thought of Jesus' baptism.

Why did Jesus have to be baptized to be able to be declared righteous? The answer is seen when a proper understanding of where baptism originated. John said he was sent to baptize with water (John 1:33). Luke wrote "the word of God came to John" and as a result he went "preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins" (Luke 3:2-3). One can only conclude baptism came from heaven.

This was the answer to Jesus' question when He was asked by the Pharisees where His authority originated (Matt. 21:23-27). Jesus asked them if the baptism of John was from heaven or men. The idea was both Jesus and John had the same source of authority, heaven. Sadly, like these men, there are many today that deny baptism has any standing with their relationship with God.

JESUS’ TEACHING ABOUT BAPTISM

There is no doubt Jesus was baptized. Every gospel writer attests to the fact of His baptism by John. Rationally, one can say a study of Jesus’ teaching about baptism should be extremely important, if we desire to be His disciple.

Nicodemus came to Jesus by night and talked with Him (John 3:1-21). Jesus informed Nicodemus “unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (John 3:5). Notice Nicodemus’ response, he does not argue the necessity of baptism with Jesus, whom he said was a teacher from God, but asked, “How can these things be?” (John 3:9). In the same discussion, Jesus said, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved” (John 3:16-17).

When one considers these teachings, there are two ideas connected – belief and rebirth. Jesus told Nicodemus unless he was born again he could not see the kingdom of God (John 3:3) and those who believe in Jesus will have everlasting life (John 3:16). It is no wonder when Philip went to Samaria and preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized due to their belief (Acts 8:12).

Some may say, “Show me where Jesus taught some one they had to be baptized.” No doubt, Jesus forgave sins while He was on earth and did so at the sign of a repentant heart. One example would be the sinful woman that washed His feet with her tears (Luke 7:36ff).

However, we do have an account in John chapter four which indicates Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John (John 4:1-2). If all Jerusalem, Judea, and the region around the Jordan went to be baptized by John, then one has to wonder how many were baptized as a result of Jesus' teaching. The text does say that the disciples were the one baptizing them, but Jesus, it seems, was the one doing the teaching. If Jesus thought baptism was not important, then why would He have His disciples baptize anyone?

In Acts chapter nine, Saul of Tarsus desired to seek out the Christians in the synagogues of Damascus and bring them chained back to Jerusalem. In fact, he was the one who asked for the letters from the high priest. On his way to Damascus, he saw a light and heard Jesus' voice. During this conversation, Saul asked Jesus what He wanted him to do. Jesus' response was to go into the city and it will be told to him what he must do.

Upon his entrance in the city, he was found in Judas' house. He could not see and was fasting and praying for three days. Jesus spoke to Ananias and told him to go see Saul.

Ananias went to Saul and told him that Jesus sent him so he could receive his sight; something like scales fell from his eyes. According to Saul, Ananias asked him, "...why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (Acts 22:16). In Acts 9:18 Saul was baptized.

There are some who believe Saul was saved on the road to Damascus. However, Saul did ask Jesus what he should do. He never told Ananias, "I am already saved, so I do not need to be baptized." If he was saved before entering into Damascus, Saul did not recognize his

salvation; furthermore, he was the saddest saved person I had ever heard or met.

In his letter to the Romans Saul, now known as Paul, wrote on how to become a slave of righteousness. In Romans 6:17, Paul taught, “But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered.” What a marvelous thought; no longer a slave of sin! Paul added, “having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness” (Rom. 6:18).

To what doctrine was he referring? It seems he referred to the doctrine found in the first seven verses of this same chapter. He noted they had been baptized into Jesus’ death, or they had died with Christ through their baptism. They were buried with Him and raised just as Jesus was by the glory of the Father. Therefore, they were dead to sin, but alive in Christ and a slave of righteousness.

This same Paul, who was baptized by the instruction of Jesus to go into Damascus for further instruction, taught the necessity of baptism. Paul taught the Colossians, “In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ” (Col. 2:11). Paul did not stop there so we would have to speculate in what he meant. Paul went on to say, “Buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead” (Col. 2:12). When was this circumcision applied? It was during their burial with Him in baptism. Thus, in chapter three of Colossians, Paul could say they had put off the old man and his deeds and put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created Him (Col. 3:9-10).

JESUS' COMMANDS ABOUT BAPTISM

Jesus thought it was important to be baptized by John to fulfill all righteousness. He had taught others they had to be baptized to enter the kingdom of God. One can also conclude Paul, who at the instruction of Ananias because Jesus told him to go and listen in Damascus, was baptized and taught others to do so, as well. However some may say if Jesus specifically said I have to be baptized, then I will do so. Therefore, a study of Jesus' commands about baptism is of necessity.

In Luke 24:47, Jesus told His disciples, "...that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." In Mark 16:15-16, Jesus said, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned." Here one can see the message which was to be preached, the gospel. Through the gospel, one learns about repentance and remission of sins. However, Jesus also said, "he who is baptized will be saved." How does this fit? One can only conclude those who hear the gospel and believe it have to be baptized in order to be saved.

Some may say, "It does not say and are not baptized!" It does not have to say such. Jesus in John 3:18 indicated "...he who does not believe is condemned already." Baptism is not a fix-all solution. Without belief, then baptism profits nothing. Without baptism, then belief profits nothing, as well.

Jesus also taught in Matthew 28:18, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth." Since Jesus has all authority, then Jesus is able to make commands which

all of heaven and earth have to obey. “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things I have commanded you,” was His command (Matt. 28:19-20). They were to go, teach, baptize, and teach some more.

What did His disciples do? In Acts 2, Peter preached about Christ’s death, burial, resurrection, and ascension. They asked him what they should do. Peter’s response was to “repent and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38). Just as Christ commanded and about three thousand souls were baptized (c.f. Acts 2:41).

Peter commanded Cornelius to be baptized (Acts 10:48). The Samaritans and the eunuch were baptized by Philip in Acts chapter eight. Paul baptized Lydia and the jailor in Acts chapter sixteen.

In 1 Peter 3:21, Peter discussed similarities between the ark of Noah’s day and baptism. The water saved Noah and his family because it floated the ark to safety. Baptism saves us, not because we are no longer filthy physically, but it gives us the answer of a good conscience toward God. All of this is due to Jesus’ resurrection.

CONCLUSION

With all of the evidence pointing to the importance of baptism, one must consider why there are doctrines teaching some they can be saved without it. It seems to me, this is due to a lack of focus when speaking about baptism. There are times when gospel preachers focus more on winning the argument about baptism instead of preaching Jesus. We may have made Jesus a part of baptism

instead of baptism a part of following Jesus and His will for our lives.

Jesus desires and requires all to be baptized for the remission of their sins so they can enter into the kingdom of God. It is not that baptism alone saves us, but it shows our obedience and submission to the will of the Lord. In fact, baptism without faith and repentance does not profit anything.

After all, Jesus demonstrated how important it was for Him to be baptized. He left Galilee and walked to the Jordan, where John was baptizing. Some indicate this to be between sixty-five and eighty miles (Boles 88). Just because it was the right thing to do.

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THE NEW MORALITY

CLARENCE DELOACH

It was 1963 when Bob Dylan wrote his much celebrated song, “The Times They Are A-Changing.” When you think about it, it was the 1960s that brought about some revolutionary changes in the mind-set of our nation with regard to morals. It was that generation that revolted against moral law, and the restrictions of religion and the so-called Puritan ethic. We began to hear about the enslaving and suppressive influence of the church and that its message and work is not relevant for today. It was that generation that urged revolution against the establishment. They rebelled against the values of their parents and grandparents. The phrase “doing your own thing” and “if it feels good do it” became popular to describe their pragmatic lifestyle.

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In the late 1960s and early 1970s, numerous articles, debates, books and lectureship themes focused on God’s standard of morality. Bill Banosky and Anson Mount, religious editor of Playboy magazine, had a debate on the subject. That has been more than fifty years ago. In our society we are seeing the fruit of these Godless philosophies in our culture, education, government and even in religion.

Peter Drucker, a well-respected management and business guru, writes in his book **Post-Capitalist Society**:

Every few hundred years in Western history there occurs a sharp transformation. Within a few short decades, society rearranges itself, its worldview; its basic values; its social and political structure; its arts; its key institutions. Fifty years later there is a new world. And the people born then cannot even imagine the world in which their grandparents lived and into which their parents were born. We are currently living through just such a transition.

The sad reality is our grandchildren are living through a time of pressure to conform. It will be more difficult for them than it was for us to stand for and live by the principles of Biblical morality. This is not their grandparent's world!

The 1960s crowd with their "down-with-the-establishment" rhetoric are now our leaders in government, education and religion. These leaders are steeped in postmodern culture and consequently are seeking to reinvent government, education and religion. Government becomes increasingly socialistic, education becomes more pragmatic and religion is pluralistic. God is not denied by all these philosophies, but is reinvented. Man has made God in his own image.

Christianity is vehemently opposed; Jesus is ignored or mythologized; God is humanized; and the Bible is repudiated as a book of myths. In no area of society has more transformation occurred than in the practice of human behavior. Moral relativism argues that there is no absolute

and objective standard of right and wrong. Each individual must decide his/her own cultural, ethnic and sexual orientation. Television, movies, politicians, and professors in our universities have accepted moral relativism as the norm. To speak out on matters like cohabitation, same-sex unions, abortion and other moral evils is considered “politically incorrect” and morally confusing to time.

In 1966, Joseph Fletcher published a book, *Situation Ethics*, in which he set out the ethical system of the “new morality.” Many who read the book concluded that the “new morality” is nothing more than the “old immorality” dressed up in new garb to make it more respectable. Fletcher suggested three possibilities as to approaches in making moral decisions: the legalistic, the antinomian, and the situational.

The legalistic approach is entered with a set of prefabricated rules and regulations. The antinomian approach has no regard for rules or maxims, but is totally unpredictable, erratic and momentary. Situationism is never based upon right or wrong, but always on the basis of love, so argued Fletcher. Accordingly, if love is best served by lying, stealing, then the law regarding lying, stealing, etc. are set aside. According to this popular mind-set it is sometimes right to do wrong.

Many were the pulpits and books that condemned Fletcher’s “situation ethics,” but it did not die. As a matter of fact, it is ingrained now in America’s moral behavior and used as justification for many behaviors.

Many do not prefer abortion and would argue against it but would prefer it to raising an unwanted child. It is the view that it would be better to terminate a child’s life than to have him grow up unloved and disadvantaged. This

is a classic example of situationism and moral relativism. The word of God is clear that God hates the taking of innocent life, and that is what abortion is (Prov. 6:16-19). [All scripture is quoted from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted.]

Some view same-sex marriage as wrong, but argue that passages in the New Testament do not condemn a love-relationship that is monogamous. In their book, **Is the Homosexual My Neighbor?**, authors Letha Scanzoni and Virginia Mollenkott argue that the New Testament passages dealing with homosexuality did not condemn a committed, loving relationship. They said:

The Bible clearly condemns certain kinds of homosexual practice, i.e. gang rape, idolatry, and lustful promiscuity. However, it appears to be silent on certain other aspects of homosexuality—both the ‘homosexual orientation’ and ‘a committed love-relationship’ analogous to heterosexual monogamy.

This is the view advanced by religiously oriented homosexuals, including churches that have ordained homosexual ministers. Love and commitment, according to them, justifies a relationship that ordinarily is condemned. Of course such a position is ludicrous and totally without Biblical support. It is an example of moral relativism and situationism applied to a deviant lifestyle. Those who practice the homosexual lifestyle expect society to approve and accept them. Pressure is brought upon state government to grant them civil rights extended to traditional marriage. They view belief in absolute truth as mean-spirited, intolerant, exclusivist and judgmental. In our pluralistic culture, they want their preferred lifestyle to

have equal acceptance with heterosexual marriage. More and more, homosexual advocates are becoming militant and irreverent. Robert Williams expresses the belligerent spirit of the moral relativist when he states,

The point is not really whether or not some passages in the Bible condemn homosexual acts; the point is that you cannot allow your moral and ethical decisions to be determined by the literature of a people whose culture and history are so far removed from your own. You must dare to be iconoclastic enough to say, "So what if the Bible does say it? Who cares?"

There you have it in black and white! Who cares what the Bible says! It is a book of antiquity! It no longer speaks to our culture! That is the contention of atheists, agnostics, humanists, pluralists, liberalists—all moral relativists.

All moral responsibility begins with God! The direction of one's life is determined by his attitude toward the first four words of the Bible: "In the beginning GOD..." (Gen. 1:1). Faith or doubt begins here! Did God make man, or did man create God? The answer to these questions is like the "continental divide" and will determine the way your life will flow. Values, morals, faith begins here! Morals are defined if you accept the Biblical revelation of God. Otherwise you will be the victim of human confusion.

If there is no God, the highest power is matter and energy. The highest rational power is man. Truth then becomes whatever man, society or culture dictates. It becomes changing and relative with no universal standard. The only conclusion to such thinking is "whatever is, is right." To the contrary, since God is, He is the creator and

sustainer of this universe. He is all-powerful and supremely intelligent. Since He created man, He knows what is best for man. He has communicated his love and grace to the human family. The Bible reveals His purpose, plan and agenda for man. We can understand His will revealed therein. It is timely, universal and relevant to the needs of man in every culture. It has transcended numerous cultures, yet remained fresh and applicable to all. It has stood the test of time, being consistent, accurate and thorough. It stands undaunted though the hammers of unbelief have been hurled upon it. The promise of God remains, "The Word of the Lord endures forever" (1 Pet. 1:25).

God has a standard for moral righteousness. Men do not break the laws of God! They violate them only to be broken in time themselves. There comes a time when God "gives up" or "gives them over" to their own lusts and rebellion. Romans 1:18-32 describes how a people can become morally and spiritually bankrupt. But, judgment is coming when God will right all wrongs.

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PREACHING AN ANCIENT FAITH TO THE MODERN WORLD

GARY HAMPTON

To those who are worldly minded, the preaching of the gospel is outdated, silly and absurd (1 Cor. 1:18-19). To those who “are being saved” (footnote ASV) the gospel is mighty (dunamis), like dynamite (Rom. 1:16). The worldly minded will rush to suggest means other than preaching to capture the attention of men in our modern world. They have tried carnivals, rock bands, plays, light shows and an endless number of other means to attract men. However, God does his calling in the preaching of the message of the gospel. The apostle Paul wrote, “But we are bound to

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give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining

of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thess. 2:13-14). [All scripture references are taken from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.]

None of this is to say that the gospel preacher can excuse himself from making his preaching relevant to his listeners. To effectively preach the gospel, a man of God must find ways to show his listeners that his message has an immediate application to the modern world. The inspired penman related the numbers of the divisions equipped for war that came to David in Hebron when they were turning the kingdom over to him. He made this interesting statement, "of the sons of Issachar who had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do, their chiefs were two hundred; and all their brethren were at their command" (1 Chron. 12:23, 32).

USING ILLUSTRATIONS AND ANECDOTES

One of the ways this can be accomplished is through the illustrations and anecdotes used by the one who proclaims the truth.

We must try thus to get the truth into the people, for it will never get in of itself; and we must remember that the hearts of our hearers are not open, like a church door, so that the truth may go in, and takes its place, and sit upon its throne to be worshipped there. No, we have often to break open the doors with great effort, and to thrust the truth into places where it will not at first be a welcome guest, but where, afterwards, the better it is known the more it will be loved.

Illustrations and anecdotes will greatly help to make a way for the truth to enter; and they will do it by catching the ear of the

careless and the inattentive....You must endeavor, brethren, to make your people forget matters relating to this world by interweaving the whole of divine truth with the passing things of every day, and this you will do by a judicious use of anecdotes and illustrations (Spurgeon 52).

THE PROPHETS USED ILLUSTRATIONS

The prophets used things from the world around them to draw their listeners in to hear important truths. Amos wrote specifically of the things Israel had done that was bringing a judgment of the Lord. One can almost imagine an article in a newspaper as he reads,

Therefore, because you tread down the poor
And take grain taxes from him, Though you
have built houses of hewn stone, Yet you
shall not dwell in them; You have planted
pleasant vineyards, But you shall not drink
wine from them. For I know your manifold
transgressions And your mighty sins: Afflicting
the just and taking bribes; Diverting the poor
from justice at the gate (5:11-12).

He went on to illustrate their inability to escape punishment by vividly describing two tragic examples from daily life. "It will be as though a man fled from a lion, And a bear met him! Or as though he went into the house, Leaned his hand on the wall, And a serpent bit him! (5:19).

Nathan, God's prophet, "resorted to a parable by which he led on the king to pronounce sentence of death upon himself" (Keil 388). The prophet described a rich man with many sheep and oxen who lived beside a poor

man who had only one little lamb “which he had bought and nourished...so that it grew up in his house along with his son, and was treated most tenderly and loved like a daughter. The custom of keeping pet-sheep in the house, as we keep lap-dogs, is still met with among the Arabs” (Keil 389). One suspects the story would have struck a strong cord in David, who some call the shepherd-king. When he condemned the actions of the rich man who killed that one special sheep, David laid bare his own soul as a result of the story and saw himself as a sinner.

THE LORD USED ILLUSTRATIONS

It is interesting to note how often the Lord used illustrations arising from the daily life of the people to whom he spoke. He used the remarkable growth of the mustard seed to illustrate the way the church would grow (Matt. 13:31-32). “A mustard plant is a pod-bearing herb which the Jews of Palestine planted in their gardens.... It sometimes grew to be from five to ten feet high and higher when cultivated” (Roy 24). Not surprisingly, birds made nests in this very large herb bearing plant.

Jesus knew how well men are acquainted with material matters – a farmer sowing in the springtime and workers at the harvest separating the wheat from the tares, a merchant who gives his life in quest of a rare pearl, or children who play in the marketplace – and using these timeless pictures He sought to tell men principles that count in the unseen world (Lightfoot 14).

By piquing their interest, our Lord was able to lead his hearers to a conclusion before they realized the truth they were about to acknowledge.

The Lord was also familiar with current events which were being discussed by the people. When a group of people told Jesus about those who were killed by Pilate while offering their sacrifices, thinking they were an example of punishment for being particularly sinful, Jesus called to mind the case of eighteen upon whom a tower in Siloam fell (Luke 13:1-5).

PETER AND JUDE USED ILLUSTRATIONS

Jude described false teachers by using images which would have been very familiar to his readers. "They are clouds without water, carried about by the winds; late autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, pulled up by the roots; raging waves of the sea, foaming up their own shame; wandering stars for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever" (12b-13). Peter describes the tragedy of having found the truth and turning back by citing a proverb that must have been well known.

For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them. What the true proverb says has happened to them: "The dog returns to its own vomit, and the sow, after washing herself, returns to wallow in the mire" (2 Pet. 2:21-22).

PAUL USED ILLUSTRATIONS

On more than one occasion, Paul quoted from poets his listeners would have known. On Mars Hill, the apostle to the Gentiles seems to have quoted from Epimenides of Crete when he said, "for in Him we live and move and have our being." He then went on to say, "as also some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring'" which is from the poem "Phainomena," written by Aratus

(Acts 17:28). In writing to Titus, his son in the faith, Paul also seems to have quoted Epimenides when he wrote, ‘One of them, a prophet of their own, said, “Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons”’ (1:12).

Paul repeatedly used illustrations from the era in which he and his readers lived. One of his favorite areas of comparison arose from using one of the twenty-four Olympic games. “In 2 Thessalonians 3:1 he speaks of the word of the Lord as running (throughout the world—an idea that goes back to Ps. 147:15) and of being feted wherever it went, as was the successful competitor in the games” (Williams 268). “In Galatians 5:7 he laments that his readers had been running well (specifically, in their obedience to the truth of the gospel) but someone played foul and caused them to stumble” (268). Williams later suggests Romans 9:31-32 makes an allusion to the games, when he writes, “The Jews, on the other hand, had stumbled over Christ in their ‘race’ to win God’s acceptance” (272).

The apostle also used images of boxing as a metaphor in 1 Corinthians 9:26-27 to show his “determination to live a disciplined life and especially to keep his natural desires under control: ‘I am not boxing,’ he says, ‘like a man beating the air’ (sparring or shadow boxing, skiamachia)—I am not making a pretence of Christian discipline—‘but I beat my body black and blue [as it were] and make it my slave”’ (269). Later in verse 27, “He pictures himself as the herald who has called the athletes to the line (although in his illustration he remains an athlete himself). How sad it would be if, having instructed others in the rules of the contest, he should himself be barred from the crown by a breach of those rules” (269).

TODAY'S PREACHER NEEDS TO USE ILLUSTRATIONS

Preachers who would effectively preach the ancient faith to our modern world must stay in tune with what is going on around them. It is a good idea to stay up with the news, particularly near where we live, like Jesus did. Read a newspaper to know what is going on locally and around the world that impacts the congregation. Quotes from songs, or poetry with which the audience would be familiar would be as useful now as it was for Paul on Mars Hill. The discipline it took for Michael Phelps to win eight gold medals was well chronicled during the past Olympic Games and could serve as a good illustration of an important element of our Christian life. Reading biographies is a good way to discover illustrations from real life.

SOUND DOCTRINE MUST BE PREACHED

While illustrations from the world around us draw listeners to our lessons, it is important for sermons to include solid teaching from God's word. "There must be some 'body' in every discourse, some really sound doctrine, some suitable instruction for our hearers to carry home; not merely stories to amuse them, but solid truth to be received in the heart, and wrought out in the life" (Spurgeon 53).

Preachers must carefully study God's word knowing they are not the originators of the message but stewards of the truth. "Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful" (1 Cor. 4:1-2).

The steward is the trustee and dispenser of another person's goods. So the preacher is a steward of God's mysteries, that is, of

the self-revelation which God has entrusted to men and which is now preserved in the Scriptures. The Christian preacher's message, therefore, is derived neither directly from the mouth of God, as if he were a prophet or apostle, nor from his own mind, like the false prophets, nor undigested from the minds and mouths of other men, like the babblers, but from the once revealed and now recorded Word of God, of which he is a privileged steward (Stott 15).

Stewardship is likely the driving force behind many of Paul's instructions to his son in the faith, Timothy. Instead of arguing over meaningless things, Timothy was to be studious and cut a straight line through the Word, which is a clear reference to using a good hermeneutic (2 Tim. 2:14-15). Knowing scripture is the God-breathed, or spoken, word should have compelled him to know it, correct mistakes, have a right relationship with God and become perfectly adapted to the task of doing every good work God desires (3:15-17). With God and the Lord Jesus as witnesses, the apostle went on to challenge Timothy to proclaim God's word like a herald, both when it was convenient and inconvenient (4:1-2).

KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

Jesus was the master teacher because he knew his audience. Without any introduction, the Lord knew both Simon and Nathanael (John 1:42, 47-48). At the feast of the Passover, he knew those who believed on him and did not place his trust in them because he knew them.

Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in

His name when they saw the signs which He did. But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all men, and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man (John 2:23-25).

He knew about the life of the woman at Jacob's well to the point that she told the people of Sychar, "Come, see a Man who told me all things that I ever did. Could this be the Christ?" (John 4:16-18, 29). The Master knew the complaints of some disciples who followed him, though they never told him, and the one who would betray him (6:61-64; 13:11). As God incarnate, he knew Lazarus' sickness would be used to glorify God and told his disciples when his friend was dead (John 11:4, 14). God's Son knew the type of death Peter would suffer (John 21:18-19).

While preachers today cannot know the hearts and personal history of men like the Lord did, we can become acquainted with their thinking. It can be helpful to read books on marital relations, rearing children, caring for aging parents, money management, etc. Researchers like George Barna have been particularly helpful at defining the thinking of each generation. No matter what the thinking, God's word has what each of us needs.

DESIGN A CONCLUSION TO GET THE DESIRED RESPONSE

Many good lessons concerning the ancient faith come to an ineffective end because of a weak conclusion. "A pertinent question is, 'As a result of this message, what changes does God want in my life and the lives of those who hear it?'" Once that question has been answered, "Be direct and brief....Direct the conclusion to cause people

to change their beliefs and/or behavior” (Mayhue 209). It is important to realize the composition of your audience. Most groups will include listeners who have never obeyed the gospel, those who are novices, mature Christians and Christians struggling with sin. Be sure people in each category recognize the action they need to take.

Peter’s example on the day of Pentecost is an outstanding one. He used good hermeneutical principles to establish the fact that God knew his Son would be killed by the people and their wicked rulers. He also foretold the resurrection of Jesus on the third day. Peter declared that the Father had raised his Son from the grave and concluded, “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.” His listeners “were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” He clearly stated, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:36-38). After further pleading, some three thousand were added to the church.

USING BLOGS AND PODCASTS TO PREACH THE ANCIENT FAITH

There are many modern means of reaching out to more people with an eye to preaching the ancient faith. For instance, some preachers have established a “blog,” a shortened form of the term “weblog.” It is “a website that displays in chronological order the postings by one or more individuals and usually has links to comments on specific postings” (“Weblog”). A blog is a good means of posting materials and resources which can help members of the church do more thorough study on a given topic. It is also possible to host on-line discussions, embed online

video, audio, slide shows and multimedia presentations.

Some churches have begun “podcasting” each week’s sermons. “Podcasting” is a word that originally came from use of the Apple Computer Corporation’s iPod, which is “a portable digital audio player that allows users to download music from their computer directly to the device for later listening. The term is no longer specifically related to the iPod but refers to any software and hardware combination that permits automatic downloading of audio files” (7 things...). People who have an interest in the subject could hear the message whenever they choose and could listen again and again.

USING VIDEOS AND WEBSITES TO PREACH THE ANCIENT FAITH

Neil Richey, preacher for the Piedmont Road Church of Christ in Marietta, Georgia, makes short videos, from 60 to 90 seconds, and posts them on You Tube under the title, “Thinking Out Loud.” These little devotionals are a good means of making contact with friends and friends of friends. They can easily be sent as a link in e-mails. The videos can also be posted on a Facebook account.

A number of churches place outlines of sermons on their website. Some also place study materials they are using in classes. Students interested in a wide variety of subjects can be sent to <http://thebible.net> for over 1,000 hours of video instruction. There are also Bible correspondence courses available through the site. Wayne Jackson’s Christian Courier (<http://www.christiancourier.com/>) has excellent studies on a variety of topics and is searchable.

USING POWER POINTS TO PREACH THE ANCIENT FAITH

Many churches have now acquired the means of using PowerPoint in the auditorium, if not in all their classrooms. This method can be especially effective because the listener both sees and hears the points being made. To have the greatest impact, presentations should be limited to no more than two graphics per slide. If a graph is used, it should not show much detail. Our eyes tend to land in the optical center of the slide so it is important to maintain an optical balance, not crowd information. Leave a little space between lines. Templates may be helpful. Only use a few colors per slide and remember it is easier to read light colored text on a dark background. Font size should be used to communicate importance. All capital letters are hard to read. Use upper case letters to start words and lower case for the rest. Avoid abbreviations (Lindsay).

Be sure to make your text large enough to read. A good test is sitting seven feet away from your monitor and trying to read your presentation. Use no more than six lines of not more than seven words per slide. Keep the text and any animation simple and to the point. Use different colored fonts to emphasize particular words. Use numbers for things that are in sequence and bullets for points that are without priority or sequence. Remember, size implies importance. Limit the number of slides to not more than three per minute (Chen).

CONCLUSION

Gospel preachers who want their listeners to see that the ancient faith is still relevant in the modern world must use anecdotes and illustrations that draw them to God's powerful word. Prophets, the Lord, the apostles and other inspired men repeatedly used every day items and events to help their hearers understand their life giving message. They never failed to present sound doctrine. Instead, they recognized they were stewards of the most precious story that has ever been told. They used their knowledge of their audience to guide the truth like an arrow to their hearts. Their conclusions drove men to make choices that would impact their lives for eternity.

There are a number of modern means of getting the message of the ancient faith out to the modern world. Blogs, podcasts, videos and websites can all be used very effectively. PowerPoints that are well done will help one's listeners to better understand the message because two of their senses have been employed.

However, we should be careful not to let modern tools become the focus. Our ultimate goal must be just like that of the apostle Paul. "For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2).

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AN ANCIENT SERMON FOR A MODERN WORLD

JERRY CARMICHAEL

The task before us is a daunting one! Our job is to glean truths relevant to our times from one of the most widely read and studied chapters in the entire Bible! As a gospel preacher of many years, I have perhaps quoted from this chapter more so than any other. The practical lessons of the entire “Sermon on the Mount” have supplied material for countless sermons and bible classes. This chapter is especially filled with valuable truths for the modern world.

There are seven natural divisions that in reality all tie together. The divisions are: Judge Not That You Be not Judged (1-6); Ask, Seek and Knock (17-11); The Golden Rule (12); The Wide and the Narrow Gates (13-14); Wolves

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in Sheep’s Clothing (15-20); The Doom of False Teachers (21-23); and The Wise and Foolish Builders (24-27). An eighth division could be added if one wished to expound

upon Matthew's comment about the authority of Jesus' teaching and the astonishment of his hearers (28-29).

THOUGHTS ON JUDGING (7:1-6)

"Judge not, that you be not judged" (7:1) is often the response of those whose faults are being pointed out by another. [All Scripture Quotations are from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.] Many seem to think that we should never make moral judgments of any kind in what we see in others. Is that true? Is Jesus saying there is never an appropriate time when one is wise in pointing out the right or wrong in others? The fact is that Jesus' statement is often misused. What is actually being taught is there are times when we must judge and there are times when it is appropriate to point out the faults in others!

Should we make judgments and when is a judgment justified? These are the questions before us. The answers are in our text, Matthew 7:1-6.

First of all, some believe His words rule out adverse judgment or constructive criticism, altogether. If this is the case, then, one could never point out any fault found in another! Even if it were to be truly "constructive" criticism!

Secondly, if Jesus was ruling out all manner of judgment, this would include discipline of any sort! Exercising discipline requires "judging" others. If Jesus is ruling out all judgment then verses 1-2 rule out any sort of church discipline!

In the third place, if Jesus' words forbid any type of judgment, exposing those who teach error would be forbidden. In order to consider whether someone is teaching

error, a judgment call is required! Therefore, if Jesus is forbidding all types of judgment, one must conclude that we cannot speak out against those who teach error.

Is that what Jesus really meant? Must we remain silent when we see a brother overtaken in a fault, bringing reproach upon the church, or teaching error? Jesus did not rule out all forms of judgment.

The immediate context of the verses being considered reveals that in some cases “proper” judgment must be made. In verse 6 we are told not to “give what is holy to the dogs or cast your pearls before swine.” How do we determine who the “dogs” and the “hogs” are? We must make a judgment based upon the available facts!

In verses 15-23 we clearly see that judgment is necessary in determining who the false teachers are (“by their fruits you will know them”)!

Elsewhere, in the scriptures, Jesus taught people to “judge with righteous judgment” (John 7:24). Christians are said to have the responsibility to “judge those who are inside” the local church (1 Cor. 5:9-13). We are taught by John to “test the spirits” which requires making a judgment call (1 John 4:1).

Jesus made it very clear as to what kind of judgment He is condemning. The kind of judgment being condemned by Jesus is judging when one is blind to his/her own faults! Notice verses 3-5. The action being condemned is concentrating one’s attention upon the speck in the brother’s eye while ignoring the beam in his own eye! Notice the further clarification of this principle as stated by the Apostle Paul. “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in

a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted" (Gal. 6:1).

Secondly, Jesus is condemning judgment without mercy, love and compassion. This is clearly indicated by the parallel passage in Luke 6:36-37. In this passage, the warning to "Judge not that ye be not judged" is prefaced by the command to "...Be merciful just as your Father also is merciful." James also warned against making judgments without mercy. In James 2:13 we read: "For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment." If we make judgments without showing mercy, then no mercy will be shown when we are judged! Just as Jesus said in Matthew 7:2: "For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged. With the same measure you use, it will be measured back to you"

The implication is not that we should never judge, but that when we do judge, we should remember that we shall be judged by the same standards we use! Let mercy and love temper our judgments.

Jesus implies that there are times when we must make judgments.

First, we must remove the "beam" from our own eye (verse 5). When we have done so, we are able to see, discern (judge), and be of help to others who are overtaken in their faults. Indeed, "the law of Christ" requires us to do so (Gal. 6:1-2)!

The kind of judging forbidden by Jesus is self-righteous, hypocritical judging. This is the kind of judging that was also condemned by James when he wrote: "Do not speak evil of one another, brethren. He who speaks evil of a brother, and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law

and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge another?" (Jas. 4:11-12). May God help us to refrain from such judging. May we be more apt to remove the "beams" from our own eyes. This will enable us to be more useful in helping others with their problems.

But to say we should never judge, is to misuse what the Bible teaches, not only in this passage but elsewhere as well!

ASK, SEEK AND KNOCK (7:7-11)

"Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you" (Matt. 7:7).

Another major point in the Sermon on the Mount, is that of receiving God's blessings. He admonishes His listeners to remove the plank from their own eye so that they can see more clearly to remove the speck from the brother's eye. He tells them to be discerning about speck removal and correction by not throwing that which is holy to the dogs or casting their pearls before the swine. It is impossible to do these things without God's help, so he tells them, and us, how to receive the blessings from God that we need. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ" (Eph. 1:3).

First He tells us to "ask, and it shall be given to you" (7). Those things for which we ask must be according to what God is willing to give. That is, they must be consistent with the things He has promised to give, and that which would be best for us, and that which would honor Him

most. "Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us" (1 John 5:14). God knows what we need and how and when we need it, better than we do!

For a great treatise on some of the things God is willing to provide for us we need only to go to the scriptures. Here we see that He is willing to forgive our sins (Matt. 6:14-15), to save our souls (1 Tim. 1:15), to befriend us in trial (Heb. 13:5-6), to comfort us in death (1 Thess. 4:13-18), and to extend the gospel through the world (Matt. 28:19-20). In addition to this, Paul tells us that "everything" that may be a source of anxiety, is that for which the Christian is permitted to ask his God (Phil. 4:6-7)! Man "can" ask no higher things of God; and these he may ask, assured that he is willing to grant them.

How does man qualify to receive the blessings of God? Some say that there is nothing we can do, that God just bestows His blessings unconditionally upon those He chooses. Others say we must earn His blessings either by our works or by our suffering for our sins. The Apostle Paul wrote: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast (Eph. 2:8-9). This makes it clear that we cannot earn God's blessings and that we cannot be saved by our own efforts. Some take this and go one step further and say that there are no further conditions to receiving God's blessings. But the Bible answers that clearly also:

What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? ...Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without your works, and I will

show you my faith by my works. You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble! But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar?

Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, “Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.” And he was called the friend of God. You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only (Jas. 2:14-24).

So when do we receive God’s blessings and under what conditions? When we do what God has said! We are to Ask: Not for show or the praise of men (Matt. 6:8). Not while hating our brother (Matt. 18:19). Not for earthly advancement (Matt. 20:22). James and John asked for something that Jesus could not promise them. We are to ask from proper motives, with faith and without doubt (Matt. 21:22; Mark 11:24). “You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures” (Jas. 4:3).

“Seek and you shall find.” The phrase signifies to seek with earnestness diligence, and perseverance. The promise is, that what we seek shall be given us. It is of course implied that we seek with a proper spirit, with humility, sincerity, and perseverance.

After what things are we to seek to be pleasing to God? God knows that we need material things: “For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things” (Matt. 6:32). God must be first in our seeking (Matt. 6:33). We are to be

seeking lost souls. "What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them goes astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine and go to the mountains to seek the one that is straying" (Matt. 18:12)? The women sought Jesus after the resurrection (Matt. 28:5). Jesus' reason for coming to the Earth was to "... seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). The Disciples wondered what Jesus was seeking from the woman at the well (John 4:27). We are not to seek our own will (John 5:30).

Seeking God's will and His blessings requires hard work and diligence (Jas. 1:5; 2 Tim. 2:15).

"Knock and it will be opened unto you." This, of course, is taken from the act of knocking at a door for admittance (Rev. 3:20).

Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able. When once the Master of the house has risen up and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open for us, and He will answer and say to you, I do not know you, where you are from, then you will begin to say, We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets. But He will say, I tell you I do not know you, where you are from. Depart from Me, all you workers of iniquity (Luke 13:24-27).

Jesus summarizes His lesson with an illustration. No parent turns away his child with that which would be harmful. He would not give him a stone instead of bread, or a serpent instead of a fish. God is better and kinder than the most tender earthly parents; and with that

confidence, we may come as his children, and ask what we need! Parents, he says, are evil; that is, are imperfect, often partial, and not infrequently passionate; but God is free from all this, and therefore is ready and willing to aid us. Every one that asks receives, i.e. every one that asks aright, that prays in faith, and is in submission to the will of God.

He does not always give the very thing for which we ask, but he gives what would be better. A parent will not always confer the "very thing" which a child asks, but he will seek the welfare of the child, and give what he thinks will be most for its good. Paul asked that the thorn from his flesh might be removed. God did not "literally" grant the request, but told him that his "grace" would be "sufficient" for him. (2 Cor. 12:7-9). There is great comfort in knowing that God will hear the requests of the righteous. "For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers; but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil" (1 Pet. 3:12.)

THE GOLDEN RULE (7:12)

In verse 12, we find the so-called "Golden Rule." This "rule" is actually a further explanation of the preceding verse about asking, seeking and knocking. It ties neatly together with the previous passage, "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him! In other words, since we receive good things from God we should also treat others as we would want them to treat us!

Was Jesus simply repeating what others had already taught?

- The HINDU religion taught: “This is the sum of duty: do naught to others which if done to thee would cause thee pain” (The Mahabharata).
- The BUDDHIST religion taught “Hurt not others with that which pains yourself” (Udana-Varga).
- The JEWISH traditions taught: “What is hateful to you, do not to your fellow men. That is the entire Law; all the rest is commentary” (The Talmud).
- The MUSLIM reads in the Hadith, “No one of you is a believer until he desires for his brother that which he desires for himself.”
- The Book of Certitude of the BAHAI faith teaches: “He should not wish for others that which he doth not wish for himself, nor promise that which he doth not fulfill.”
- Isocrates (436-338 BC) reportedly said, “Do not do unto others what angers you if done to you by others.”
- In Analects 15.24, it is written, “Tzu-kung asked, ‘Is there a single word which can be a guide to conduct throughout one’s life?’ The Master said, ‘It is perhaps the word “shu”.’ Do not impose on others what you yourself do not desire” (Epic).

Notice that Jesus’ rule is positive while most of the others are not! Jesus’ “rule” requires you to do something favorably to others, while the others only prohibit you from doing something unfavorably to others! Jesus basically said do unto others what you want them to do to you. The others tell us, don’t do to others what you don’t want done to you.

With the others, all that is required is that you don't harm other people; with Jesus, what is required is that you show kindness to others. Jesus' rule is truly the golden rule, the others are "silver" rules (of value, yes, but not as much as "gold").

The only exception appears to be that found in Hadith (the traditions of Islam); but then, some of Islam is admittedly based upon what Jesus taught 600 years before Mohammed.

So what Jesus taught was something new compared to what "uninspired" teachers had taught prior. But in another sense it was nothing new; rather, in a simple and easy to remember statement, Jesus gives us a guideline for righteous conduct toward others.

Just as we see in the rest of Jesus' teachings (Matt. 5:21-48), this one "rule" summarizes what the Law and the Prophets were all about. Just as the commandment "Love your neighbor as yourself" summed up the Law according to Paul (Rom. 13:8-10). If we treat others as we would be treated, and it is unlikely we will ever do the wrong thing in our relationships with others!

Even in this way, we find that Jesus did not come to "destroy" the Law, but to fulfill it in every way, including summarizing its righteousness in ways easy for us to understand and apply! Throughout the first twelve verses of Matthew 7, then, there is a continuous theme: the righteousness of the kingdom in regards to man's dealings with man. And what are the basic points? Be careful in your judgment of others. Persevere in looking to God for help in making proper discernment. In your treatment of others, treat them as you want to be treated.

THE NARROW WAY AND THE WIDE WAY (7:13-14)

Man has only two roads from which to choose. One is narrow, restrictive, and difficult, and only a few of all mankind will find it and be willing to follow it (vs.14; Matt. 20:16). Not straight but strait: as in limited movement. Not without curves and steep cliffs on either side. Satan and his highwaymen await in every crevasse and hiding place. A move too far to one side places one against a solid impenetrable wall and a move too far to the other side and one falls to his/her death. The restrictions are for one's own good! The other way has a wide gate, and a broad path, and "many will go in by it" (vs.13). Where do these roads go? The narrow one "leads to life," Heaven, eternal reward (vs.14; 25:46; Rev. 21:27). The wide one "leads to destruction" (vs.13; 25:41; Rev. 20:15; 21:8) It should alarm any compassionate Christian to know that only a few will enter the narrow way to eternal life. Why will so few enter the narrow way?

It will not be because they are predestined to destruction. Such a doctrine would make God responsible for them being lost, but Peter tells us plainly in 2 Peter 3:9 that God is "Not willing that any should perish." God gave His Son to prepare a way so that we "should not perish" (John 3:16). Why would Jesus say, "Enter by the narrow gate...which leads to life"? If such an entry were impossible for some, God would be showing partiality. But we all know that "...God is no respecter of persons but in every nation, whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him" (Acts 10:34-35). The Gospel is God's power to save (Rom. 1:16). Is its power limited to a chosen few? Why "preach the Gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15), if some cannot be saved even if they wanted to? The narrow way will not be missed because it is impossible to find. Why would a loving, compassionate God tell us to

enter then make it so that we could not know how? Such would reflect negatively on God's mercy and goodness.

"Understand what the will of the Lord is" (Eph. 5:17). "You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). All accountable adults can understand and know if they want to (Matt. 7:7-8).

It may be that some miss the narrow way to life because we who have found it fail to warn them! We are to carry the Gospel (Eph. 3:10; 2 Tim. 4:1-2; 2 Cor. 4:7). We are the world's watchmen (Ezek. 3:18-21). We are debtors (Rom. 1:14). In Acts 8:4 we see that they preached the word everywhere they went! We certainly don't want to stand before the Judgment throne of God not having exhausted every opportunity to seek and save the lost!

Quite simply, many will miss the narrow way to eternal life because they mishandled a deadly weapon! Almost half of the deaths by gun shot in the US are accidentally self-inflicted. A gun can be a protective device, a means to gather food or a means to death.

God's word is described as a deadly weapon in many cases. Hebrews 4:12 tells us that it is "Living, powerful (Active,) sharper than a two-edged sword, able to sever the soul and the spirit, the joints and the marrow, and the thoughts and intents of one's heart." In Ephesians 6:17 it is referred to as the "Sword of the spirit." We are also told plainly to handle this weapon carefully, and properly so that it will achieve the intended good results and not cause irreparable damage! "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15).

One of the dangers of mishandling God's word is that it may cause one to think he can do something when, in reality, he cannot! Preacher and snake handler, John W. Brown Jr., died in Alabama in 1997 as the result of a deadly bite from a rattlesnake. His wife, Melinda, had died in 1995, also from a deadly rattlesnake bite. He was 34, she was 28 and they left behind five children (Lexington).

Carved into the top of the box, where the poisonous snakes were kept, one could see the inscription Mark 16:18. A failure to understand that this passage was spoken to the Apostles, during the age of the miraculous, in order to substantiate the word, and that it is no longer applicable to the church today was a deadly mishandling of God's word (See 1 Cor. 13:8-13).

In the place of miracles we now have the practical results of Christianity and the completed word of God, all the proof we need! The death of one from handling snakes or drinking poison is the deadly result of mishandling the powerful sword of the Spirit which is the word of God! Perhaps the most tragic of all the results of mishandling God's word is that one may think he is saved when he is not (Matt. 7:21-29; Rom. 10:1-4; John 12:42-43; Acts 17:30-31; 2 Tim. 3:7). The responsibility of being saved belongs to each individual (Rom. 14:12). The responsibility for handling God's word properly rests with the individual. Mishandling dynamite is deadly, so is mishandling the word. The mishandling of this word will cause many to miss the narrow way!

Many may miss the narrow way because of preconceived prejudices. They hear, but they already have their minds made up. Prejudice is "An opinion, usually unfavorable, formed before a careful examination." Some

examples of religious prejudice would be: "What's good enough for my parents is good enough for me," or "One church is as good as another," or "We are all going to the same place, just by different roads," or "All Christians are extremist, gun-toting radicals, who blow up abortion clinics." Some will miss the precious narrow way to life because they are not open to the possibility that these preconceived notions may not be correct!

Many will miss the narrow way because they followed a favorite preacher without investigation. Many false prophets are in the world (2 Pet. 2:1-3). Try the spirits (1 John 4:1). We should follow the example of the noble Bereans (Acts 17:11; 2 Tim. 2:15). "If the blind lead the blind they both fall in the ditch" (Matt. 15:14).

Some will try to enter the narrow with the world on their backs. One absolutely cannot walk the narrow way with sinful things that he/she doesn't want to give up (Heb. 12:1-2). The way is too narrow to bring the world in with you, it must be left outside (Phil. 3:13). Following Christ involves self-denial (Matt. 16:24). Repent means to leave sins behind otherwise we will perish (Luke 13:3,5). Even families come second (Matt. 10:36-38; Luke 14:26,27,33).

