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## **2000 Preachers' Study Notes**

### ***Difficult Texts***

**held at the Church of Christ on Northwest Twenty-First  
Street in Oklahoma City, OK**

#### **Moderators:**

**Cliff Arney**

**Duane Cutter**

**Glen Osburn**

The views expressed in the Preachers' Study Notes are the views of the particular and individual authors, and are not necessarily the views of the editors of the Notes, the moderators, the host congregation, other participants and authors, or the **Christian's Expositor**. Each article has the address of the author appended should you desire to respond to the author or seek additional information. The editor of this volume and of the **Christian's Expositor** encourages readers to test all things by the Word of God (1 Thess. 5:21; 2 Tim. 2:15; Acts 17:11). May God bless you in your pursuit of truth.

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# **Difficult Texts**

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## Foreword

The 2000 Preachers' Study was organized and directed by the 21<sup>st</sup> Street Church of Christ in Oklahoma City, OK, and had as its theme "Difficult Texts." Each participant was assigned one or more passages containing interpretive difficulties along with a brief outline highlighting the difficulties to be addressed. Each participant conducted himself admirably in respect to demeanor and scholarship. The moderators for the study were brethren Cliff Arney, Duane Cutter, and Glen Osburn of the 21<sup>st</sup> Street congregation.

In this book we have preserved the manuscripts of all nineteen presentations delivered during the 2000 Preachers' Study. For those who were in attendance, this book serves as a reminder of the great truths that were presented. For others, it will be a wonderful aid in achieving a better understanding of these difficult texts of the Bible.

This is the thirteenth consecutive year the **Christian's Expositor** has published the manuscripts from the annual Preachers' Study. It is a project requiring considerable effort and expense, but one we believe is of great value to the church. We would like to publicly acknowledge the moderators for their work in assigning the topics and managing the oral sessions, and sisters Martha J. Morris and Linda Cutter for contributing many hours of editing expertise. Special consideration goes to L. Melvin Crouch, whose fiscal generosity and love for the truth has made the publication of the Preachers' Study Notes a viable project.

Jim Crouch, editor

# **Modest Apparel; The Woman's Role**

*by Melvin Blalock*

I have been asked to deal with several passages pertinent to modest apparel and the woman's role in the church. These may be viewed as separate topics, but they are certainly connected. It was with some trepidation that I agreed to accept this subject. With many, this is not a popular subject, and whatever one might say will probably displease someone. However, I seek not to please men, but God. That being said, I am honored to participate in this study and to give consideration to the following passages in the order that was requested: Deuteronomy 22:5; 1 Peter 3:3; 1 Timothy 2:9-10; 1 Timothy 2:11-12; 1 Corinthians 14:34-35; and 1 Timothy 2:8-15.

## **Deuteronomy 22:5**

The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment: for all that do so are abomination unto the LORD thy God.

This prohibition is not at all difficult to understand. These instructions were given to Old Testament Israel. It applied with equal force to both sexes and absolutely forbade cross-dressing. The woman was not to wear a man's garment, nor was the man to wear a woman's garment. This tells me that the unisex movement did not originate with God. God created men and women to be different, and He insisted upon that distinction being readily discernible. The clothing was to be such that would easily distinguish the sexes. To attempt to obliterate this distinction was contemptible to God. To use the wording of Deuteronomy, "it was an abomination."

Strong's Hebrew Dictionary (#8441) defines this word to mean something "disgusting, an abhorrence."

Webster's New World Dictionary of American English, Third College Edition, offers the following definition: "an abominating; great hatred and disgust; loathing; anything hateful and disgusting."

God found this practice disgusting. My friends, that is pretty strong language. Some may feel we need not be concerned with this passage because it is in the Old Testament, but I am always concerned when God says He abhors something. I cannot imagine our eternal and unchangeable God, who is so definite about something He finds disgusting, at a later time becoming acclimated to it and acceptant of it. While it is true that we are not amenable to the

laws of the Old Testament, we do not discard principles that are clearly set forth there in God's dealings with man. We are reminded of this in the New Testament by the following passages:

For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope (Rom. 15:4).

Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted (1 Cor. 10:6).

Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, on whom the ends of the ages have come (1 Cor. 10:11).

And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. 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. 3:15-17).

Many commentators say that "scriptures" in this passage refer to the Old Testament.

I like what Matthew Henry had to say in his commentary regarding Deuteronomy 22:5: "The distinction of the sexes by apparel is to be kept up, for the preservation of our own and our neighbour's chastity, v. 5."

There are New Testament passages that show plainly that God still wants men to look and act like men and women to look and act like women. Effeminacy in men is condemned. Jesus talked about soft or effeminate clothing on men in Matthew 11:7-8, saying that they who wear such are in king's houses.

Paul said that the effeminate would not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9). Concerning the hair, Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 11:14-15:

Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him? But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering.

In these passages, as well as those we have under consideration, we find that God has distinctive roles for men and women and that their wearing apparel is also to be distinctive of their gender.

Certainly there is much teaching about morality and righteousness in Deuteronomy 22. There are things recorded there for our admonition even in this last dispensation of time. In studying these issues, it has been my observation that God has not lowered moral standards since those words were given to Israel so long ago. God has not "loosened up" on any moral issues that I can

think of. If anything, the standard is higher in the New Testament. Adultery is an example: "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart" (Mt. 5:27-28). Divorce for any cause was tolerated under the Mosaic system, which is not so in this dispensation.

Let me say clearly that the unisex movement was clearly forbidden under the law, and I believe it is no less an abomination to God today. Lesbianism and homosexuality are often associated with cross-dressing. Homosexuality was also an abomination to God (Lev. 18:22). Like cross-dressing, homosexuality is not specifically called an abomination in the New Testament, but it is denounced plainly as sin. The point is that if either of these was an abomination then, we believe they are no less an abomination today. Homosexuality will close the doors of heaven against its adherents (1 Cor. 6:9). The Deuteronomy passage has to do with the subject of the woman's role and her modesty, which is shown by not wearing that which pertains to a man.

### 1 Peter 3:3-4

Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel. But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price.

The Holy Spirit in this passage is de-emphasizing the outward adornment and exalting the inward beauty, the ornamentation of a gentle and quiet spirit. It should be understood that he does not forbid the wearing of certain ornaments, or that of apparel, but rather the inner person is where the emphasis is to be placed. Dr. James MacKnight offers the following comments:

*Let it not be the outward adorning only.* The word 'only' is supplied here, agreeably to the known phrasology of scripture, and to the nature of precept. For we cannot suppose that the apostle forbids Christian women to adorn themselves with apparel suitable to their station, any more than the Lord forbade his disciples to labour for meat that perisheth, John vi. 27. His meaning in that precept certainly was, that the disciples were not to labour for meat which perisheth only, but also for the meat that endureth to everlasting life..."

MacKnight used the Syriac version in his