Some will miss the narrow way because of procrastination. They seem to want to enter, but not right now (Acts 24:25). "I'll obey when I am older." "But of that day and hour no one knows, no, not even the angels of Heaven, but My Father only" (Matt. 24:36). "Now is the accepted time, today is the day of salvation" (2 Cor. 6:2).

Some will miss the narrow way because they started and then fell by the wayside (2 Pet. 2:20-22; Heb. 6:4-

6). The gist of Jesus' teaching in this passage is that when it comes to finding eternal life, the majority is wrong. Faithfulness to God will always put one in the minority. Noah, Lot and his daughters, the children of Israel (only two entered), Stephen, Paul and Jesus are all examples of those who were placed in the minority because of their faith in God! We must remember that "Few there be who go in thereat."

Jesus is the way to life, open to all mankind. But, not many are willing to travel the narrow way that leads to life!

WOLVES IN SHEEP'S CLOTHING (7:15-20)

Many people like to think they can trust religious leaders. Ministers normally rank high in polls concerning people you can trust. People will often accept whatever a preacher says, as the truth without investigation. Yet Jesus told His disciples to beware of false prophets. He even explains that they may appear like sheep, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. We need to be able to identify them by knowing that for which to look. We should be concerned about false prophets today. The great diversity of religious teaching suggests that many are being misled. We need to be reminded of the danger, and know how to spot any "wolves" that might come our way! Numerous New Testament writers warn us about false teachers.

Paul warned the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:28-31. Telling them to take heed, for even from among themselves would men arise, misleading people. He also warned the church at Corinth in 2 Corinthians 11:13-14. Referring to false teachers present, even then, appearing as ministers of righteousness, even as Satan appears as an angel of light. To the young preacher Timothy, Paul warned of the

apostasy that would come (1 Tim. 4:1-3; 2 Tim. 3:1-9). Describing the character and tactics of those who would mislead others, Peter warned of the rise of false teachers (2 Pet. 2:1-3). John called upon the people to “test the spirits” (1 John 4:1). Jude tells us of false teachers who had already come (Jude 3-4).

How is one to recognize such “wolves” when they appear so disarming, like sheep? In our text we notice that we can recognize them by examining the fruits of their lives (Matt. 7:16-20). That which is truly in one’s heart will eventually manifest itself in actions. For from the heart proceeds any sin that may be there (Mark 7:21-23). False teachers and false prophets are often betrayed, by their greediness, their immorality and their lust for power. Given time, the true character of many false prophets will be exposed by the fruits of their lives!

False teachers can also be easily recognized by the fruits of their teaching.

Take notice of their methods. Their ministries will be shrouded in secrecy, rather than being open to one and all (2 Cor. 8:20-21). They draw people in with an appeal to what people often covet, such as health and wealth, rather than preparing people for what Christians can expect (Acts 14:23; 2 Tim. 3:12). Using deceptive words (2 Tim 3:13; 2 Pet. 2:3), they twist the scriptures to support their message (just as Satan did in trying to tempt Jesus), rather than handling the word of God properly (2 Tim. 2:14-16).

When examining them one should take notice of their doctrine. Their gospel may start out right, but becomes twisted along the way. They teach that which is clearly contrary to the scriptures (Deut 13:1-4). Even if they appear able to perform signs and wonders, the final test is how

their teaching compares to the word of God and that of His apostles (1 John 4:1,6).

It is not necessary to judge the hearts of those who claim to speak for God. We need only to be “fruit-inspectors.” The fruit of their life and teaching will become apparent soon enough. Of course this demands that our knowledge of God’s word is sufficient. To know what to look for in the life of a false prophet and to know what to listen for in the teaching of a false prophet, one must first know what the Bible says!

Otherwise, we will be no different than Israel, of whom God said: “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge...” (Hos. 4:6). We must be well equipped to identify a wolf in sheep’s clothing when confronted with them (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

THE DOOM OF FALSE TEACHERS (7:21-23)

“Not everyone who says to me ‘Lord, Lord’ shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven: but he who does the will of my Father in heaven” (Matt. 7:21). The “wolves” of whom Jesus spoke in verses 15-20, will be surprised in the day of judgment when they are told to depart from the presence of the Master! They will protest. They will point out their credentials to the Judge (as if He doesn’t already know what they have and have not done). They will suddenly come to realize that God was serious about saving only those “who do the will of the Father.”

If one were to randomly ask people whether or not they wish to go to heaven, an overwhelming number of them would answer “Yes.” Countless numbers of people will affirm their belief in God and in Jesus yet there are relatively few willing to do what is necessary to make their

calling and election sure (2 Pet. 1:10). Few are the people who are willing to completely, without reservation, conform their will to that of the Father. Perhaps this is one of the reasons the Lord states in Matthew 20:16 that “many are called but few are chosen.” The question that we should ask the lost and dying world should not be “Do you want to go to heaven?” They will all answer yes to that one. But rather, we should be asking, “Are you willing to do what it takes to go to Heaven?”

Follow up questions should be: “Have you obeyed the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ?” “Have you believed” (Mark 16:16)? “Have you Repented” (Acts 17:30; Acts 2:38; Luke 13:3)? “Have you confessed your belief in the Christ and in His resurrection from the Dead” (Rom. 10:9-10; Matt. 10:32-33; Acts 8:37)? “Have you been baptized for the remission of your sins” (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; Acts 22:16; 1 Pet. 3:20-21)? If one affirms that he has done these things, then we must ask: “Are you living a faithful Christian life” (Rev. 2:10)? “Are you seeking those things above” (Col. 3:1)? “Is your mind set on Heavenly things” (Col. 3:1-2)? “Are you laying up treasures in heaven” (Matt. 6:19-21)? “Are you growing in Christ” (2 Pet. 3:18; 1 Pet. 2:2)? “Are you proving faithful in all things” (2 Cor. 13:5)? Pilate’s question of old is so relevant for us today! “What then shall I do with Jesus” (Matt. 27:22)?

There are but two things to do with him: ACCEPT HIM OR REJECT HIM. The Lord states emphatically “He who is not with me is against me” (Matt. 12:30). We must get people to thinking about whether or not heaven is their destination? We must hope and pray and urge all to do whatever is necessary to one day stand before the Lord and hear those marvelous words, “well done faithful servant.”

Every person who learns the truth and obeys it and who remains faithful even in the face of death, will be another one snatched from the jaws of the false doctrine of the ravenous wolves (Jas. 5:19-20)!

WISE AND FOOLISH BUILDERS (7:24-29)

The contrast between the wise and foolish is a teaching method that Jesus used often. In Matthew 25:1 He talked about wise and foolish virgins. In Luke 12:16-21 He spoke of a wealthy fool. In Psalm 14:1 the writer tells us, "The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God.'" Those who are depicted as being spiritually wanting are portrayed as fools throughout the Bible.

"Therefore" since not everyone who claims to be religious will enter into Heaven, be sure you are building upon the right spiritual foundation. Those in verses 21-23 who claimed to be on the Lord's side, and weren't, are the ones to whom He is referring. "Be doers of the word and not hearers only deceiving yourselves" (Jas. 1:22-25). "Be" in this case means "Keep on Becoming" doers of the word. The world is full of those who hear and never act. Some have their body in the assembly while their mind is in the world. Others "talk the talk but never walk the walk." The doer looks into God's word, sees what needs doing, and does it. It is a law of liberty to him which he gladly obeys. A perfect law giving a true account of facts and privileges. The guide we should be following to show what to do is "the word of truth" (18); "the engrafted word" (21) "the word" (22) and "the perfect law of liberty" (25). "The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach" (Acts 1:1-3). Jesus was doer as well as a teacher. That Jesus was the greatest teacher to ever live, is an indisputable fact (Matt. 7:29). His words have motivated untold millions to change their lives and give themselves totally over to Him. We, in the

churches of Christ, have been some of the best and most effective Bible teachers in history. The Bible knowledge of our members often astounds those from the denominations. Certainly, we wish to always be known as the people who know the book. The Bible answers all the questions of all the things which pertain to life and godliness. However, there is an area in which we often fail. Too many of us say and don't do! The Pharisees had this same problem (Matt. 23:1-3).

Jesus says the man who hears the sayings of the Lord and does them is like a man who builds his house on a solid foundation. The man represents each of us. The house is our spirituality, our relationship with God, our Christianity. It may take longer, and the digging is more difficult, but the house will stand firm against Satan and his attacks. "Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes" (Matt. 21:42).

"For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 3:11). "Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone, in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit" (Eph 2:19-22). "Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: 'The Lord knows those who are His,' and, Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity" (2 Tim 2:19).

The wise person is sure of his Christianity, he is sure he is building upon the right foundation. He has no

intention of living his whole life only to be told “I never knew you” (Matt. 7:23). In contrast to the wise builder, Jesus says one who hears the teachings of the Lord and does not do them is like a foolish man who built his house on a foundation of sand! His house looks good on the outside. He didn’t have to work as long and as hard on his. He was comfortable in his for a while. Then came the winds. So is the one who sits through sermon after sermon and does nothing about what he hears, or the one who builds his spiritual house to be seen on the outside only.

“Fool” is not a kind word and not one we should often use. We are unable to see into the heart and make proper judgments in such matters. God uses the word sparingly but He does use it! God sees the inside of a person (Heb. 4:12-13). Therefore, His judgments are fair and correct. God calls the foolish builder a fool. Who else does God call fools?

The Bible tells us, “He who despises wisdom and instruction is a fool” (Prov. 1:7). God’s ways are foolishness to those who are perishing (1 Cor. 1:18). The fool thinks he already knows everything, and that no one can teach him anything (Job 12:2-3). Job’s friends thought they possessed all wisdom! Ananias and Saphira thought they were wiser than God (Acts 5:1ff). “The fear (respect) of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge” (Prov. 1:7). The world is full of foolish people who refuse to be instructed in righteousness! The rich farmer is called a fool (Luke 12:16-21). “The fool has said in his heart there is no God” (Psalm 14:1; 53:1). “The wise in heart will receive commands but the prating fool will fall” (Prov. 10:8). “Whoever spreads slander is a fool” (Prov. 10:18). “To do evil is like sport to a fool” (Prov. 10:23). “The fool will be servant to the Wise” (Prov. 11:29).

The lesson is a simple one taught in the little VBS song taken from this text. “Build your life on the Lord

Jesus Christ and the blessings will come flowing down. The blessings come down as the prayers go up." The wise man built his house upon the rock and the rains came tumbling down, but the wise man's house stood firm. The foolish man's house went splat!

THE AUTHORITY OF JESUS' TEACHING (7:28-29)

Matthew concludes his record of the "Sermon on the Mount" by telling us about the reaction of the audience. "And so it was, when Jesus had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes" (Mat. 7:28-29).

What was so astonishing about His teaching? Why was it so different? John records an incident where officers were sent to arrest Jesus and came back without Him. When they were questioned as to why they were unsuccessful in their mission their answer was very simply, "No one ever spoke like this man" (John 7:32-52). Those soldiers were absolutely right on target! The following are just a few of the areas in which Jesus' teaching was different from anyone before or since He graced the earth with His presence!

- No man ever spoke with such authority (Matt. 7:28-29).
- No man ever spoke with such tenderness (Matt. 26:50).
- No man ever spoke with such love and compassion (John 15:14).
- No man ever spoke with such scathing rebukes (Matt. 23).
- No man ever spoke with such simplicity (Matt. 13:3-23).
- No man ever spoke such promises and kept them (Mark 16:15-16).

- No man ever spoke such words of hope (John 14:1-3).

The lessons of Matthew chapter 7 are many and varied with one central theme running throughout the entire chapter. The chapter can be summed up in no better fashion than did Matthew himself. Jesus has all authority.

He exercises this authority by telling His followers to avoid rash, self-righteous, hypocritical judgment. He instructs us to live so that the things for which we ask, seek and knock will be provided. He encourages us to treat others as we wish to be treated. He warns us of the easy road that leads to destruction and that most will wander down its path to a terrible eternal end! He uses this authority given to Him by God the Father (Matt. 28:18), to warn us of false teachers who seem as harmless as sheep, when in fact they as dangerous as ravenous wolves! He loves us enough to tell us that calling on the name of the Lord and calling out the Lord's name is not the same thing, and will not result in the same rewards on judgment day! And He encourages us to be wise builders. We are to build our spiritual houses on the foundation that cannot be shaken (Matt. 16:18; Heb. 12:28).

May God strengthen and bless us as we pursue these worthwhile endeavors that will eventually be rewarded in Heaven!

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BRING ONE A WEEK TO THE ANCIENT FAITH

JERRY A. JENKINS

In his book *To Dream Again*, Robert Dale states: "Persons and organizations are largely explained by their dreams" (Dale 13). Dreams have always played a dominant role in shaping the people of God. It was a dream that facilitated contentment in the heart of the wandering patriarch, Abraham (Heb. 11:10); it was a dream that empowered a prospective Pharaoh to renounce affluence, power, and acclaim, and to direct an unappreciative people to the promised land (Deut. 1:27-2:4); it was a dream that precipitated the most monumental individualistic change in history—the transformation of Saul from a church wrecker to Paul the church builder (Acts 9:1-20); in fact, God throughout human history has used only those who were able to dream a dream of His mission.

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Langston Hughes agreed with Dale when he stated, "Hold fast to dreams, For if dreams die, Life is a broken winged bird that cannot fly, Hold fast to dreams, For if dreams go, Life is a barren field, Frozen with snow" (Rampersad 152). This is not a new concept. Centuries ago, the Greek philosopher, Epicurus said, "Do not spoil what you have by desiring what you have not; remember

that what you now have was once among the things you only hoped for" (Cook 76).

A dream is an aspiration, a greatly desired goal. What should be the primary dream for God's people? Perhaps to some it would be to have the most beautiful church facilities in the community. Others might desire the most educated and articulate minister in the state. Some would affirm the greatest need to be the finest Bible school program to be found anywhere.

While some of these are superior to others none is the primary work of the Master. If one is to pattern his life after the Savior his primary concern should be to reach the lost with the gospel message. The Savior, Himself, outlined His primary mission by stating, "for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). [All quotations are from the KJV unless otherwise noted.] Without this mission all mankind would be condemned without piety, happiness, and heaven.

To be like the Master our dream should be to teach every lost person the message of redemption. It is evident this is not being accomplished. In some 58 years of preaching it is the conviction of this speaker that the greatest fear Christians have is personal evangelism. Perhaps this is the reason that it is the most neglected imperative privilege given to Christians. Bible study and prayer may be often disregarded, or at least relegated to a lower rung on the level of priorities, but evangelism is the least practiced of all Christian disciplines.

Why is the teaching of the redemptive message to others the most neglected command in all of Scripture? Many are the excuses: "I do not know how," "People are not interested," "I do not have the time," "I am already doing my part," "I am afraid I'll hurt somebody," "I am too

old to learn," "I do not know where to begin," "I do not remember the Scriptures well," "I do not have the right personality," "I'm too tired," or perhaps a number of other excuses. One of the greatest personal workers this writer has ever known was a sharecropper in north Arkansas, with little formal education. Yet, he was constantly teaching and baptizing others into Christ? He had accumulated and studied practically every book on evangelism written by brethren. His desire to teach others was so great he had taken the time to study and learn all that he could.

Would it make a difference in one's desire and motivation to teach others, if for every person taught, the Lord would write the teacher a check for \$250.00? Would it make any difference if a Christian really accepted the reality that his unsaved friend was in danger of eternal condemnation? One whose friend was about to burn in a house fire or whose friend was drowning in the ocean would not hold back because he was concerned that he would not use the correct procedure for getting this person to safety. Family, friends and neighbors are on their way to eternal punishment, unless they are taught the way of salvation. Surely this will be enough motivation to spur one to forget his fear and lack of proper training to redeem one for the Lord.

How sad that the major emphasis of the life of the Master, i.e., to reach the unsaved with the gospel message has gone unheeded. His final words to his followers was a charge to spread the gospel to all the world; many Christians have never personally led another individual to Christ or shared the message of redemption with an unbeliever.

WHAT IS MEANT BY "BRING ONE A WEEK TO THE ANCIENT FAITH?"

This lecture today is entitled, "Bring One a Week to the Ancient Faith." This simply means that it should be

the goal of each congregation to bring at least one soul per week to salvation by teaching and baptizing them into Christ. Is the goal to bring one per week unrealistic? Surely churches with more than a thousand members could far excel this number while those with thirty or forty members might find it difficult to attain a new convert each week. It must be remembered that some fields are riper for harvest than others. The important factor is that effective congregations have established goals. It is an old but true saying that if one aims at nothing, nothing will be hit. This is also true for the Lord's church. Once goals have been set they should be kept before the congregation. There should be several occasions during the year to evaluate if enough effort is being given to attain the goal.

The leaders must be sold on the worthiness of the goal. One might recall the story told often by the late Ira North of a large group who passed a service station. In a few minutes a much smaller number came and asked the attendant, "Did you see a large group pass this way?" The service attendant answered in the affirmative. The representative of the smaller group stated, "We have to catch them, we are their leaders."

It has been the experience of this speaker that leaders in the Lord's family are not necessarily the best soul winners. Perhaps this statement is too generalized, but the key ingredient in soul winning is not a title, but the desire within the heart. One cannot lead where he is unwilling to go.

God never demands, of any, the impossible. As Paul stated to the Christians at Corinth, "If there is first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what one has, and not according to what he does not have" (2 Cor. 8:12). The context of this passage has reference to giving, but the

principle is applicable to every Christian duty. The proper mindset is the chief desire of God and without this all is vain.

This willingness of heart is brought about when the followers of Christ constantly display certain characteristics and attitudes. First, the Christian understands and believes that he is never alone in sharing the gospel with others (Miller 1). God is with the teacher of his will. This is a mutual effort. This cooperative effort was Paul's encouragement to the early Christians. He stated, "We then as workers together with him also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain" (2 Cor. 6:1). Not only is the Father with us, Jesus is also with the Christian. This promise the Master, himself, made "...lo I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:20). These un-influential and unlettered laboring men would be happy to undertake the moral and religious conquest of a world because of this promise.

Finally, not only is God and his son present in the life of a Christian, there is the precious promise that the Holy Spirit will direct one's walk, guide in the proper direction, and lead-in the path of truth. Jesus so affirmed in an upper room in the waning hours of life (John 16). In the early days of the church this was done personally, but now representatively through the Word.

Not only is deity with the one personally involved in teaching the lost; God also gives us his word that under no circumstances, at any time, will the child of God be given anything of which he is incapable. In Paul's most affectionate letter he offers this tremendous promise, "And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:19). No greater source could be found, no more reassuring promise could be offered, and

no more powerful being could be found to stand behind this great and marvelous promise. This tremendous love and the loyalty of the Father offers assurance that cannot be found elsewhere.

Even though each admits the power and promise that accompanies the teacher, it must also be noted that God is aware of man's ineptness in delivering this message of redemption. God did not assign the task of relaying the saving message to angels. Not a single time did a holy being relay to one lost in sin the message of hope. The Father did not reserve the tremendous task of teaching to the more skilled. In the words of a favorite song, "If you cannot sing like angels, If you cannot preach like Paul, You can tell the love of Jesus, You can say he died for all" (Wiegand 881).

There is a reason that this treasure is put into the hands of the common. Paul affirmed, "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us" (2 Cor. 4:7). The word treasure is the same word that describes the gold gifts brought to baby Jesus at his birth, or the values found in an ancient field that prompted one to sell all that he had to purchase that field (Matt. 13:44), or the riches of Egypt sacrificed by a perspective Pharaoh for the reproaches of Christ (Heb. 11:26). The invaluable truth was placed in the hands of weak, feeble, frail, old clay pots. Why such action that defies logic? Paul states it clearly; that God had of design chosen weak and feeble instruments in order that it might be everywhere seen that it was done, not by human power, but by God's own power. The instrumentality employed was altogether disproportionate in its nature to the effect produced.

It was much like the manager of a bank who received an urgent call from a company needing coin change

immediately. Because the bank stressed for employees on this particular afternoon, the manager took a young employee and they loaded the back of an old 1935 International pickup truck with the needed change. They covered this great treasure with an old quilt and went through a rough section of the city. It was necessary to stop and purchase gas in a particularly high-crime area. They were not threatened for this fortune was being transported in an old dilapidated, beat up looking truck and the treasure was covered by an old torn blanket. No one would have ever dreamed that a fortune would be so delivered. In a similar manner no one, but God, could have devised a plan that placed the gospel, with all its beauty, in old clay pots. Indeed, the gospel treasure is distributed, not by angels, artists, or professionals, but by common ordinary people. Paul gives the reason: "That the excellency of the power may be of God" (2 Cor. 4:7), that is, that it may be manifest to all that it is God's power, and not man's.

If a congregation is to bring one a week to the Savior this truth must be constantly before all. Any church that leaves the sharing of the message to the hands of the highly educated, the rich, and the skilled surely does not understand the teaching of the apostle to the Corinthians.

The threefold motivation, i.e., the fear of punishment for disobedience, the robbing of fellow human beings of spiritual blessings, and the failure to ever know the joy of blessing others with the message of redemption should cause every Christian to want to be part of bringing another to the Master. However, even with all this there must be some method used to grant each an opportunity to win another.

Ideally, if Christians had the same joy of sharing the gospel that a grandmother has in sharing the news of a new

grandbaby, there would be no need of special programs or materials to help in winning the lost. Tragically, this is not the case. Even those who do have great zeal tend to run low in energy after a while.

SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR SUCCESS

The following suggestions, though in harmony with Scripture, are not mandated in the Book. These are prompted by a lifetime of experience and study. First, there must be a class where members are trained and offered encouragement. At this class one should be introduced to as many methods of teaching as feasible. These materials should cover flip charts such as J. T. Bristow's excellent charts, "A Few Minutes with Someone Who Loves You." These sixteen chart pages offer a marvelous way of instructing someone in a short period of time. Another excellent chart series is "Tisdale Charts." These charts are very fundamental and cover in much detail needed basic lessons for one seeking the way of salvation (McKnight 20).

A second type of study would include what might be referred to as "Open Bible Study." This method has been used very successfully. Some of the finest material seen by this speaker consists of approximately twenty lessons. The lessons are on an 8.5 by 11 page with blanks to be filled in by the student. These studies have been successfully used in campaigns, classes, and one-on-one studies.

Another very similar study is where a Bible is pre-marked by the instructor and the student is given a page to turn to in the Bible. This is a form of the material this speaker first saw from brother Ivan Steward entitled, "Personal Evangelism Workbook."

These types of studies might be divided into what could be called, "Cottage Meetings," Group Bible Readings, and Bible Discussion Groups. Each has some great advantages as well as some disadvantages. For example cottage meetings would be more lecture style with less participation from prospects, Group Bible Readings may not be challenging enough for those who attend, and Discussion groups generally take more time (9-12 months generally).

Two of the more popular methods are the Jule Miller Bible Study Slides, later developed into videos, and "Fishers of Men;" thousands have been converted using these two approaches. They offer the advantage of being self-contained, that is, they each contain everything needed to convert the lost. They are, for the most part, pretty easy to understand. The material is well organized and develops each lesson from the preceding one. They give an over-all picture of the Bible and church history. They each lead one to become a Christian and challenge the student to study the Bible.

This speaker would challenge everyone to adopt materials that are Biblical and materials with which one may feel comfortable in presenting and study and work on the material until it has been adequately mastered. This class that is taught on personal evangelism could share these different materials, but it would be better to select one and thoroughly train members of the class to use the material.

In these personal evangelism classes students should practice on one another using the material until they would feel comfortable in teaching the one who is instructing the class. The class should not be drudgery or so difficult that those attending become discouraged. It is important to

have this on-going class. New students should be added constantly and older students should be given the names of prospects and encouraged to visit and set up studies with them. The class should also serve as a time of assignment of those qualified to prospective students and a time of reporting how the study classes are progressing.

A couple of items about these classes: They should not be turned into “gossip sessions” where personal matters of one’s Bible student(s) are discussed. The classes must be positive in nature and never should flaws or deficiencies of student teachers be noted before other class members. The class is essential to encourage and to teach new students how to be better soul winners.

It would be marvelous to have every member of the congregation in the outreach program of the congregation, but this speaker does not know how to make this a reality. At least, on one occasion, this speaker had more involved in soul winning that could be properly taught, but this was short-lived and rare. Do not become discouraged if there are only a few who genuinely want to be involved. Everyone has the potential of being a soul winner and they probably would not be the one likely selected.

It is this speaker’s suggestion that lessons be taught on the importance of soul winning. Of course, the lessons should be Bible centered and not designed for some time of superficial commitment. Once these series of lessons have been presented there should not be a constant brow beating of those not directly involved in the soul winning class. Naturally, if one preaches God’s word there will be mention made of evangelism, but this must not become the hobby of the preacher to the neglect of other great Biblical teachings.

After the soul winning class has been established the instructor should constantly be watching for others who show interest in becoming a soul winner. The teacher should give public commendation to his students every time he/she leads a soul to Christ. Let the instructor stay in the background and be mature enough to know that the Lord knows those who are serving him. It would be marvelous if the elders would allow some outward commendation of those who are working diligently in the "Lead One Each Week" to the Lord effort. When the primary method used was the Jule Miller Series at one congregation, when one converted five souls a projector, filmstrips, and screen were presented to the teacher.

Not only is it important to reach the lost, it is also important to retain those who are converted to Christ. There must be some time and effort in developing an organized program to keep the saved, saved. Once again the size of the congregation is an important factor in the implementation of the program. Actually smaller congregations have some real advantages over those much larger. A smaller group will note the attendance of new members at every service. By this is not meant that they be mentioned, but it is natural that when a new convert is present in a congregation, of 100 or less, he will quickly be seen by those who are members.

Following the conversion of a person he/she should be publicly recognized. Sometimes this is simply by having them stand at a service, but perhaps a better way would be for them to be presented a new Bible along with their certificate of baptism. Of course, all realize that the Lord adds to the church, so certificates are simply keepsakes often cherished by the recipient.

Several years ago this speaker heard Flavil Yeakley affirm that to retain a new convert, that convert must

become friends with at least seven members of the congregation. This speaker has done no study on numbers and percentages, but experience indicates that if one is converted and makes no friends in the congregation he will soon become discouraged and probably drop out.

Within each congregation there are some more skilled at teaching non-members and some more skilled in showing fellowship and mentoring after their conversion. In larger congregations there should be those designated to “look-after” new converts. They should have them out for a meal and should get genuinely acquainted with them, with their interest, and needs.

Also, there needs to be a person or a couple designated to become a Barnabas to the new member. Some refer to this as the Barnabas ministry. The Barnabas ministry name was created in respect to Barnabas in the Bible. The name Barnabas means encourager. The elders or those assigned by the elders should be sure that a new convert has a Barnabas assigned to him to help him/her in their new walk with Christ.

In addition to a program to keep the new Christian walking in the right direction there must be a class taught for the New Convert. The teacher of this class should be one of the best in the congregation and he should cover the fundamental teaching of the Bible. Numerous excellent workbooks are available or perhaps even better let the teacher of the new convert’s class develop his own material.

TO DEFER IS NOT AN OPTION

What is your dream for Christ? This dream must not be forgotten—it must not be abandoned. Hughes reminds

everyone of the tragedy of a neglected dream when he states, "What happens to a dream deferred? Does it dry up like a raisin in the sun? Or fester like a sore And then run? Does it stink like rotten meat? Or crust and sugar over like a syrupy sweet? Maybe it just sags like a heavy lead" (Rampersad 393).

In conclusion let each be reminded of Paul statement: "I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise" (Rom. 1:14). In like manner today Christians are debtors to every non-Christian because of possession of the good news that can save the soul of the lost. This places each child of God under obligation to share the gospel with the lost so they can be saved. Because someone loved every Christian enough to teach him/her the truth, each one must do as much for someone else? What if one was unsaved and doomed for eternal punishment, would he not want someone to teach him the saving gospel of Christ?

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KEEPING THE ANCIENT FAITH CURRENT

JERRY A. JENKINS

What is the worse tragedy that you have ever heard? We hear of so many tragedies in the world in which we live, but in the past few weeks, newspapers, radios, and televisions have been filled with an action that has shocked even the 21st century's hardened society. How moved listeners were when they learned of a mother who took a brush to her daughter's blond hair and slowly combed through it, an act she had longed to perform, but this was impossible because when her daughter was only eleven she had been abducted. Now 18 years later this distraught mother learned how her daughter had been kept in the back yard of a convicted rapist and registered sex offender. Without doubt she had been the pleasure of this madman and the result were two grandchildren that this mother had not seen before. How this mother had longed to hold the hand of this missing daughter, to kiss her cheeks, and do

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mom/daughter things. She had not been able to teach and train her child in these important formative years of her life. These things had been cruelly snatched from her the day her daughter was taken.

While this story is certainly horrendous, an even more shocking and distressing story is taking place in the world.

This story involves the ancient faith, that which serves as the foundation on which the church is built, and what is being done by those who want to change and modify because it is considered “out-dated” and therefore, not applicable to the modern world. The focus of this lesson is, “Keeping the Ancient Faith Current.” As one examines this statement he must first recognize that there is the danger of taking at least one of two trajectories. First, there is the possibility of binding non-biblical traditions on another. Secondly, there is the practice of change brought about by an attitude that teaches one has outgrown the ancient faith and that new teachings must emanate from the people of God.

KEEPING THE FAITH

Perhaps it would be best to go back, at least one step and define the title. What is the ancient faith? The term “faith” is used both objectively and subjectively in Scripture. By subjective faith one refers to the action proceeding from or taking place in a person’s mind rather than the external world; a subjective decision, particular to a person’s personal and subjective experience. Perhaps a very simple manner in which to define subjective faith is simply reliance (Torrey 150).

Hebrews chapter eleven describes twenty examples of subjective faith. Fifteen godly men, two women, and several groups were moved to action by their subjective faith. Notice the text, Abel by faith offered an acceptable sacrifice, by faith Enoch was translated, by faith Noah prepared an ark, by faith Abraham sojourned in the land of promise, by faith Sarah conceived, by faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau, by faith Jacob worshipped leaning on this staff, by faith Joseph had instructions concerning his bones, by faith Moses was hid three months by God

fearing parents, by faith Moses forsook Egypt, by faith Israel marched around the walls of Jericho, by faith Gideon defeated the Medianites, by faith Barak overthrew the hosts of Canaan, by faith David killed Goliath, by faith Samuel was distinguished for his godliness, and by faith the prophets of old called men to turn from sin and turn to God.

These all died with a song in their hearts for their devotion to God. They had faith expressed in the words of Albert Brumley:

*This world is not my home I'm just passing through
My treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue
The angels beckon me from heaven's open door
And I can't feel at home in this world anymore
(Sanderson 138).*

The term, "objective faith," refers to a body of truth that creates subjective faith. In other words it is the foundation upon which subjective faith is built. For the purpose of this lesson the faith being referred to is the gospel of Jesus Christ. The scriptures provide evidence that the term "faith" and the term "gospel" are interchangeable. For example, it is said of the churches of Judea, "But they were hearing only, "He who formerly persecuted us now preaches the faith which he only tried to destroy" (Gal. 1:23); yet in this same chapter Paul affirms that he preached the gospel (Gal. 1:8). The term faith is also used in the objective manner in the following passages: "Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith" or "obedient to the gospel" (Acts 6:7). "Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith..." or "the gospel" (Acts 14:22). "So the churches were strengthened

in the faith, and increased in number daily" (Acts 16:5). "Watch, stand fast in the faith," or the gospel, "be brave, be strong" (1 Cor. 16:13). "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith," or strayed from the gospel, "in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows" (1 Tim. 6:10).

O Timothy! Guard what was committed to your trust, avoiding the profane and idle babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge by professing it some have strayed concerning the faith. Grace be with you. Amen (1 Tim. 6:20-21).

Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 1:3).

KEEPING THE ANCIENT FAITH

Having noted the meaning of "faith," attention is now given to the term "ancient." This word means from a remote period, a long time past, very old (Webster 22). The word "ancient" is not used a single time in the New Testament. It occurs in the New King James translation a total of 23 verses in the Old Testament. It is translated from a total of six different Hebrew words. One of those words is "gedem" which means, "old, past, or afore time." This Hebrew word occurs in more than seventy verses of Scripture, though translated by the term "ancient" only a few times. Even a more used word is "owlam" which

means, “lasting, old,” or “long-time.” This word occurs in more than 400 verses, yet is translated fewer than ten times by the word “ancient” (Strong’s 84).

In this study the term translated “ancient faith” refers to the faith that was given in Biblical days, especially in the days when the New Testament was being written. It is another way of simply identifying the Scriptures, the law of the Lord. The ancient faith does not refer to customs practiced long ago, but to the will of God revealed to those writing sacred Scripture.

The term “keeping” simply means to preserve the message. In other words it cannot be changed and still remain God’s message. God has never allowed his word to be changed from one generation to the next. As Moses’ work was about completed and Israel was about to enter the Land of Promise, he repeats the principle occurrences of the forty years and shows the absolute necessity of their respect for His law. He states: “You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you” (Deut. 4:2). A brief time later he states: “Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it” (Deut. 12:32). He rewarded Israel when they were obedient to His word. He promised that when they destroyed the idols “because you have listened to the voice of the LORD your God, to keep all his commandments which I command you today to do what is right in the eyes of the LORD your God” (Deut. 13:18).

New Testament writers concur with these Old Testament admonitions. Paul states,

But even if we, or an angel from heaven,
preach any other gospel to you than what we

have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed (Gal. 1:8-9).

The author includes himself and other apostles in the term “we” (Barnes 291). Jude, the half brother of the Lord states: “Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). The writer shows that the Christian faith is that which can be delivered, not something, which each group manufactures. Jude also notes that it is something which is once and for all delivered, or, as another translation states, “My loved ones, while my thoughts were full of a letter which I was going to send you about our common salvation, it was necessary for me to send you one requesting you with all my heart to go on fighting strongly for the faith which has been given to the saints once and forever” (Bible in Basic English).

This denotes that the faith is unchangeable. It is not the prerogative of each generation to rediscover, rethink, or to re-experience the Christian faith. Even though the faith is entrusted to God’s dedicated people it is not their right to ever alter the gospel. This faith was not the possession of one person or one small element, but to the entire church. Yet within the church every Christian is the blessed recipient and is commanded to be a defender of the faith. The word which Jude used for “defend” is “epagonizesthai” which contains within it the root of the English word, agony.” (Barclay 179).

To the names Moses, Paul, and Jude, the name of Peter may also be added, “But sanctify the Lord God in your

hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear" (1 Pet. 3:15). Peter, who was writing at a time of great persecution, reminds all that one's attitude must be holy respect and reverence for God more than any suffering from the hand of mankind. Certainly this is not a new concept of God. Moses declared: "This is what the LORD spoke, saying: 'By those who come near Me I must be regarded as holy; and before all the people I must be glorified'" (Lev. 10:3). When one sanctifies the Lord in his heart, he believes the truth of all that God delivers by his word and promises.

KEEPING THE ANCIENT FAITH CURRENT

Having noted that the ancient faith cannot be changed, what exactly is meant by the term "keeping the ancient faith current?" The meaning of the word "current" is new, present, most recent, publically reported or known. It is in no way referring to the message: rather its focus is keeping the methods used to teach the ancient faith to children, grandchildren, family, friends, and neighbors as up-to-date and effective as possible.

Christ did not bind the methods we are to use when He said, "Go preach the gospel." He left it up to each generation to use the most up-to-date and effective means possible to carry out His commission. Trouble always arises when the brethren confuse a change in method presentation with a change in the message. The speaker remembers at the little white-framed church building some seventy years ago when it was decided to divide the Bible classes by age difference. Some protested that this was an unscriptural practice. It was argued that there had always been only one class and that it would be wrong to change the ancient faith. Common sense prevailed, based on the rationale,

that young children could not learn in a class where old men and women spent a forty-minute class period arguing about the difference in "Mercy" and "Grace." The message was not changed by the adoption of class division, only the method of presentation.

There were also objections when the Gospel Advocate Company introduced the old quarterly material. This writer does not recall, perhaps because of his age, any objection for the adult material, but there was objection when the Bible Card material was introduced in the children's class. Again some thought of this as a change in the message rather than a change in method.

The speaker also was present when an adult quarterly was introduced at another church in north Alabama. The objector went to the chalk board (he had no objection to the use of the board), drew a line and challenged anyone present to come and place on the line, book, chapter and verse for the scripturalness of using a book in a Bible class, other than the Bible.

In none of these cases was the Ancient Faith changed. These were merely tools that were employed to aid in the teaching of God's word. Today these objections seem so trivial, but it was to some a very viable challenge of the ancient faith. To use methods to assist in teaching is not altering the gospel message.

Today the Church is facing a different challenge. In the past few years, actually though the exact date cannot be easily established, roughly in the 50's and reaching its zenith in the late 1960s, a way of thinking and analyzing ideas made its appearance. The new methodology is called Postmodernism. As usual, the church of the Lord manages to be a little behind the times in her preparation to resist

dangerous philosophical trends, but now there is a much better understanding.

In simplistic terms the concept is that nothing old is good. The old way of worship with congregational singing should be replaced by specialized groups and solos, the Lord's Supper according to this concept of change should not be limited to the first day of the week, the church should be financed by a more modern fifth avenue approach replacing the freewill offering of members on the Lord's day, and many other changes. These are not simply current methods to improve ways of practicing the faith, but they constitute innovations or changes in the avenues of worship itself, thus changing the ancient faith.

The primary reason given for making these changes was to reach out to the unchurched by modernizing the ancient faith and making it more appealing. This would result in growing larger congregations. However, according to studies done by "Cooperative Congregations Studies Partnership [Faith Communities Today (FACT)], the research and educational program of the Cooperative Congregational Studies Project (CCSP) at Hartford Seminary, represented the largest most comprehensive survey of congregations and other faith groups ever conducted in the United States.

The results of this survey revealed: (1) A tendency of larger, urban and suburban churches to engage in more diverse worship experiences than small rural churches, but there was little relationship between worship change and congregational growth, (2) Historically, music in Churches of Christ was a cappella and the use of instruments had been rejected. This study found that churches that had interjected the instrumental accompaniment were significantly less likely to have growth, (3) Churches that

use visual projection, drama, special music and/or praise teams were not growing faster than those that did not.

These results lead to the conclusion that innovation to the ancient faith will not assure church growth. The key, it appears to this writer, is not simply to make changes to compete with other religious groups, or to keep up with modern times, and certainly not to make changes just to make changes. The key should be to use modern techniques and tools to enhance the teaching, edifying, and benevolent efforts of God's family.

When Paul wrote to the church in Colosse he asked for prayers to make his Gospel telling, "manifest, as I ought to speak." The NASB and NIV translations prefer the word "clear" or "clearly." Paul wanted to present the message in the most effective manner. When writing to the Christians at Corinth he states there are ways that the gospel should not be presented. He states, "But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God" (2 Cor. 4:2). Just as Paul affirms there is a right and wrong way for the gospel to be presented, there is a right and wrong manner for Christians to honor and serve God.

WHAT ARE SOME METHODS THAT SHOULD BE USED?

What are some methods that would enhance the spread of the ancient faith and yet keep the ancient faith current? It should be noted that it is not wrong to observe the methods used by other religious groups. Simply because a church down the street uses a certain approach does not make it a sin for the people of God

to use the same or a similar approach. Many years ago it was reported that the late Charles Brewer stated that brethren needed to start coming into the church building through the windows because he saw people down the street at another church coming in through the door and they should not be mimicked. Each method should be scriptural and then carefully evaluated.

Methods being used effectively in spreading the ancient faith can be grouped into three categories. First, the category of technology that include: radio, television, pod casting, Internet, and well developed power point presentations. The second category, use of the printed word, includes: newspapers, magazines, Bible correspondence courses, Heart to Heart type mailings, direct mailings, and brochures. The third category is more personal in nature and includes: Home Bible studies and campaigns as well as many others. There are many methods available for use with each category. The people of God must stay abreast of up-to-date teaching techniques and technologies and use them effectively.

WHAT WILL BE THE LONG-TERM EFFECT OF KEEPING THE ANCIENT FAITH CURRENT?

Never in the history of mankind has there existed more knowledge about the teaching/learning process. Never has there been more technology available. What a shame it would be to fail to take advantage of the knowledge and tools available to teach the ancient faith. The ancient faith must never be changed; however, the methodology of the presentation should be of primary concern to every Christian. Truth does not change in any field of study. It may be that in the field of science or mathematics new components have been learned, but the fundamentals are still the same. Two plus two equals four but there may

be more effective ways this can be taught than sheer memorization

A major focus of this presentation has been to remind that while the revealed message of God must not be altered, one should keep up with the latest and best presentation of that message. It should not be necessary to travel to the place of worship in horse and buggies simply because that was done for many years. There must constantly be improvement in the methods of presenting the gospel, but never should the ancient faith itself be changed.

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WORKING TOGETHER FOR THE SAKE OF THE ANCIENT FAITH JERRY A. JENKINS

A number of years ago a group of German students studying at Westminster University volunteered to rebuild a cathedral in London that had been destroyed by Nazi planes in World War II. Near the front of the ancient building was a beautiful statue that depicted Christ with outstretched arms and the caption, "Come unto me." Restoration of this artistic monument could not be completed because the hands and arms were missing. Finally, the problem was resolved by changing the inscription to read, "He has no hands but our hands."

With all his power and greatness to create humanity, he limited himself and chose to make known his plan of redemption through frail humans. What a sobering thought!

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To realize that God is depending on Christians to carry out his plan. It is an imperative that cannot be carried out by a few. God's plan will only be accomplished when we work together for the sake of the ancient faith. The word faith simply means, "the gospel." It is the priceless redemptive treasure that God has given to mankind.

The faith, used here in its objective sense, is described by Paul when he stated, "But as it is written: Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him" (1 Cor. 2:9). Many times this is read at funerals and used in reference to heaven, but Paul is not speaking about heaven. The very next verse states, "But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God" (1 Cor. 2:10; Calvin 57).

This treasure, the gospel, is in earthen vessels. Why would God put that which is so valuable in the hands of frail mankind? Paul answers this query by stating, "That the excellency of power may be of God and not of us" (2 Cor. 4:7). Recently while visiting with a family in Northwest Alabama, a brother showed me through his house. It was the first time this writer had ever seen an entire room floored with Cedar. When commenting about how unusual it was to have a small closet covered with Cedar wood, the man responded, "Well we grew it here on the farm." Then he pointed out a trunk that had been in his mother's house for many years. She had recently died at age 103 and the brother said, "I found some interesting things in that old trunk. Then he pulled out a piece of box cardboard that had a white document on it. It was an old deed of their property and was signed by president Monroe. Then another cardboard with another document, this one signed by president Adams. This family had no idea the value of these treasured documents. Similarly, many Christians fail to realize the treasured gospel that has been left in clay pots.

IMPORTANCE OF WORKING TOGETHER

In making available this treasure to lost humanity, it is imperative that children of God work together. As one

thinks of working together for the sake of the ancient faith two key passages in God's word come to mind. The first, found in the tremendous epistle Paul wrote to the Christians at Rome, states:

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them... (Rom. 12:1-6a).

This passage clearly highlights the importance of working together. In these few verses there are great truths that become very evident. First, Paul notes that this effort is a voluntary effort. Unlike the ancient sacrifices of Israel when the sacrifice was placed on the altar against its will, the Christian sacrifice climbs on the altar at his own volition. In addition, the ancient sacrifice once placed on the altar had no power to remove itself. Such is not the case with the Christian sacrifice. At any point he may remove himself from the altar and go where he chooses.

Finally, the Christian sacrifice is unlike the ancient sacrifice in that the decision to climb on the altar, not only affects him, but it may have a profound impact upon others (Dunn 709).

The ancient sacrifice is referred to as a holy sacrifice. Only the finest animal available was offered. It could not be an inferior animal. The law was clear that no animal with a blemish, blind, broken, with warts, festering or running sores, deformed or stunned could be offered (Lev. 22:22-24). In sharp contrast, the offering man brings of himself is not the finest; it is often worn, dilapidated, and torn by sin, but when cleansed by the blood of the Lamb it becomes holy (Hastings, XIV, 221).

The instructions given by Paul states that there is to be a reasonable service or work. God does not require what he is unwilling to do or what is impossible for his children to accomplish. In the very dawn of creation God exemplified work. The writer of Genesis states, "And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done" (Gen. 2:2). The Psalmist affirms in Psalms 8:3, that God is a working God when he states, "When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, The moon and the stars, which You have ordained." Jesus referred to the work done by both the father and himself when he stated, "My Father has been working until now, and I have been working" (John 5:17). Repeatedly in Scripture there is the notation of the untiring service efforts of Jesus. At the early age of 12 he said to his mother and Joseph, "Why is it that you have been searching for me?" He replied, "Did you not know that it is my duty to be engaged upon my Father's business?" (Luke 2:49 Weymouth's translation). Before healing a man who was blind from birth Jesus said, "I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is

day; the night is coming when no one can work" (John 9:4). It was noted by his followers that he was not one who taught, do as I say and not as I do. He condemned ancient religious leaders who said but did not act in these words, "But do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do" (Matt. 23:9). His followers were keenly aware that Jesus practiced what he preached, in Luke's historical account of Jesus, after his resurrection, in reference to the gospel account as the things Jesus did and taught (Acts 1:1).

Jesus also taught his followers that by their actions, God would be glorified. This he affirmed in the greatest of all his sermons. "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in Heaven" (Matt. 5:16). The motive for Christian involvement is not to receive the acalays of men, but to honor God. A failure to do good works denies the very existence of Christianity in our lives. We may not be able to contribute thousands of dollars, or teach outstanding Bible classes, but the smallest of lights at midnight is of use.

When one thinks of the emphasis placed on the fervent work of God's children, there are two very pointed Scriptures that come to mind. First in Paul's closing statement following his arguments to show that the resurrection of the Savior actually occurred, "Therefore my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Cor. 15:58). This verse indicates that Christians are to keep on becoming firm, strong, unshaken, steadfast, confident in the faith, not frail, weak, detoured by strives, temptations, and care of this life which inevitably all will face (Robertson, IV 133).

Not only is the child of God to be strong and stand firm, he is also to always abound in the Lord's work. The word "always" is the Greek word "pantote" which means, "at all times" (Strong's 198). Some Christians tend to be energized for a while and then hibernate. Several passages indicated that the word always means, "at all times, always, evermore." The word was used by Jesus a number of times in such passages as: "For ye have the poor always with you; but me ye have not always" (Matt. 26:11), "And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine" (Luke 15:31), "And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to lose heart" (Luke 18:1), Paul also employed the word in such passages as: "Giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph. 5:20), "Rejoice in the Lord always" (Phil. 4:4), and finally, "Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one" (Col. 4:6).

This verse, 1 Corinthians 15:58, also emphasizes the constancy of the work in which God's children are involved as he commands that Christians abound in the work. The word abound is "perisseuo." It means to be in excess, be the better, enough and to spare, exceed, excel, over and above." It is the same word that is found in Matt. 5:20 where Jesus said: "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and the Pharisees, you shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven." The word here is exceeds, unless your Christianity abounds more than that which is characteristic of these self-righteous religious people, you cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven.

Another example is found in Matthew 14:20 when Jesus fed the 5,000 men, not counting the women and children. After this mass of people was fed they took up

12 baskets full of the fragments that remained. The word “full” is the word under consideration. Christians are to fully serve, not a part-time servant, not a half-baked Christian, but an abounding Christian.

This word “abounding,” in another form, also occurs in Luke 15. When the prodigal son was feeding the pigs he thought of how his father’s hired servants had bread enough and to spare. The words “enough and to spare” is present passive, meaning, “surrounded by loaves,” like a flood (Robertson, III 202). It is obvious that the word, “abound,” means more than enough, to exceed, it is filling the cup to the top and allowing it to overflow. This is the way that Christians are to serve God. It is the very opposite of endeavoring to do the minimum. Occasionally, there are followers of the Lord who ask, “How much do I have to give?” or “How often do I have to attend?” Such attitudes cannot be harmonized with the injunction given by the apostle, “to always abound.”

The second key passage where emphasis is given to the concept of “working together,” is addressed by Paul in another section of his letter to the Corinthians when he states: For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. For in fact the body is not one member but many. If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body,” is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body,” is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling? But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. And if they were all one member, where would

the body be? But now indeed there are many members, yet one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you" (1 Cor. 12:13-21).

Paul's analogy of the church to the body serves that not all Christians have exactly the same abilities or function. Rather, each part is designed to function together for the overall health of the body. This should be the goal of each Christian. Imagine attempting to build a house and all builders only knew how to hammer. No one knew how to measure or how to saw a board. The necessity of the unity of the church is made evident by Paul's comparison of the spiritual body, the church, to the physical. He affirms that every member is important. No one would want to lose a single member of his or her physical body. In other words there is no unimportant member in the physical or spiritual body (Chafin, VII 156).

The essentiality of the unity of every member of the body is evident when one sees a dysfunctional member of the human body. When one sees a person with delayed development of muscle motor skills, difficulty using one or more muscle groups, drooling, eyelid drooping, there is a good possibility of muscular dystrophy. How horrible is the affect of some member in the spiritual body that, because of the disease of sin, has become dysfunctional.

With unity being so essential for the proper functioning of the body there is no confusion as to why Deity places such emphasis on unity. On the night before his crucifixion the next morning at 9:00 AM Jesus fervently prayed for the unity of all his followers. He desired that there might exist a oneness such as that between He and the Father (John 17:20-21). Christians should have unity for each is on the same team, in the same army, and attached to the same vine.

Scriptures are repeated with injunctions for unity among all followers of the Master. It was Paul who stated: "So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another" (Rom. 12:5), "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28), "Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all" (Col. 3:11), "Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all" (Eph. 4:3, 6). "Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel" (Phil. 1:27), "That their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ (Col. 2:2).

The plea for unity was cited, not only by Paul, but by other writers of the New Testament and some are noted in the following passages: "Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous" (1 Pet. 3:8), "Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members?" (James 4:1), "My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth" (1 John 3:18), "These are grumblers, finding fault, following after their own lusts; they speak arrogantly, flattering people for the sake of gaining an advantage" (Jude 1:16).

The importance of unity was noted by a number of the writers of the Old Testament. Amos, the herdsman of Tekoah stated, "Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?" (Amos 3:3); the Preacher noted, "Two are better than one, Because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, For he has no one to help him up. Again, if two lie down together, they will keep warm; But how can one be warm alone? Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken (Eccles. 4:9, 12).

The sweet singer of Israel noted, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is For brethren to dwell together in unity!" (Ps. 133:1). Unity is good and pleasant. If this be true in a family setting, in a community, in a nation, and in a family, how much important it is among the spiritual members of God's family? Adam Clarke noted, "Disunion is bad and hateful. The former is from heaven; the latter, from hell" (Clarke, III 653).

It has been documented that if there were two old horses separated, the first could pull up to 9,000 pounds, the second a little more than 8,000 pounds. One would think that together they could handle 17,000 pounds, but actually together they could pull 28,000 pounds. This certainly is true of the people of God who have all been redeemed by the same blood, are seeking the same heaven, and experiencing the same desires, enemies, and joys. As Albert Barnes states, "There is no friendship so pure and enduring as that which results from having the same attachment to the Lord Jesus" (Barnes, V 121).

Truly the world will never be impacted without unity. Religious division sometimes exists because of major

differences, i.e., “What is to constitute religious authority?” or “How does one become a member of the church?” or “How is worship to be conducted?” but there are often trivial matters that have separated the people of God. At least six distinction groups wearing the name, “church of Christ,” have existed in this writer’s hometown. One group, thankfully they no longer use the name, “church of Christ,” affirm that women may Scripturally serve as elders, deacons, and ministers in the congregation. Another church limits the funds contributed on Sunday to assist only those who are members of the Lord’s church, a third which limits communion to the Sunday evening services, a fourth that believes it a violation of Scripture to divide into Bible classes, and finally a group which affirms that communion must be from one blessed loaf and that the fruit of the vine should be served to every member attending in one vessel.

Such reason might remind some of the experiences of Gordon Melton. Whenever time permitted, this man, with an unusual hobby, would travel the land seeking for churches with uncommon beliefs and practices. He found one church called, “The Church of John Kennedy,” after the late president Kennedy, whose primary distinctive purpose for existence was to pray through Kennedy for healing of those with illnesses and broken bones. Another church called, “The Church of Universal Wisdom,” existed to seek for flying saucers.

Arrogance gets in our way of serving God. Some feel that I am above doing the menial tasks that some are called on to do. This attitude is noted in New Testament times and severely condemned. To the Philippians, Paul instructed, “Fulfill my joy by being like minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but

in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself" (Phil. 2:2-3) and to the Ephesian brethren he said, "Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph 4:3).

Having noted the responsibility of individual Christians, attention will now be turned to the responsibilities of certain groups in God's family. What is the function of the shepherds in working together with God's people for the ancient faith? The Old Testament has much to say regarding the role of the shepherd, especially Psalms 23. Shepherds of the Lord's flock are not an executive board that meets together and makes decisions. They are shepherds and when they are serving as elders they will be out shepherding the flock of God. Jesus said the shepherd will know the sheep by name and he is concerned when one of them go astray and will not rest until that lost lamb is found.

Some men who serve as elders believe their primary duty is to meet weekly, semi-monthly, monthly, or whenever necessary to make decisions. After such "righteous" decisions are made they dispatch memos and announce edicts that have been made to the congregation. They have made a "few" bad decisions over their lifetime of service, but never have they admitted error at any time. This popish mentality is foreign to the leadership style of the Master.

Some with the tactic of embarrassment or personal information about certain members attempt to coerce members to cooperate. This lording over God's family is specifically condemned by a New Testament elder when he stated,

The elders who are among you I exhort, I
who am a fellow elder and a witness of the

sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock (1 Pet. 5:1-3).

Many years ago this writer sat in a class taught by the late Ira North and heard him relate how a small group of men were following a much larger group. The smaller group stopped at a service station and asked the attendant if he had seen a large group of men go by. The attendant stated, "Yes, a short while ago." To which the small group responded, "We have to catch them, we are their leaders." People prefer to follow those who help them, not those who intimidate them (Wilkes 88).

Elders have a unique responsibility of promoting unity in the Lord's church and assuring that God's plan is fulfilled. They will decide if the church will travel the road of entertainment, the road of exclusivity, or simply the narrow way outlined by the Savior. Elders need to be in the forefront of every phase of congregational activity. This does not mean that every elder must be involved in every church function, but they should be represented. This further does not mean that elders must be the only ones involved. It should be their role to give guidance to the flock.

The work of the Lord's family is threefold and usually congregations are known for that area which receives the major emphasis. Some congregations are known for an outstanding evangelistic outreach effort, some for a tremendous Bible school program, some for their

magnificent buildings, and some for huge saving accounts. Elders will determine what the major emphasis will be. Ideally, a major thrust will be evangelistic outreach.

Following are some suggestions in which elders may lead a congregation in their outreach efforts: (1) Adult campaigns where a group of adults will assist smaller congregations in their community. Please note that care should be given that the larger congregation not force its ways upon the smaller struggling group, (2) Young campaigns where all the young people are encouraged to go into a community, knocking on doors, inviting people to attend services, enrolling interested parties in a Bible Correspondence Course, and conducting home Bible studies, and (3) Local campaigns where every door will be visited in a given area and information made available concerning the Lord's church.

Deacons also have a role to play in working together for the ancient faith. They are not junior shepherds who long for a step to the forefront, but are servants. They are, in the words of the late G. C. Brewer, "A standby committee, not standing by." They serve whenever and wherever needed. The various areas in which a congregation functions should be clearly defined and a deacon given the responsibility to make sure the area is adequately covered. For example: (1) Care of the building, (2) Handling issues relative to the benevolent activities of a congregation, (3) Serving on various committees in seeing that the Bible School functions in the most efficient manner.

Bible School teachers also play a major role in promoting unity and harmony in working together for the ancient faith. Their classes are less formal than the preaching services and these settings offer an opportunity for more personal care assignments. If the major thrust

of a congregation is evangelism the class members can be encouraged to bring new members. The classes will also offer an opportunity for fellowship activities where members will get to know each other on a more personal level. Bible classes offer members the opportunity to delve more in depth in God's Word, thus developing a deeper knowledge of God's plan.

The minister also has a unique role to play in encouraging and offering guidance to the people of God. He has the power of the pulpit to teach the message of salvation. No doubt, he is the most influential person in the congregation because of this unique role. He is to preach the word, but far more than a 30 minute discourse on Sunday morning and evening, and teach a class on Wednesday night. He is to teach the will of God everyday of his life. How many athletes waste their talents? How many students are not reaching their capabilities? How many ministers are not functioning and fully using their abilities to the glory of God? A minister is not only responsible for those of his congregation, but should also set himself a realistic goal to share the gospel with a specific number of lost souls each week. Without such a goal the temptation is for him to become a "pastor" in the non-biblical concept of the minister's role. Also a major area of his work should be in training members how to lead others to Christ.

How many do less simply because of the menial task of which they feel capable. There is much that only you can do. Only when all the members of the body of Christ are working together will the plan of God be fulfilled.

*Christ has no hands
but our hands to do his work today,
He has no feet but our feet to lead others in his way.
God has no voice
but our voice to tell others how he died,*

*And God has no help
but our help to lead them near his side (Zuck 111).*

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THE ANCIENT FAITH TAKES ME HOME

TOM HOLLAND

If the religious polls are reliable a larger percent of Americans still believe in heaven. God-fearing, Christ-honoring people who believe the revelation of the Holy Spirit know that there is a heaven. The “faith once delivered” (Jude 3) [All scripture references are from the New King James version unless otherwise noted.] reveals the reality of heaven, the importance of believing in heaven, and enough information about heaven to cause people with “good and honest hearts” (Luke 8: 15) to resolve to go to “the home of the soul.”

Our existence on earth is temporal, brief, fraught with danger, often burdened with cares, disappointments, heartaches, and the realization that this earthly sojourn will end because, as the song says, “Here we are but straying pilgrims” (1 Pet. 2:11).

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In the inspired book of James one finds solid reasons to believe in heaven. One, the uncertainty of the future, “You know not what shall be on the morrow” (Jas. 4:14). Two, the brevity of our earthly existence, “For what is your life? It is even a vapor, that appears for a little time” (Jas.

4:14). Three, the certainty of life on earth to “vanish away” (Jas. 4:14). On June 27, 2005, the world’s eleventh richest man died, one of the sons of Sam Walton. July 2009 a popular entertainer died. July 2009 a popular actress died. Already in 2009 plane crashes have taken several hundred people into eternity.

If it is important to believe in heaven it is just as important to believe in the heaven revealed in Scripture. The only valid source of information about heaven is in the “faith once revealed or delivered.”

Atheism has no place like heaven. The rash of books written by Sam Harris, Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, and such unbelieving authors, may make the New York Times bestsellers lists, but the fruit of their writing leads to nihilism. Marvin Olasky observed:

The popping up of several New York Times best sellers over the past five years shows that those hostile to Christianity have some discretionary income, but publishing successes do not root out atheism’s underlying problems both rationally and emotionally: atheism denies the glory of God that the heavens declare, and atheism cannot by its very nature offer any hope (45).

Philosophical assertions cannot insure the soul with hope. Theologies of men, especially those which seem to be obsessed with the return of Christ to establish a “kingdom” on earth, at least have prolonged the hope of heaven.

But in the God-breathed Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:16-17) we are given the assurance of heaven’s reality and we are provided ample evidence to produce faith in our minds and hearts. From genuine “sincere faith,” we can experience hope.

This lesson will focus on three important facts of heaven revealed. First, heaven is a place; two, heaven is a prepared place; three, heaven is prepared for a prepared people.

HEAVEN IS A PLACE

When Jesus was preparing His apostles for the time that He would leave them, He promised, "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to myself that where I am, there you may be also" (John 14:2-3).

Heaven is not a myth, the assertions of unbelievers notwithstanding. Heaven is not a state of mind. Heaven is not the product of human imagination. Heaven has a location. Heaven is a place as real as any place on earth. It is not a material place, as a material place on earth, but heaven is as real as God, the angels, and Jesus the Christ.

Heaven as a place is a contrast to places on the earth. Heaven is a place of purity. Places on earth are often polluted; the air and water may be contaminated. Garbage has to be removed. Epidemics can burden cities. Relative to heaven, the Holy Spirit inspired John to write, "But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life" (Rev. 21:27).

The heavenly place will be the habitation of the Lord's redeemed, those who have been bought from sin's slavery and those who have been set free from the "law (rule) of sin and death" (Rom. 8:1-2).

Heaven is a place of peace. Earth knows turmoil, strife, hatred, war, destruction and death. The heavenly

place will be blessed with peace because the instigator of turmoil and war is Satan; and he will have been cast down forever (Rev. 20:10).

Too often the church, designed by the Lord to be a haven of peace, is troubled with confusion, strife, envy, and even division. The envy and strife of the world invaded God's church in Corinth and the division manifested a lack of spirituality in the church (1 Cor. 3:1-3).

Even families are sometimes victims of strife, envy and turmoil: children against parents; parents disgusted with children; spouses in constant verbal battles. There are families that do not know "the way of peace" (Rom. 3:17).

But heaven will be a place of calm, delightful, refreshing, perfect peace. On the other side of this life, as Job observed: "There the wicked cease from troubling; and there the weary are at rest" (Job 3:17).

Heaven is also a permanent place. Earth is a place of change, decay and death. In time fine houses decay. Expensive automobiles wear out. Storms destroy mansions and run-down shacks. The old song accurately states: "Change and decay in all around I see." Our bodies grow old and eventually will be by death dissolved. However, God's people know "that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (2 Cor. 5:1).

The heavenly inheritance of God's child is, according to the apostle Peter, "incorruptible, undefiled, and fades not away" (1 Pet. 1:3-5). The late Guy N. Woods comments:

- (1) The inheritance is "incorruptible" (aphthartos, immortal, imperishable undying,

enduring) ...it is unlike earthly inheritances which...yield to dissolution and decay.

(2) The inheritance is also "undefiled"... therefore, pure and chaste. Being undefiled, the inheritance does not partake of the contamination characteristic of the inheritance of men.

(3) The inheritance is "unfading"...the inheritance which awaits the children of God will not deteriorate, nor will the passing of age render it less desirable or attractive (26-27).

This is the place Jesus went to prepare (John 14:1-3). God's people have a place reserved for them in heaven. It is a permanent place.

HEAVEN IS A PREPARED PLACE

Our first parents were blessed to live in a place that God had prepared for them. "The Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there He put the man whom He had formed" (Gen. 2:8). God then completed man as God created woman to be with man (Gen. 2:18). Their home was this garden God had planted. God who can "paint a beautiful sunrise and sunset;" God who can so order nature that in the fall trees are "painted" with hues and colors of incredible beauty; God who can form real pictures of beauty with babbling brooks, majestic mountains, rolling hills and the azure' sky is the God who is preparing heaven, a permanent place of eternal beauty.

The inspired writer of Hebrews tells of people of great faith who knew that on earth they "were strangers and pilgrims" and they looked by faith for a "heavenly

country." "Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared for them a city" (Heb. 11:13-16). God's heroes lived, as some said, "in the future tense."

There was power in the hope for a heavenly country. This expectation would result in the eternal being more important than the fleeting present. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Sarah could be contented in tents because they looked for "a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Reb. 11:10).

Milligan observed:

The fact then that the saints under the Old Testament were moved in their conduct by considerations which had respect to the invisible world, or an immortal state of existence, is plainly implied here by the reasoning of the Apostle (397-398).

The place the Lord is preparing will manifest attention to detail; there will be an emphasis on beauty. The Holy Spirit revealed to John that the city prepared will indeed be as a "bride adorned for her husband" (Rev. 21:2). The word translated "adorn" means, "to make orderly, to adorn, to decorate, to make beautiful or attractive" (Rogers and Rogers 649).

The adornment of the prepared city will not be marred by pain, because God's people will know eternal comfort. Sorrow will not disturb the peace of heaven because God will bestow eternal comfort. Crying or weeping will not be known because of eternal joy bestowed. Death will have been "swallowed up in victory."

The realization of God's preparation will supply the motivation for living for the Lord. The realization of God's

preparation will bring consolation to the heart, even in the face of death.

PREPARING FOR THAT PREPARED PLACE

As surely as heaven is a prepared place, preparation must be made to go there. The exciting news is, we can go to heaven! God wants us to be saved now and eternally (1 Tim. 2:4); God does not want anyone to miss heaven (2 Pet. 3:9).

Relative to being saved forever in heaven there seems to be two extremes: One, universal salvation, everyone is going to heaven. Two, very few will make it to heaven because people are so spiritually weak and going to heaven is very demanding. Neither of these extremes is true.

It is true that Jesus said in comparing those who choose the narrow way which leads to life and the many who travel the broad way which leads to destruction, "few there be that find" the narrow way. But few in comparison to billions could be millions. So we sometimes sing the late Tillit S. Teddlie's song, "Why should I long for the world with its sorrows, when in that home O'er the sea, millions are singing the wonderful story? Heaven holds all to me" (*"Heaven Holds All to Me"*).

Since God desires our presence with Him in heaven, He has provided the way by which we can get there. The way God has prepared by which we can go to heaven begins with an assurance. All we need to know and do is, by His power, revealed potentially to us (2 Pet. 1:3-4). In the complete revelation of a complete revelation there is also the motivation for us to go to heaven, namely, God's "exceeding and precious promise" (2 Pet. 1:4).

There are three steps to heaven. Steps we can certainly take. There is not an impossible step in the three. After all, God did not design Christianity for angels in heaven, but for men and women on earth!

Step one: answer or respond to God's call. Peter said, God has "called us by glory and virtue" (2 Pet. 1:3). A few statements later the apostle exhorted: "make your call and election sure" (2 Pet. 1:10).

The Holy Spirit guided (John 16:13) Peter to declare on the Day of Pentecost that God's promise is to as many as "the Lord our God will call" (Acts 2:39). In his first epistle Peter emphasized the call of God five times.

The method by which God calls is clearly revealed in God's word. He calls by or through the gospel (2 Thess. 2:13, 14). The good message of the gospel is for the world (Mark 16:15), the world that God loved enough to send His son to die for its salvation (John 3:16; Rom. 5:6-10).

One answers God's gospel call by obeying the commands of the gospel (2 Thess. 1:7-9). When those who believe the gospel message repent of their sins (Acts 2:38), confess the Lord (Rom. 10:9-10), and are baptized (Acts 2:38) they have answered the call of God. Indeed they have taken the first step to heaven.

The second step is taken in response to the gospel call. There must be the cleansing from old sins (2 Pet. 1:9). Sin defiles the mind, heart and conscience (Titus 1:15; Heb. 9:13-15). The blood of Christ has the power to purge or cleanse one from the "old sins" of the sinful life (Rev. 1:3; Heb. 9:13-15). The Lord Jesus washes our sins away through the power of His blood (Rev. 1:5). In baptism we contact the blood (Acts 22:16; Rom 6:1-6).

The third step is the internalizing of seven powerful, practical spiritual characteristics, often called the “Christian Graces” (2 Pet. 1:5-11).

A careful analysis of the seven qualities of a person’s spirit by which he/she is being prepared for heaven reveals the practical nature of each characteristic. Examine the list and identify the impossible one or ones. A sincere, dedicated, conscientious person who wants to go to heaven can do these required things and, therefore, will take seriously Peter’s admonition, “giving all diligence,” add these characteristics to life (2 Pet. 1:5). Rogers and Rogers have an interesting explanation of the word translated “diligent.” “We are to bring into this relationship, along side what God has done, every ounce of determination we can muster” (581).

Those who answer God’s call in obeying the truth (1 Pet. 1:22-25) cleansed from sin and kept clean as they “walk in the light” (1 John 1:7) then add the seven spiritual qualities in their lives are assured that they will not fall but will experience an abundant entrance into “the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 1:11). God wants us to be saved in heaven; the Lord Jesus Christ has made it possible for us to go to heaven; the Holy Spirit has revealed the way we can go to heaven. Let us all resolve that we will lay hold and keep a firm grip on God’s precious promise (2 Pet. 1:3, 1 John 2:25).

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SECTION II

LADIES' SPECIAL CLASSES

HOW ANCIENT IS THE ANCIENT FAITH?

EVELYN APPLE

DEFENDING THE ANCIENT FAITH

In college I took a course entitled “Critical Introduction to the Old Testament.” The course dealt with the origin and authorship of Old Testament books. For the first time in my life, I learned of theorists who critique the Bible as if it were ordinary literature rather than a divine product. I had been reared by Biblically literate Christian parents and had heard good preaching and teaching—but this course material was new to me. Moses did not write the Pentateuch? JEDP Theory? Redactors? What was all that about?

My instructor was a faithful Christian who firmly believed in the scriptures’ authenticity. It may be that he dealt very effectively with modernist attacks on Scripture,

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but in my alarm I missed it. Just knowing the Bible’s credibility was in question (in some circles) shook me to my core. I experienced a miserable interval before I gradually studied and prayed my way back to a good understanding of biblical integrity.

You might never take a class that acquaints you with “critical theory,” but you can be exposed to Biblical criticism every day. Maybe it’s a scholarly documentary on

the History Channel, in which archaeologists chip away at the historicity of a particular Bible event. Perhaps it's a secular college professor who insists that Bible Character X did not author the book bearing his name and probably did not even exist. Or, it might be mocking conversational reference to Bible stories that all informed people recognize as "myth." Even if such assaults do not unsettle your faith, they might undermine someone else's confidence in the word of God. Who will suffer damage: your child? A sister or brother in your congregation? The neighbor you are hoping to bring to Christ?

HOW ANCIENT IS THE FAITH, AND WHY DOES IT MATTER?

When we examine what skeptics say about the Bible and Christianity, much of what we encounter has to do with chronology. The dating of Bible books, people and events is a major focus of Biblical criticism. Why?

- If skeptics can conclusively date prophetic passages later than the events they foretell, "predictive prophecy" loses its value as a proof of divine authorship. For example, if the synoptic gospels were not written prior to A.D. 70, Jesus' detailed forecast of Jerusalem's fall is unimpressive and worthless as evidence of inspiration (Barfield 247).

- If skeptics can date New Testament books long after the first century A.D., they can more easily portray the New Testament as a patchwork of embellished legends and made-up doctrine. The further they can remove the books from the events they chronicle, the less credible the New Testament appears.

- If skeptics can prove the Bible is historically unreliable—even in part—they destroy its credibility as a

whole. For example, if Moses did not write the Pentateuch, both Old and New Testament authors were mistaken (Josh. 8:32; 2 Chron. 34:14; Ezra 3:2; 6:18; Neh. 13:1; Luke 24:27; Acts 15:21; Rom. 10:5; 2 Cor. 3:15). If Moses did not write the Pentateuch, Jesus did not tell the truth (Mark 7:10; 10:3–5; Mark 12:26; Luke 24:44; John 5:46, 47) (Lyons, “Mosaic Authorship”). If neither Israel’s sojourn in Egypt nor the exodus actually occurred, New Testament writers and preachers simply rehashed long-held myths (Acts 7; Heb. 3:16; 8:9; Jude 5).

Clearly, we must be certain of the authorship of Moses, the reality of the exodus, and the early dates of Old Testament prophecies and gospel accounts. We must have confidence in the supernatural foreknowledge of God’s prophets, and know that they spoke well in advance of prophesied events. Above all, we must be sure that in the first thirty years A.D., a virgin-born Jew named Jesus lived in Palestine in fulfillment of divine prophecy.

While skeptics disparage scripture as a collection of fabricated myths and stories, we know that the evidence indicates it is God-breathed and (in its totality) a single, cohesive unit. We can help others see through the haze of skepticism only if we are “ready to give a defense to everyone who asks” why we believe (1 Pet. 3:15). [All scripture is quoted from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted.]

In this space we cannot possibly describe and debunk every criticism nonbelievers have aimed at the Bible. What we will do is examine five approaches that skeptics typically employ, with at least one example of each. As we work our way through these approaches, I hope to accomplish three objectives:

- First, I want to help you recognize invalid methods skeptics often use to undermine the Bible’s credibility. They don’t “play fair,” and you need to be able to identify their tactics.

- Second, as we note selected examples of each method, I hope you will become better prepared to answer a few specific arguments.

- Third, I want to help you avoid distress when you encounter new assaults on the Bible. If Scripture is inspired by God, attacks against it are based in falsehood. It might require diligent searching, studying and thinking, but we can always find truth that answers a skeptic’s challenge.

HOW DO THE BIBLE’S DETRACTORS ATTEMPT TO DESTROY FAITH IN GOD’S WORD?

(1) They approach the Bible with a naturalistic bias.

The usual head scratching over Deuteronomy’s account of Moses’ death and burial betrays an anti-supernatural prejudice:

How could Moses have written the first five books in the Bible (the Pentateuch) when his own death and burial are described in Deut. 34:5-6 (“So Moses the servant of the Lord died there in the land of Moab ... and he buried him in a valley. . . .”)? (FreeThoughtPedia.com)

God never hesitates to announce future events when it suits his divine purposes—so why is it difficult to imagine that God might well have dictated to Moses what was about to happen? Only someone with a naturalistic bias

discounts the possibility that inspiration was responsible for Deuteronomy 34.

A second example reveals a similar bias: The time of the Hebrew monarchy is reflected in Genesis 36:31, yet this passage is set in a discussion of the patriarchal period. How could Moses write of conditions that did not come into being until long after his death? (Larue)

Again, we understand that God directed Moses' writing, and God knew Israel would become a nation ruled by kings. Hadn't Moses already recorded God's promise to Abraham that nations and kings would descend from Sarah (Gen. 17:16)? Hadn't he documented God's covenant with Jacob (Gen. 35:11), in which he repeated his prophecy of future nations and kings (Lyons, "Mosaic Authorship")? Only intolerance of the concept of divine inspiration would blind one to the idea that divine foreknowledge easily explains this glimpse of future events.

(2) They impose a contrived, unreasonable set of rules on the Bible.

If we were to use deist Thomas Paine's yardstick, we would have to reject all legitimately ancient material that does not somehow manage to appear not ancient:

It is not the antiquity of a tale that is an evidence of its truth; on the contrary, it is a symptom of its being fabulous; for the more ancient any history pretends to be, the more it has the resemblance of a fable. The origin of every nation is buried in fabulous tradition, and that of the Jews is as much to be suspected as any other. (Paine)

Paine's convoluted reasoning creates an impossible standard: an ancient work must not seem ancient—for if it does we must assume it is only pretending. The older it pretends to be, the more fake it seems. Therefore, if a work gives the impression of being very old, it must be a fable.

How could any genuinely ancient historical account pass Paine's absurd test? Clearly, material written thousand of years ago is very likely to seem ancient. Refusing to permit ancient texts to resemble what they are is unreasonable. Only a critic who is determined to discount the Bible's internal evidence would try to impose such a standard.

Some refuse to consider the legitimacy of any account of Jesus written by those who, of all things, believed he was who he claimed to be: Except those of biased Christian writers, there isn't one writing outside the Bible in all of ancient history that clearly refers to Jesus of Nazareth. (FreeThoughtPedia.com)

This denunciation falls flat for three reasons:

- First, the statement itself is false. We find references to the historical Jesus in the writings of Tacitus, Suetonius, Pliny the Younger, the Talmudic rabbis, and Josephus.
- Second, New Testament writers' belief in Jesus does not render their record worthless. A.N. Sherwin-White (British historian of Ancient Rome) was impressed by the volume of accurate historical detail in the New Testament books Luke and Acts: For Acts the confirmation of historicity is overwhelming... Any attempt to reject its basic historicity must now appear absurd. Roman historians have long taken it for granted. (Sherwin-White 189)

As others have asked—given Luke’s amazing factual precision in so many details, why would we assume he erred or lied when he narrated the life, death and resurrection of Jesus? (Ankerburg)

- Third, we must take into consideration the extraordinary nature of the case: Jesus of Nazareth was the son of God. His actions and words would, by their very nature, produce belief in the hearts of honest witnesses. In the real world, who would demand that no eyewitness account be written by someone who actually accepts the testimony of their own eyes and ears? It is unreasonable and unfair to disqualify those who, because they experienced Jesus’ incomparable life and astonishing works, happened to believe what they saw.

(3) They handle the Biblical text unfairly.

A word or phrase can convey one thing in a certain context, but something different in another context. We understand this in our everyday communication, but skeptics often do not allow for Biblical terminology to be used in different ways—which enables them to identify supposed contradictions: How can Exodus 33:20, which says no man can see God’s face and live, be squared with Genesis 32:30, which says a man saw God’s face and his life was preserved (FreeThoughtPedia.com)?

This critic refers to the incident in which Jacob wrestled with an angel:

Then Jacob was left alone; and a Man wrestled with him until the breaking of day.... And He said, “Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have struggled with God and with men, and have

prevailed." ...And He blessed him there. And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: "For I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved" (Gen. 32:24–30).

How do we know the "Man" Jacob wrestled was not God himself?—Hosea 12:2-4 identifies him as "an angel." Why, then, did Jacob say he had seen God?

Was it really God that Jacob saw? No, he did not see God but instead witnessed a representative of God. A similar example can be found in the case of Manoah (the father of Samson), recorded in Judges 13. In this instance, the text says that Manoah and his wife were visited by the "Angel of the Lord." ...Afterwards, Manoah said: "We shall surely die because we have seen God!" (13:22) (Estabrook)

Was Manoah confused about his visitor's identity? Certainly not: verse 21 states that "Manoah knew that He was the Angel of the LORD." Manoah knew he was an angel, yet he said, "we have seen God!" His statement testifies to his awe at having come into close contact with one who represented God. Jacob's statement does the same, and there is no contradiction between this passage and Exodus 33:20.

Another skeptic reads God's list of unclean "birds"—"And these you shall regard as an abomination among the birds; they shall not be eaten, they are an abomination: the eagle, the vulture, the buzzard...the stork, the heron after its kind, the hoopoe, and the bat" (Lev. 11:13–19)—and concludes that "[B]ats are birds to the biblical God." (Skeptic's Annotated Bible)

Does God really classify a bat as a bird? First, it is unreasonable to assume God's use of terms must be dictated by modern taxonomy (Lyons, "Blunders") or that the Hebrew word translated "bird" must have a meaning identical to the current English definition of "bird."

A quick lexicon check shows the word translated "birds" in Leviticus 11:13 is the Hebrew word 'owph,' which derives from the word 'uwph'—which is most often translated as some form of "fly." A better translation for 'owph' would be "flying thing," rather than "bird" (Brown, Driver, Briggs). Bats certainly are "flying things," so the author of Leviticus did not make a mistake.

To handle any literature fairly, one must understand its words and statements in context. It is never fair to impose meaning the text does not convey.

(4) They make illegitimate arguments from silence.

In an article entitled "The Historical David," professor of Ancient Near Eastern Studies P. Kyle McCarter contended, "The Bible is our only source of information about David. No ancient inscription mentions him. No archaeological discovery can be securely linked to him." (117)

In McCarter's defense, Old Testament scholar Walter C. Kaiser explained,

Until the recently discovered inscription found at Dan containing the bet David, "house/dynasty of David," with its epigraphical evidence from archaeology, McCarter's 1986 assessment was correct: "The Bible is our only source of information about David." But that judgment is now *passé*, for this

inscription has enormous significance in light of the grave doubts that had been cast on the actual existence of either David or his dynasty. (225)

It is easy to see the folly of arguing, “We haven’t found it so it must not exist.” Is it rational to assume that every existing Bible-related relic has been unearthed? No; archaeologists keep finding things. The history of Biblical archaeology is a continual unfolding of the fabric of the past. Then again, should we expect to find an inscription or artifact pertaining to every biblical event and character? No, but as research continues to yield new information about the past, we can reasonably expect some of what archaeology reveals to corroborate biblical accounts and support the Bible’s integrity. Arguments from silence—based on what we have not yet found—prove nothing.

(5) They repeat discredited arguments.

At a site on which people “share knowledge,” a user posts the question, “Who do you think truly [sic] wrote the BIBLE” (Answerbag.com)?

Another user replies:

...The stories that follow this in the Old Testament (from mid-Genesis onwards), such as those of Moses, David & Goliath, Deborah, Joseph, Elijah - they are all generally considered to be legend. That is they probably did happen - there is usually some archaeological [sic] evidence, or something more scientific is known to suggest it may have happened - but because writing did not exist then, the stories would

have become part of campfire tradition as well.... (Answerbag.com).

Why would anyone believe writing did not exist in 1500 B.C.? It is not unreasonable to blame this user's blunder on the mistakes of scholars such as nineteenth-century theologian Hermann Schultz:

Of the legendary character of the pre-mosaic narrators, the time of which they treat is a sufficient proof. It was a time prior to all knowledge of writing, a time separated by an interval of more than four hundred years, of which there is absolutely no history....And even when writing came into use, in the time, that is, between Moses and David, it would be but sparingly used, and much that happened to the people must still have been handed down simply as legend. (25–26)

Schultz published his erroneous claim only a few years before archaeologists excavating in (what is now) Iran unearthed Hammurabi's Code—which proved writing existed hundreds of years pre-Moses. Later discoveries in the Sinai Peninsula and Egypt revealed evidence of writing dating from about 1600 and 1800 B.C., respectively (Britannica, Himmelfarb). Although the "Moses couldn't have known writing" argument has been thoroughly discredited by these and other finds, some people simply repeat what they have heard.

Other critics denounce Bible references to camels. English biblical critic T. K. Cheyne insisted,

The assertion that the ancient Egyptians knew of the camel is unfounded...The difficulty of

the narrative in Genesis 12[:]10–20 [in which Egypt's pharaoh gives Abraham camels, EA] is very great so long as it is assumed that it correctly represents the Hebrew tradition. (634)

We find the same claim in recently published books:

...based on every other [i.e. other than biblical, EA] available evidence we have, tame camels were simply unknown during Abraham's time...there could have been no domesticated camel during Abraham's lifetime. It must be, then, that the above stories are later additions to the legend of Abraham. (Tobin)

In *The Bible Unearthed* (under the heading "Some Telltale anachronisms") Finkelstein and Silberman said,

The stories of the patriarchs are packed with camels, usually herds of camels; but...camels are also described as beasts of burden used in caravan trade. We now know through archaeological research that camels were not domesticated as beasts of burden earlier than the late second millennium and were not widely used in that capacity in the ancient Near East until well after 1000 BCE. (37)

Tobin, Finkelstein, and Silberman were mistaken. Archaeological finds prove various cultures were using camels for transport well before Abraham's era:

A study of archaeological material, however, reveals a knowledge of the camel in Egypt even before the time of Abraham. Archaeological evidence showing early knowledge of the camel in Egypt includes statuettes and figurines of camels, plaques bearing representations of camels, rock carvings and drawings, camel bones, a camel skull, and a camel hair rope. These objects, some twenty in number, range from the seventh century B.C. back to the period before 3000. In recent years numerous indications of the domestication and use of the camel in Mesopotamia and Syria during the patriarchal period have come to light. (Free 51)

Under the heading “.....was the Bible wrong about Abraham having camels that early?” Christian-Thinktank.com presents a list of comments by various scholars, referring to such archaeological evidence.

From Egyptologist Kenneth Kitchen’s *Ancient Orient and Old Testament*:

It is often asserted that the mention of camels and of their use is an anachronism in Genesis. This charge is simply not true, as there is both philological and archaeological evidence for knowledge and use of this animal in the early second millennium BC and even earlier. While a possible reference to camels in a fodder-list from Alalakh (c. eighteenth century BC) has been disputed, the great Mesopotamian lexical lists that originated in the Old Babylonian period show

a knowledge of the camel c. 2000/17000 BC, including its domestication. Furthermore, a Sumerian text from Nippur from the same early period gives clear evidence of domestication of the camel by then, by its allusions to camel's milk...For the early and middle second millennium BC, only limited use is presupposed by either the biblical or external evidence until the twelfth century BC. (Christian-Thinktank.com)

From Robert W. Ehrich's Chronologies in Old World Archaeology:

The period [3000-2500 BC, noted at web] is marked by technological advances in pottery production, including the introduction and dominant utilization of the fast wheel and the appearance of efficient, two-tiered pottery kilns; metallurgy with deliberate alloying and evidence for local production in the form of copper smelting furnaces on the outskirts of Khapuz-depe; stone working; and a development of wheeled vehicles drawn by Bactrian camels and possible bulls as indicated by terra-cotta models. (Christian-Thinktank.com)

From Richard W. Bulliet's The Camel and the Wheel: "As has already been mentioned, this type of utilization [camels pulling wagons] goes back to the earliest known period of two-humped camel domestication in the third millennium B.C." (Christian-Thinktank.com)

Additionally, the site presents a list of quotes demonstrating that "[t]he general consensus today is that

domestication definitely was early” (Christian-thinktank.com). The following from Smithsonian Timelines of the Ancient World will suffice: Both the dromedary (the one-humped camel of Arabia) and the Bactrian camel (the two-humped camel of Central Asia) had been domesticated since before 2000 BC. (Christian-thinktank.com)

The abundance of archaeological evidence for early domestication of camels proves the “camels” criticism to be absolutely unfounded. Why do writers such as Tobin, Finkelstein and Silberman make such baseless assertions?

Randall W. Younker, Professor of Old Testament and Biblical Archaeology at Andrews University, has offered an explanation:

It is interesting to note how, once an idea gets into the literature, it can become entrenched in conventional scholarly thinking. I remember doing research on the ancient site of Hama in Syria. As I was reading through the excavation reports (published in French), I came across a reference to a figurine from the 2nd millennium which the excavator thought must be a horse, but the strange hump in the middle of its back made one think of a camel. I looked at the photograph and the figurine was obviously that of a camel! This scholar was so influenced by the idea that camels were not used until the 1st millennium, that when he found a figurine of one in the second millennium, he felt compelled to call it a horse! This is a classic example of circular reasoning. (Younker)

None of the attacks we have discussed poses any threat to the credibility of the Bible, but we must recognize that even a stale argument can discourage belief in someone who does not know it has been falsified by credible evidence. We must prepare ourselves to deal with assaults on the faith, even allegations that were debunked long ago.

WE CAN DEFEND OUR ANCIENT FAITH

Some questions are problematic, but if we search, study, and reason well we can arrive at valid responses to skeptics' questions. As we grow more familiar with evidence supporting the Bible's integrity, we become more adept at defending our ancient faith and guiding others to salvation in Christ.

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IS THE ANCIENT FAITH RELEVANT TODAY? JANE WASHINGTON

Today in our society we hear so much talk, talk, talk. The news dominates our life and inundates our minds. News that is full of liberal ideas, that are said to advance our world to heights unknown.

News such as the prevalence of drugs in our society. News of the deaths caused by these drugs. However, the idea remains to legalize these same drugs for the good of society.

News of abortion, and how it is the right of a woman to choose.

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News of alcoholism and of the destruction it causes, yet, even with alcoholism so prevalent, to drink is a right of choice.

News that invades our psyche of the homosexual movement in America. It comes in a casual setting, in a

fun show you might be watching, in an article that you might read, or in a live broadcast from the very men and women who make the laws of our land.

News of terrorism, persons who wish to destroy, not because the one they will destroy has wronged them personally, but because of control, power, and sheer desire to have the world the way they wish it to be.

This is a look into society at this present time, today.

The list of today's challenges to our strength of character could grow to immeasurable lengths. What are our choices? How do we combat the forces of evil and disruption that seek to take us to the lowest level of a base society? Is our ancient faith relevant today? Will the principles taught so many years ago apply today? Could they lift society from the mire before we sink so deeply never to be pulled up again?

Choice is such an interesting word. In everything we do in this life we have to choose. What education will you receive, choice. What job will you take, choice. Where will you live, choice. Will we serve the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, choice. So it was true for the men of old. The choice made by each great Bible personality tells about their life and their ability to make a right choice for their life.

The Ancient Faith tells of the man, Nehemiah. He found himself in a no-win situation just as we do today. He turned to the only source that he knew would give him the strength to carry on the work that must be done. The enemies, the ones who would control, had accused, spread rumors, proclaimed his defeat at the work and,

just in general, been a huge discouragement to the man Nehemiah. His answer to their intimidation is found in the ancient writings: "For they all were trying to make us afraid, saying, 'Their hands will be weakened in the work, and it will not be done.' Now therefore, O God, strengthen my hands" (Neh. 6:9). [New King James Version used, unless otherwise stated.] This prayer was answered and the work was done. Nehemiah had a confidence that there was a higher being than himself that could control and maintain a peace within him and the workers no matter what occurred. He knew how to combat the evil forces that surrounded him. He made a choice; his choice was his faith, his God, who could give him the strength to soar to great heights.

Today's society is trying to make us afraid. As an individual, we will turn to something for strength. What? Will you know with confidence, as did Nehemiah, that there is a higher being than oneself? Will you pursue knowledge and understanding of that higher being, or will you look at God's Word as ancient faith?

Nehemiah had the work going in the direction that would mean completion. His responsibility was enormous. He needed to have a clear mind that could think, understand, and organize. He did not need the stress. Yes, they too had stress, brought on by a power play. Allowing fear to overtake was not an option. Nehemiah pursued a solution that brought him peace of mind. He knew where to turn for strength, to God. A strengthened hand is a confident hand. In his confidence, with a renewed positive attitude, he went forward and proved God's people are can-do people.

Society today may say it has the answers. It may tell us to change and become more modern in our thinking.

Change, however, is not always good. Worldly change seems to have the wrong value system. It appears to take us in a direction that would not coincide with the path that the ancient faith would have us travel.

Thus says the Lord: "Stand in the ways and see, And ask for the old paths, where the good way is, and walk in it; then you will find rest for your souls" (Jer. 6:16). Now therefore, thus says the Lord of hosts: "Consider your ways!" (Hag. 1:5).

Consider, stand, and walk. This is what we must do to arrive at our choice, God's way, ancient faith, or the world's way. We must consider, think, examine, and evaluate all that we can find to make this paramount decision. We must, after consideration, take a stand. Timidity is not an option when we are to stand. The world rushes right in when we are afraid and can consume us. God said stand. Pick yourself up and take control of this one life that you have been given. Walk. Walk the way of your choice. God wants all men everywhere to come to an understanding of who He is and of what He can do for you in your life. It is left up to you to be the one who makes the choice.

Making a stand for the ancient faith shows that we understand that God's way is the only way in which we, His people, can survive. With all that goes on in this world, the answer still lies within the pages of the word of God. As we read the Bible, we find when to begin to acquire this knowledge and understanding. We see the responsibility that comes to each parent to train so the next generation will know and understand. Train so higher ideals will prevail in generations to come.

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

You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up (Deut. 6:7).

We begin with instruction. Guidance to learn the old ways – the right path that will take us to victory. The victory that comes when we have considered, stood, and walked with our God and with our Savior in the Ancient Faith. If this path is the one we choose, instruction will become our way of life. Knowledge and understanding are the keys to peace of mind. In this knowledge and understanding, we learn that we must study and grow. We cannot lift a society to new heights without growth of our own personal value system.

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15).

But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ... (2 Pet. 3:18).

Knowledge and understanding have been the ways since the beginning. Teaching the next generation when they ask, “What mean these stones” (Josh. 4:21).

At all times learning and teaching, the only ways that will lead to life eternal.

We have begun to understand what God would require of us. Now we must put that into action. We must practice what we have been taught. For example,

Philippians 2:7, “but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant, and coming in the likeness of men.” Here we learn that Jesus came to serve; if we are to emulate Christ, would it not follow that we are to serve others also? Have you tried service being your way of life? If so, you know the joy and peace it brings. All the knowledge we can gain is of no use unless we put it into action.

Hebrews 10: 25, “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.” When we talked of Nehemiah, we talked of his strengthened hand. A strengthened hand is a confident hand. Coming together allows us to draw near, hold fast, and consider each other to love and good works. This gives us that confident hand. Obedience in action.

How will what you have learned from instruction help you? When practiced, it gives you the courage, strength, and confidence to live as God would expect you. Nothing that is of the world is as satisfying as obedience to God’s Word can be. The more that is learned from the Word and put into practice, the more settled our hearts and minds will become. The training should begin at birth so, in adulthood, you are prepared to serve. By serving, you show those who do not know our Savior what it means to be a Christian.

The child draws a picture, it says, “God is the Best.” Where did they learn, how do they know? The rain has continued and the crops are beginning to mildew in the fields. There seems no hope for the harvest. If it continues, this year’s crops will be lost. The father says, “Don’t know what we are to do.” The child says, “Don’t you think God will take care of us?” A two-year old sits

in the back with his parents. The song, *Jesus Loves Me*, is sung and to the top of his lungs he sings. A child shall lead them, Isaiah says. Suffer the little children to come unto me, Jesus said. Much can be learned by watching the love, care, and concern our children have for each other and for us.

The mind that embraces God's Word, that embraces the teaching of our Savior, Christ, is changed. "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 18: 3-4). Why did Christ give us this teaching? To teach us humility, to put away pride and arrogance, always thinking of and putting others before yourself.

Be strong and stand. Consider, stand, and walk. Be vocal in your faith and belief. Help others to see and understand. Do not be afraid of the world and what it can do to you. You are here to serve the choice you have made and the choice was God.

"For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind" (2 Tim. 1:7). God has delivered us from this thing called fear. Fear alarms us, causes us to worry, makes us uneasy, apprehensive, just in general anxious about the world around us. Remember Nehemiah? They are trying to make me afraid. He knew fear was not of God. He knew his source of power. He realized his spirit of power, of courage, and strength. He realized his spirit of love to God, which would set him above the fear of man, and his spirit of a sound mind. His intelligence, his gray matter, was focused where they should have been, on God and His ability to help in the most stressful of times when all seems lost. The peace

that is generated by that sound mind, not thinking what will happen because of someone else, but thinking how do we proceed.

Today, it is our choice to have a sound mind, a deep love for God, and the courage and strength to live for what we believe. Not fear! We are bombarded on all sides with the ways of the world. Comments come such as: nothing wrong with what I am doing, I simply do not understand why you think so. Consider, stand, and walk in the ways of God no matter what you are confronted with in life. This is the path to joy and happiness, to love and understanding, to strength and courage! Fear causes non-action. Strength and courage are built through the teaching of God and brings to each of us the ability to think better, to understand better, to organize better. A strengthened hand is a more confident hand. With confidence, we become self-assured, poised, hopeful, convinced, and positive that the road we are taking is the one that leads to life eternal.

We build our faith from understanding all that we have gathered from our study of God's Word. "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1) For what do we hope? We hope for a home in Heaven. Having not seen heaven it is hard for some to wrap their arms around this hope. But, this is what we must do. We have learned and studied God's Word. We know that Heaven is waiting even though we have not been there, and we embrace the glories of what is to come.

Fear of the unknown sometimes overtakes people and they determine to live for the here and now. That is the call of the world loud and clear. God said no fear. "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear,

because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love" (1 John 4:18). "He who does not love does not know God, for God is Love" (1 John 4:8). Living in the hope that we will end in a place of love, minus fear, a place of warmth, there with the Almighty, the Creator, the Maker of everything, our hearts should long for that hope to become seen.

We must always be ready in our defense of God's Word to the world. "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear" (1 Pet. 3:15). Answers to the world are so important. Giving a reason for your belief, your hope, your faith must always be upon your lips. Has living a Christian life made the life you live a better life? Tell it to those that are lost.

Today's liberal views don't fill the bill when it comes to finding the importance of life. They create a no-win situation. When faced with a no-win situation, turn to the one true factor of this life, God and His love for you.

Just as Nehemiah did when fear approached his life, he went for the strength that could help him overcome. The world reaches in to create in each of us the fear factor. We, like Nehemiah, must go to our source of strength. Strengthening our hands will give us a clear mind, a confident hand, and we will become a can-do person.

Society will always want us to change. We must consider the old way and consider our ways. Consider, stand, and walk to take control of our lives for the God that we love. His Word is still the answer today.

We must begin with our children and grandchildren and teach them “what means these stones.” We must study ourselves and grow stronger in our knowledge and understanding so we may show others the way.

Become as a child. Teach yourself to have humility, to put away pride and arrogance, always thinking of others before our self.

Break away from fear because fear causes non-action. Strengthened hands are confident hands filled with power, love, and a sound mind.

We must be ready always to give that answer as to why this ancient faith is the only faith that matters.

When we think of ancient faith it sounds as though it happened so many, many years ago. But this same faith is as up-to-date, fresh, and current as it was when the rules were set in place. Through our study we have learned that if God said it, we must do it. Do not procrastinate but swing into action with the knowledge in tow, faith in place, and belief that is unwavering.

HOW DO I KEEP THE FAITH FRESH WITHIN ME?

IRENE TAYLOR

INTRODUCTION

Those in the health care industry are continually reminding us of the necessity of maintaining a healthy diet if we desire to enjoy good health. Good health requires that we eat regularly. We are also counseled to eat healthy food. Just any food to fill our stomachs will not achieve the desired goal. Neither will eating once or twice a week. We can all understand the wisdom of regularly practicing good nutrition when it comes to our physical bodies.

When we fail to abide by common sense rules of good nutrition, the body suffers. So much so that often we require the services of a doctor. Suppose the

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doctor prescribes some medicine, suggests a change in our nutritional choices and adds a regimen of sensible

exercise in an effort to get us back on the path of good health. Would we follow his advice? Or will we toss the prescription in the drawer and neglect to take it as well as ignore the other necessary steps back to good health?

WHAT ABOUT OUR SPIRITUAL HEALTH?

Most of us have an innate desire to enjoy good health as long as possible. We are willing to put forth whatever effort is required to maintain our health. We recognize our individual responsibility to keep our bodies as pure and healthy as possible. "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are" (1 Cor. 3:16-17). [All scripture is quoted from the King James Version unless otherwise noted.]

Though there are those who disagree, it seems clear to this writer that this speaks of one's body as a temple of God wherein He dwells by means of His Word. "Ye are the temple of God ..." This gives added incentive to practice good health habits whereby we may have strength to serve Him.

Now let us look at the other side of the coin, the more important side. How is our spiritual health, our faith? Just as the human body becomes weak and impaired due to lack of nourishment, so does the soul. Perhaps you can recall the graphic illustration often used of the wealthy man, hefty and well satisfied with himself. But when he views himself in the mirror, he sees a bony, undernourished soul looking back at him. Why? Though he had generously fed his body, he had starved his soul!

This brings us to the question under consideration.

How do I keep the faith fresh that is within me? The question assumes that we have, at some point in the past, given our soul in believing obedience to the God of heaven. Can we recall the joy and happiness that followed the precious act of baptism which made us a child of the King? The enthusiasm felt and the eagerness to serve has not likely been surpassed since that time. What a challenge it is to keep that enthusiasm fresh. Can it be done?

THE NEED FOR PERSONAL BIBLE STUDY

The Christian life of faith and practice does not come from one or two hours a week in services. We may be present at every service of the local congregation and our faith still be lethargic. Bench warming will not maintain a strong, healthy soul. It takes effort, daily effort, to retain a vibrant, active faith. Like the Bereans of old, we need to search the scriptures daily (Acts 17:11). Jesus admonished the Jews to:

Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me ... Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed rightly dividing the word of truth (John 5:39; 2 Tim. 2:15).

The rendering of the American Standard Version emphasizes the concept of study. Its rendering states, "Give diligence to present thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, handling aright the word of truth." We are to cut it straight. When we give diligence to a matter, we are serious about it. We persevere in learning all we can about it. By so doing we are feeding our faith.

Haphazard Bible study does not increase one's Bible knowledge to any appreciable degree. The most effective study is gained from seeking a quiet place, preferably with a desk or table with a comfortable chair. Good lighting is needed to protect one's eyes. Each individual should choose the method of study most suitable for him/her. He/she may choose to read and meditate through the Bible making notes of things to remember. Some prefer study by topic. Memorization is helpful for some, especially when young. Whatever method is used, it must be done with regularity. We feed our bodies at regular intervals. Likewise, we must feed our soul regularly to maintain a healthy condition. Ideally, a set time should be set aside each day for time to reflect on the Word, God's method of communion with us.

The faith which is kept alive and healthy is one which is properly fed and exercised. Our soul cannot grow into healthy maturity by remaining on a milk diet! When we are new Christians, we need to learn the "milk" of the Word as a foundation upon which to build. "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby" (1 Pet. 2:2). The American Standard Version renders it as long for the milk of the word. That indicates a deep desire for the word. Matthew, revealing the words of Jesus, records, "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled" (Matt. 5:6). Have you ever been so hungry physically that you did not stop until you had satisfied that hunger? Jesus is telling us that our soul should be that hungry for the Word. We should hunger and thirst for it to the extent that we are satisfied only by feeding (studying) on its nourishments. We must partake of the spiritual food if we want to grow. Just as the physical newborn cannot survive without proper nourishment, neither can the spiritual newborn. If we stay a spiritual baby we are abnormal just as much as is the

physical baby who does not grow properly. Hence, Paul warns of the spiritual malnourishment which results when we remain on a milk diet.

For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For everyone that useth milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil (Heb. 5:12-14).

Adults are capable of food which must be chewed. Spiritual adults are capable of deeper study. They are capable of spiritual food which requires deep contemplation and thought. They must be willing to spend time delving into concentrated study to gain the full meaning of scripture.

THE NEED FOR A HEALTHY DIET

When hungry physically, are we willing to eat just anything? What if the food has been carelessly stored and prepared? What if it has been contaminated by vermin or mold? Our area television stations report on area restaurant ratings. Sometimes a restaurant is given a failing score for just such infractions as named above. Are we inclined to patronize such restaurants unless and until we are assured they have corrected the infractions?

What about our spiritual food? What standard will we use in choosing our supply? Are we going to feed on just anything which may come our way? Many new, "exciting"

innovations are coming down the road of religion in our era. Will we accept them? On many occasions our Master instructs, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear" (Matt. 11:15; 13:9; Luke 8:8). But He does not stop there. He cautions us to exercise great care in what we hear!

...Take heed what ye hear; with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you: and unto you that hear shall more be given. Take heed therefore how ye hear: for whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have (Mark 4:24; Luke 8:18).

If we are tempted to subscribe to some or all of the religious teaching available, we cannot keep from becoming confused. We thus expose ourselves to contaminated spiritual food and we are in danger of killing our faith. We must insist on pure, healthy teaching which will help strengthen our faith.

In Titus 2:1 we are admonished to "speak thou the things which become sound doctrine." To speak sound doctrine one must know sound doctrine. Jesus Christ taught,

Do ye not yet understand that whatsoever entereth in at the mouth goeth into the belly, and is cast out into the draught? But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man (Matt. 15:17-18).

Earlier in Matthew, our Lord declared, "for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh" (Matt. 12:34).

Let us reflect further on Titus 2:1. We are commanded to speak sound doctrine. Sound means healthy. Recall that what we speak comes from the heart (mind). This emphasizes the need to fill our heart with only that which is sound or true. Where can we obtain this sound or true doctrine? Not from the religious world in general but from the words of God Himself. He has preserved His teaching for us in the Bible. Thus we should measure and test all religious teaching by the Book of books. If we know the Book, it should be easy to spot error as differentiated from truth but remember – Satan is cunning. Remember Eve? By the use of only one three-letter word, Satan was able to take away her allegiance to God with a false promise to improve self. She heard a lie, believed a lie and obeyed a lie because of the enticement of Satan. We must “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pet. 5:8). Satan never sleeps, he is always “on duty.” We can never let down our guard. We must keep our Christian armour polished and ready for battle at any time (Eph. 6:11).

POWER OF PRAYER

Prayer is our communion with God. Our relationship with God, to have real meaning, must be a two-way communication. Have you ever had a friend who seemed delighted to hear from you but never found time to communicate to you? One-way friendships have a tendency to fade into nothingness. It takes two interested participants to maintain a healthy friendship. Think how God must feel when we occasionally read His Word and seldom, if ever, talk to Him.

Prayer is such a privilege! It is our open line to thank God for the many wonderful blessings showered

on us daily from His generous heart. We do thank God, do we not? Let us not be like the nine lepers and take God's blessings for granted (Luke 17:12-19). The greatest blessing we can ever hope to receive is the gift of God's only begotten Son (2 Cor. 9:15). Our appreciation for this unspeakable gift should rise toward Heaven daily. Without this gift, all is vain! It is through the avenue of prayer that we confess our sins and seek forgiveness. It is thus that we plead for strength to guide us and how we seek understanding of the Guide Book to Heaven. "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto (upon-ASV) thine own understanding" (Prov. 3:5). Through prayer and study we gain strength to resist life's temptations knowing that God has provided a way of escape if we will but use it.

There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man (man can bear - ASV): but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it (1 Cor. 10:13).

God is the source of our strength. "God is my strength and power: and he maketh my way perfect" (2 Sam. 22:33).

THE BEAUTY OF WORSHIP

There is no way we can be found guilty of worshipping God too much! Unlike the lady who complained that the elders where she attended were "trying to church us to death" because they encouraged regular attendance at all services, we should consider it a privilege to have the freedom to assemble often. With the current trend in our nation, we easily could lose that freedom if we do not guard it carefully!

Worship is a time of renewal. To be effective in renewing our faith, it must be in harmony with God's pattern. (And yes, He has given us a pattern of worship.) He plainly prescribes that pattern in John 4:24. "God is a spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." Notice that must placed in the pattern. This makes it imperative that we follow God's instructions. If we wish to please Him, our manner of worship is not a matter of choice, it is a matter of obeying Him. He is the one to be pleased; not us. There is vain worship (Mark 7:7). This is empty and meaningless. There is will worship (Col. 2:23). This, too, is not pleasing to our Father above. There is ignorant worship (Acts 17:22-23). The desire to worship someone or some thing is strong but we may not know the true God. Paul found this to be true in Athens. There are those today who wish to worship but are ignorant of both whom and how.

In today's religious circles many have chosen the realm of will worship. If I like it, it must please God. So, we find included in so-called worship the many gimmicks and innovations pleasing to man with little regard as to how God views such. Too many formerly sound churches of Christ have joined the crowd. In congregations still referred to as the Lord's church we find Christmas and Easter cantatas, praise teams, skits, women serving in public capacities, etc. God does not authorize such. These do not increase true faith but turn us away from God's pattern. The Bible instructs us, "And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name (by the authority - ict) of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him" (Col. 3:17). We gain from worship in proportion to what we put into it. When we put our whole mind and heart in devotion to God, our faith will be strengthened and refreshed.

THE REWARD OF FELLOWSHIP

We do not live in this world alone. God is always with His children. "... (F)or he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me" (Heb. 13:5-6). When trials come, God is there to help us. But, we must have a constant relationship with Him so that He will hear us when we call upon Him.

Our faith will be strengthened when we also maintain close fellowship with the faithful saints in God's kingdom. If we only attend public worship services and rush back to our own little corner of the world, we rob ourselves of much of the beauty of the Christian life. We need fellowship with our brothers and sisters in Christ, God's family. Listen to the sentiment expressed in the song, "God's Family." We are part of God's family who support each other through good times and bad. "Sometimes we laugh together, sometimes we cry." We have a support system that the world can never know or appreciate. When we hold God's hand with one of our own and the hands of our fellow Christians with the other hand, we can enjoy fullness of fellowship.

When the word fellowship is mentioned, one usually thinks of a potluck or some type of food fellowship with friends. This is but a small part of Christian fellowship. Such gatherings bring us closer and should occur often but please do not close the door on fellowship here. The Christian's fellowship means something much deeper.

There is the fellowship to be found when we gather together with fellow saints in true worship and praise to God. This fellowship stimulates our love for God and our desire to serve Him more diligently. When we go to worship

with an empty basket we may fill it with truth and love to sustain us in the coming week. There is the fellowship of service. Our Christian service is a privilege and done from a heart happy to have the opportunity. Service done for the praise of men is empty. Be not as the hypocrites who fasted for the praise of men (Matt. 6:16ff). It is a sad commentary on our Christian conduct when the able-bodied have to be begged to help in a given work program of the local congregation. It is sadly true that about ten percent of the congregational membership willingly carry the work load and ninety percent willingly let them! Those who actively participate are the ones who find joy in being busy for the Lord's Cause. Those actively involved are the ones who find their faith healthy and growing. God gave each of us talents and He expects us to use them. When we fail to do so, we'll find that we will lose them (Matt. 25:24-30).

CONCLUSION

Fresh, healthy faith is maintained through dedicated Bible study, regular prayer, and service (exercise) in the work of the church coupled with Christian fellowship. Note carefully the words of Paul:

Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. Consider what I say; and the Lord give thee understanding in all things. In all things showing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine showing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, Sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you (2 Tim. 1:13; 2:7; Titus 2:7-8).

WHEN IS THE ANCIENT NEW?

JANIE CRAUN

A survey published in 2009 by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life seemed to confirm what some of us already suspected. It concluded that many people are leaving the faith of their childhood. Today, it is reported, one-fourth of 18- to 29-year-olds are not affiliated with any religious body.

According to the survey, some are leaving because they no longer believe what they were taught as children. Some think their needs can be better served somewhere else. And some say they have just “drifted away” (Pew Forum).

Another report released in 2009 by the Barna Research Group reveals that only 9% of all American adults accept

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some core beliefs that most of us have embraced since childhood: (1) that moral truth is absolute; (2) that the Bible is accurate in all that it teaches; (3) that Satan is real;

(4) that salvation cannot be earned through good deeds; (5) that Jesus Christ lived a sinless life; and (5) that God is the creator of the universe who still rules today (Barna "Survey").

The same study also found that less than one-half of 1% of young adults, age 18-23, hold to these core beliefs today. That's one young adult in 200. These findings are troubling and have caused many to ask why? What has led to this religious decline?

THE OLD, OLD STORY TODAY

In recent decades, several of the mainline denominations have experienced sharp losses in membership. Within churches of Christ, our number has generally remained steady although we are not growing significantly as we were 50 years ago. This trend causes us to wonder why more people are not responding to the gospel message today when so many were receptive in the past.

Several reasons have been suggested. Some studies point to the cultural change called Postmodernism that has taken place in the United States in the previous 30 years or more. As the Barna poll reflected, a lot of people do not view the Bible as they once did. They are less concerned with sin and the need for salvation than former generations were. As far back as 1973, Dr. Karl Menninger, a psychiatrist, wrote his classic **Whatever Became of Sin?**, in which he talked about how the very word "sin" had all but disappeared from our vocabulary, resulting in many mental maladjustments. As a society, we have continued in that direction, with humanism putting the emphasis on how to get along with each other rather than on obeying biblical commands.

A social gospel, in many cases, has replaced biblical doctrine. Many view being a good neighbor as more important than living a consecrated life. So the emphasis in many churches is on the building of facilities and programs designed to meet the needs of their members whereas doctrine is downplayed and evangelism is secondary or even non-existent.

DEFINING OUR MISSION

Some studies indicate that a lot of people now view traditional churches as formal and impersonal, which accounts for why many are dropping out. Flavil Yeakley's study released in 2008 revealed that 58.2% of high school graduates in churches of Christ remain in the church whereas 21.2% go on to join other religious groups. Those who graduate and register no current religious affiliation number 20.7%. Some of these who grew up in our congregations, like some of those who have left their denominational upbringing, have gone on to community churches where the emphasis is on an emotional experience.

These findings pose a challenge to us as New Testament Christians. Jesus taught that true worship must involve both spirit and truth. Our mission is to present the gospel message without compromise while exemplifying the love and compassion of Christ to those around us. In the words of Paul, it is to speak "the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15). [All scripture is quoted from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted.]

One study by the Barna Group revealed that a majority of people say they pray within a normal week ("Spirituality"). That finding tells us that many people recognize a need for God in their lives and that they represent soil that has the potential for cultivation.

Jesus used types of soil to represent hearts in the Parable of the Sower recorded in Matthew 13. In that parable, soil types ranged from the hard-packed dirt found on the wayside to the good ground that yielded in abundance. It is significant that three-fourths of the soils mentioned were receptive to the seed, although only one-fourth actually produced anything appreciable. It suggests that a majority of people are open to teaching when it is presented although a much smaller number will become productive Christians.

Some have suggested that we must change the seed in order to see greater growth in our day. But Jesus taught that the problem is the soil rather than the seed. Although we should always be looking for ways to cultivate poorer soil, it seems that the yield would be greater if we concentrated on the rich and fallow ground that is already ready for planting. These are the people who still find the old, old story "living and powerful" (Heb. 4:12).

LET THE CHILDREN COME

Children flocked to Jesus during His earthly ministry. Undoubtedly, they were drawn by His gentleness and by the love they perceived He had for them. On one occasion Jesus summoned a little child to Him and set him in the midst of the disciples, reminding them that they must become as humble as that child if they were to enter the kingdom of heaven. Later, He was greatly displeased when these same disciples rebuked little children who had been brought to Him for a blessing. The men would have sent them away, but Jesus called to them, saying, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 19:14; Mark 10:14; Luke 18:16).

Children represent some of the most fertile soil there is in which to plant the gospel seed. But bringing them up in “the training and admonition of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4) is a task that requires a great deal of effort on the part of parents and teachers. The King James Version uses the word “nurture” which involves both instruction and discipline. A former principal in a Christian school used to remind us as teachers that our job was to nurture students by staying with them until they had mastered whatever it was that we were trying to teach. In the same way, bringing children to the point of faithful obedience requires consistent and dedicated effort.

One of my favorite little books is Nancy Eichman’s **Tend Your Own Garden First**. The subtitle is *How to Sow God’s Seed in Our Children’s Hearts*. Its chapters are filled with practical suggestions for bringing up children in the training and admonition of the Lord. In her chapter on “Preparing the Soil,” Eichman writes:

Imagine the farmer stooping, scooping up some dirt in his hand, and sifting it through his weathered fingers.... Is it rich and ready to produce fruit, or is it infertile from years of misuse and neglect? Analyzing the color, texture and condition of the farmer’s soil tells him what he needs to do to get the best yield from that soil. So it is with our “soil.” Different ages and stages of our children require unique approaches to obtain optimal results (67).

Eichman shares the fact that 85% of an adult’s personality is set by his sixth birthday, so the first six years are crucial for planting God’s Word in children’s hearts if we expect to reap a harvest (78). This is why God commanded

the Israelites to take advantage of every teachable moment in the lives of their children and grandchildren (Deut. 6:1-9). Failure to ground them in the knowledge of God and what He expected of them would result in a spiritual decline in their lives, just as it does today (v. 12).

In her chapter called “A Time to Sow,” Eichman lists some teachable moments in the lives of children. They include times when children have questions or when they have been frightened or hurt. Time spent out-of-doors provides opportunities for sharing lessons that are illustrated in Scripture. Other teaching moments can occur at mealtime and bedtime, when traveling, and during holidays and other special events (Eichman 56-64). All of these examples point to the fact that successful parenting takes a great deal of time and communication and must be a top priority if we are to keep our children faithful.

Much more has been written by others on the subject of parenting. In **Revolutionary Parenting**, his recently published study on raising children, author George Barna says that there are so many books on the subject that it would require releasing 10 new books on parenting every day for the next 21 years to equal the total number already in print (“Research”).

Based on his research, Barna describes three kinds of parenting that are typical today. “Revolutionary parenting” stands in contrast to methods that he calls “parenting by default” and “trial-and-error parenting.” By “revolutionary parenting,” he means taking God’s words and applying them faithfully and consistently in everyday decisions.

But Proverbs 22:6 sums up what is needed as succinctly as any modern textbook. It states the axiom: “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he

is old he will not depart from it.” To summarize Keil and Delitzsch, in their commentary on **Proverbs**, we might say that the passage conveys the idea of a child being continually taught from his youth, with that teaching being reinforced at every stage with techniques and principles suitable for his understanding. This kind of consistent training is absorbed by a child until it becomes second nature to him (Delitzsch).

Solomon says that when seed is planted in the hearts of children during their formative years, the soil being carefully tended, it is very likely to result in a good yield. But growth will require nurturing: regular feeding and watering from the Word of God, exposure to the sunlight of spiritual attributes, an atmosphere of warmth and encouragement, protection from harmful “parasites,” and positive role models to serve as “stakes” for providing direction.

In the church as well as in the home, children should be thought of as fertile soil. Care must be taken to teach, train and nurture them at every stage in their lives. Congregations would do well to invest time in training teachers and parents alike in how to do this through teacher training workshops as well as parenting workshops and classes. Curricula should be planned with children’s physical and spiritual development in mind and should incorporate Bible facts, application, and memory work at every appropriate level. Fellowship activities, camps and retreats, and Bible Bowls can also contribute much to their development.

Yet all these efforts alone may not suffice to ensure that our youth remain faithful after leaving home. According to a 2006 Barna study, a majority of young adults had become disengaged from their spiritual upbringing after leaving

home, although approximately half of all teens say they attend a church-related service or activity of some kind in a typical week ("Most"). The determining factor in whether spiritual seed takes root and grows in children is most often the home. When children see that parents love the Word of God themselves and model spiritual attributes before them, the likelihood that these young people will obey the gospel and remain faithful is significantly improved. And just imagine if Christians in every generation could succeed in bringing their own children to the Lord, the gospel would quickly spread throughout the world.

THE SPIRITUALLY AND PHYSICALLY POOR

Another group receptive to the gospel consists of those whom Jesus called the poor in spirit. In the Sermon on the Mount, He may have surprised some hearers in saying that the kingdom of heaven belongs to the spiritually destitute, and not just to those who are perceived as righteous (Matt. 5:3-6). The poor in spirit are those who are in need of a physician because sin has left them hurting (9:10-12). They hunger and thirst for a better way of life, and as a result they are more inclined to have their needs filled. If we are not careful, we can find ourselves shying away from the spiritually bankrupt as the Pharisees did when they criticized Jesus for reaching out to "sinners."

The physically poor are often overlooked also. James 2:1-6 describes a church assembly in which a well-dressed visitor received a warmer welcome than a poor man in filthy clothes. The passage goes on to remind readers that the poor in this world's goods have a capacity for becoming rich in faith. Paul, who was often poorly clothed himself, knew hunger and homelessness at times (1 Cor. 4:11). He also recognized that, relatively speaking, not many noble (literally, "well-born") will accept the gospel's call (1:26).

It was the common people who heard Jesus most gladly (Mark 12:37).

Christians have a unique opportunity to help people in these kinds of situations. Jail ministries, food and clothing giveaways, and financial counseling based on biblical principles are just a few of the means that we can use. Most cities of any size now have growing pockets of immigrant families, also, many of whom are unfamiliar with New Testament Christianity. It was a group consisting of the hungry and thirsty, the strangers, the naked, and the sick and imprisoned about whom Jesus said, “[I]nasmuch as you did not do it [minister] to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me” (Matt. 25:45).

THOSE WHO HAVE NEVER HEARD

As a rule, gospel meetings today do not resemble the “revivals” that many of us remember from the 1940s, ‘50s and ‘60s. Seldom today do people arrive by the busload, requiring folding chairs in the aisles. Religious discussions and old-time debates no longer draw the crowds they once did of those who are interested in examining doctrinal differences. Because of this, some might think that the gospel has lost its appeal; but this is not true.

The fact is, more than 6 billion people are in the world. Of this number only about one-third fall into the very general category of “Christian” according to some estimates, though Jesus said that many who regard themselves as Christian are not His (Matt. 7:22). It is safe to assume, then, that there are still many people—in fact a majority of the world’s population—who do not know Jesus. Of this number, many are responding eagerly to the message of non-denominational Christianity when they hear it.

World Bible School alone reports that a million new students request WBS studies every year, and of that number approximately 13,000 will complete their obedience by being baptized into Christ. And this represents just one effort. Phenomenal growth has been reported in the spread of the church throughout Africa, India and Central and South America among other places. Today, as in the first century, the fields are indeed “white for harvest” (John 4:35).

TELLING THE OLD, OLD STORY

One of my favorite hymns is *“Tell Me the Story of Jesus,”* written by Fanny Crosby. The author was blind, having lost her sight as a little girl; and so, unable to read as others might, she voiced these words: “Tell me the story of Jesus, write on my heart every word.” Remarkably, Fannie Crosby felt that blindness had caused her to be more receptive to God’s Word and said this about her situation:

It seemed intended by the blessed providence of God that I should be blind all my life, and I thank him for the dispensation. If perfect earthly sight were offered me tomorrow I would not accept it. I might not have sung hymns to the praise of God if I had been distracted by the beautiful and interesting things about me (“Fanny”).

Kate Hankey wrote, “Tell me the old, old story of unseen things above, of Jesus and His glory, of Jesus and His love. Tell me the story simply, as to a little child, for I am weak and weary and helpless and defiled.” She also wrote, “I love to tell the story, for some have never heard the message of salvation from God’s own holy Word.”

These beautiful sentiments remind us that the gospel still has appeal. The weak and weary in this world still desire rest. The helpless and defiled still need forgiveness. The young and those who have never heard still need to be taught.

And Hankey was right. Those of us who know the story best never tire of hearing it repeated.

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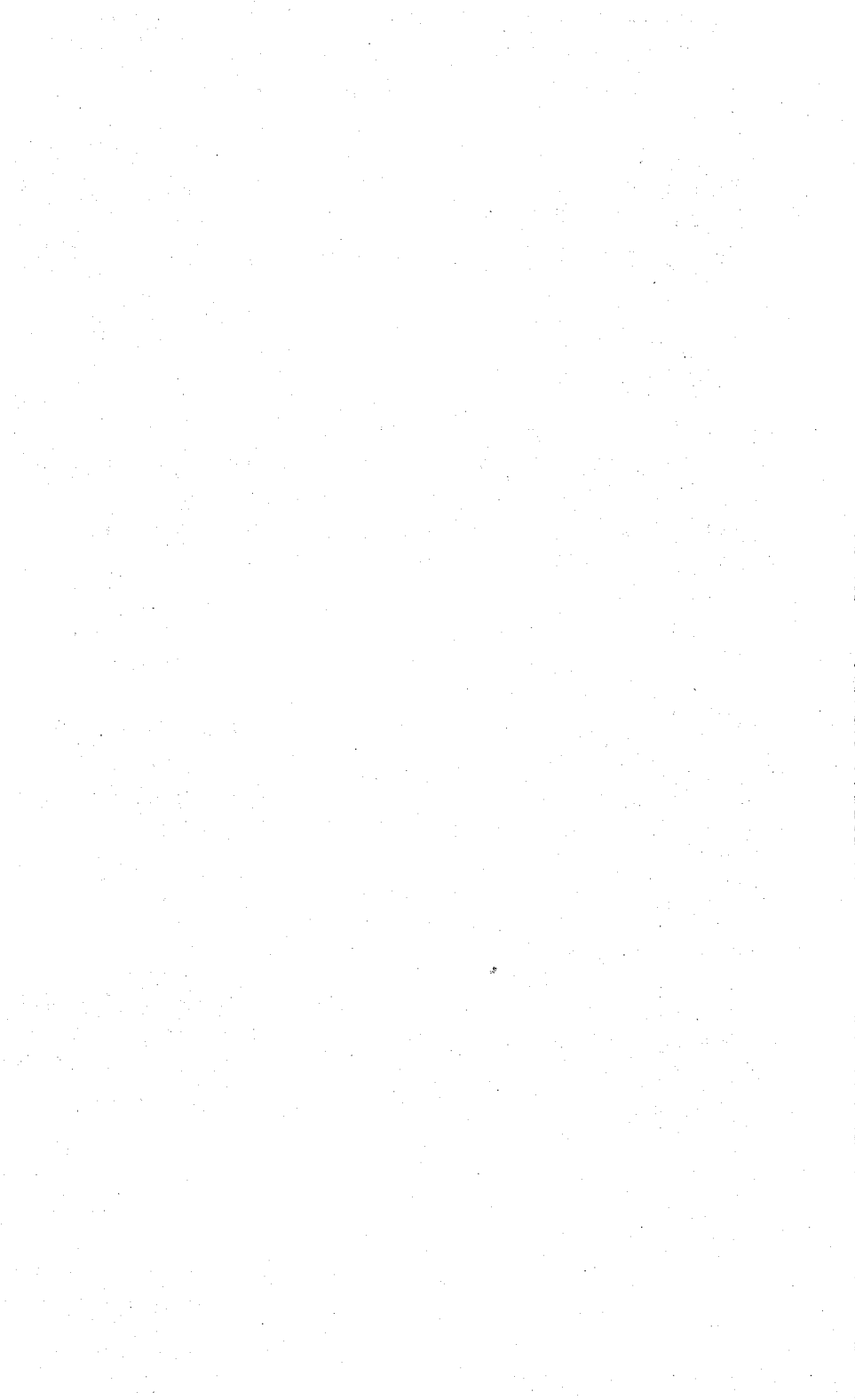
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WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ANCIENT FAITH AND TRADITION?

TERESA HAMPTON

Within families, the word “tradition” usually takes on a warm, purposeful meaning. The Kurt Warner family has a unique family tradition. He is the quarterback for the Arizona Cardinals. He and his wife have seven children. When they go out to eat, the children pick another family in the restaurant. They anonymously pay their tab for them. “The secret is, the family can never know who did it. It’s all about being charitable for charity’s sake—not for the sake of being thanked or recognized for doing a good deed” (King).

Like the Warners, my family was large. I had six brothers and sisters. We were given rituals and traditions, like feeding a large crew at Thanksgiving and inviting

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strangers to join us. It was a good tradition. Another tradition was assembling often with the saints. If the church doors were open, Dad, Mom and all seven children were there. It was a good tradition. It is also true that we were often about five minutes late. That was not a good tradition!

RITUALS AND TRADITIONS

Jeff Herring gives the benefits of family rituals and traditions. He says, “Regular and consistent family traditions/rituals can provide both adults and children with the following:

- A sense of belonging
- Identity and identification
- Role models
- A sense of purpose
- Connections
- Stability and continuity in a fast-paced and hectic world.”

Most would agree with Herring’s assessment—the word “tradition” is not a bad word when we are talking about well-functioning families. However, the word seems to take on a different meaning when we are talking about church family. For that reason, we will consider what is meant by the word “tradition” as found in the New Testament. What are good traditions and bad traditions? What about traditions not required, but acceptable or expedient?

HANDING IT DOWN

The Greek word *paradosis*, translated “tradition,” means “a handing down or on” (Vine 147). It refers to anything (teaching or ordinance) handed down from generation to generation. Thayer says it means, “a giving over which is done by word of mouth or in writing, i.e. tradition by instruction, narrative, precept, etc.” (p. 481). The New Testament refers to two basic kinds of traditions.

HUMAN TRADITION

The first is human tradition. If we teach human

traditions as doctrine or matters of faith it will keep us from heaven. If we teach these traditions as essential elements of worship, it makes our worship vain.

Jesus strongly condemned this very thing. Jewish leaders had allowed a change in one of the Ten Commandments (Matt. 15:1-9). Instead of honoring their aging fathers and mothers with monetary care, they gave the money as a gift to God, skirting around the fifth commandment. Jesus called them, "Hypocrites!" They were teaching as doctrines the commandments of men, making the commandment of God void or of no effect.

Paul spoke to the early church about the danger of allowing human tradition to creep into the body of Christ. "See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ" (Col. 2:8). [All scriptures taken from the ESV unless otherwise noted]. Lipscomb said, "All the philosophies of men, all the deceits of human wisdom, and all the rudiments of the world discovered by human reason spoil men, ruin their souls, lead them to everlasting death by leading them away from God and his salvation" (276).

DIVINE TRADITION

The New Testament addresses a second kind of tradition. It is divine tradition, the truth, the doctrine of Christ, which must be believed, taught, practiced and passed on to other believers.

John recorded Jesus' words when He said the Holy Spirit would guide the apostles into all the truth (John 16:13). In turn, the apostles preached and taught the truths that had been delivered to them, as per Jesus' command,

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations baptizing them...teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:19-20). Paul said, “So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter” (2 Thess. 2:15). In Paul’s day, many basic truths were passed along through the spoken word. The written word was not available to all. However, the inspired writings and letters were either shared by word or copied and shared. They were then passed down from generation to generation.

BASIC TRUTHS

It was important that Christians understood the seriousness of holding to the apostles’ traditions as basic truths. Paul said, “Now I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I delivered them to you” (1 Cor. 11:2). Paul warned the Thessalonians, “Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us” (2 Thess. 3:6).

The church of today is no different than the church of Paul’s day. Our adherence to the ancient faith in its pure form is just as relevant and needful to us as it was with those of the first century.

TRANSGRESS OR PROGRESS

Toward the end of his life John warned, “Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son” (2 John 9). The

word “transgress” carries with it the meaning of ‘to go beyond,’ much like our English verb ‘progress,’ to move forward, to develop to a higher, better, or more advanced stage (Merriam-Webster). If we run ahead of God, it implies that our thoughts are higher, more advanced than God’s. Coffman commented on John’s words saying,

The heresy of this age is that religious teachers may “go beyond” Christ’s teachings in any direction they please, or that they may eliminate from their doctrine any of the Lord’s teachings that they hold to be unnecessary or distasteful to themselves. The apostle John, in this verse, sufficiently warned all people that such departures or omissions remove people from any claim of having God. In a practical sense, of course, this limits authority in the Christian religion to the teachings of the New Testament, because there and there alone may be found the authentic truth “first spoken by the Lord,” and delivered unto us “by them that heard him.” A proper appreciation of this truth would relegate a great deal of present day religiosity to the ash heap.

The dangers of human tradition are a serious threat to the Lord’s church. We can be led away with human tradition borne out of philosophy, or an implied superior grasp of knowledge. It is not uncommon with these brethren to hear derogatory statements about church tradition and the old paths. On the flip side, some resemble the scribes and Pharisees and make tradition as binding as scripture, which is precisely what happened years ago in the centuries following the birth of the church. Its result was Catholicism. These brethren resort to name calling and

derogatory statements about the ones who oppose them. The former represents the Christian pendulum swinging to the far left. The latter represents the pendulum swinging to the far right. Either position does not represent the balance found in God's word, as well as the unity and love God so desires in His church.

TRADITION AND WORSHIP

Unfortunately, many of the controversial issues regarding tradition seem to be related in some way to worship. In part, this has come about because some believed worship lost one of its basic elements, the spirit. In their view, worship became a series of rote actions. Some chose to solve this problem with change by introducing something new, refreshing, or exciting. But this, too, had its downside because "the second time you do something it becomes tradition," and, with their reasoning, the only way to solve this problem is more change. The emotion-driven changes seemed to morph into an addictive phase leading them farther and farther from divinely authorized worship. The focus became what was pleasing to man, instead of what was pleasing to God.

IN SPIRIT AND IN TRUTH

An understanding of true worship is what is needed. We can have the form of worship, all of our "i's dotted" and all of our "t's crossed," but God requires more. We can experience the exhilaration of emotion-driven worship, but God requires more. Jesus said those who worship God must worship Him in spirit and in truth (John 4:24). We cannot please God with the correct form of worship (based on truth), and not engage our spirit. Nor can we please Him with an engaging spirit to the neglect of the proper form He desires. The only pleasing worship in God's sight

is that which combines an engaging heart (spirit) with obedient action (form).

FINDING ANSWERS

The criteria for finding answers to questions and issues of dispute should always be God's Word. It should not be determined by man's wisdom, his desire or need for change, or what societal norms and trends dictate. Paul warned, "not to go beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up in favor of one against another" (1 Cor. 4:6). We must turn to God's word for the final say in all things, and not go beyond what is written.

THE LORD'S DAY

The act of assembling on every first day of the week is grounded firmly in scripture, beginning with the resurrected Lord appearing to the disciples, and continuing throughout the early years of the church (Mark 16:9; John 20:19; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2). The writer of Hebrews emphasized the importance of exhortation in the assemblies (Heb. 10:25). If we forsake the assembly we transgress or 'go beyond.' However, the time of assembling is open to our choosing based on the needs of each congregation.

THE SUPPER OF THE LORD

The Lord's Supper is grounded firmly in Jesus' command, apostolic command, and apostolic example (Matt. 26:26-30; Mark 14:22-26; Luke 22:14-20; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 11:17-29). In addition, non-Christian historians recorded that the early church met on the first day of the week to break bread, and did so for centuries. Therefore, when we participate each Sunday in the supper of the Lord, our actions are not based on human tradition, but

on ancient faith. If we change the emblems of the Supper to anything other than unleavened bread and fruit of the vine, if we partake on any day other than the first day of the week, we transgress or 'go beyond.' However, the time of day is not specified. It is open to our choosing in terms of what is expedient for each congregation.

VOICE AND HEART

The form of music in worship is grounded firmly in apostolic command and example, that we use our singing voices and engage our hearts in lifting songs of praise (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16-17). Additionally, historical records reveal that the early church must have understood this divine tradition because they used vocal singing up to the fourth century. Therefore, if we change or add to the two specified elements, singing and engaging our hearts, we transgress or 'go beyond.'

We should bear in mind that singing songs in a rote manner (proper form, according to truth) without involving the heart (the spirit) is not pleasing to God. The number of songs, however, is not specified and open to our choosing. Also songbooks or paperless hymnals are simply an expedient way to conduct the song service. Some choose to quibble over old songs or new songs. In truth, when *Amazing Grace* was published in the late 1800's it was new to God's people at that time, but they embraced the spiritual words and melody with fervor. We should not reduce the effectiveness of the church by such arguments.

GOD'S ESTABLISHED AUTHORITY

The roles of conduct of man and woman in worship are firmly grounded in apostolic command and example

(1 Tim. 2:11-13; Acts 18:24-26). When men refuse to lead they minimize the role God planned for them. Generally speaking, a vacuum will be filled. When women assume authoritative positions in the church (preaching, leading prayer/song, etc. with men) they transgress or 'go beyond' God's established authority revealed in His word, which Paul reminds was God's intent at the creation of man and woman. This divine plan supersedes culture, societal trends, and human desire.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Controversial issues surrounding tradition are certainly not confined to matters of worship. Questions arise continually about why we do the things we do, and rightly so. As children of God, we should examine what we do and our motivation for doing so. We should ask questions and seriously consider matters of tradition and faith, following the example of the Bereans who searched the scriptures daily "to find out whether these things were so" (Acts 17:11). We should teach our children how to ask and answer questions about tradition, using God's word as the only guide and source to find the answers.

THE ANCIENT PATHS

The word "tradition" does not have to be an ugly word in the church. As children of God, let us remember the importance of traditions in any balanced, well-functioning family, whether it is physical family or church family. Rituals and traditions can add a sense of belonging, identity, role models, a sense of purpose, connections, and stability in a fast-paced world. We merely need to understand the meaning of good tradition and bad tradition, that is, divine tradition and human tradition.

The Lord told Jeremiah, "Stand by the roads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls, but they said, 'We will not walk in it'" (6:16). Let us learn from the mistakes of the Israelites. Let us rely on the ancient faith revealed in God's word to guide us in understanding divine traditions, as well as those that are not obligatory, but allowable or expedient. Our adherence to this faith in its pure form is just as needful to us as it was with those of Jeremiah's day or Christians of the first century. The ancient faith has the same great power to guide us in all things and lead us to please our Maker and Creator, who is the Ancient of Days.

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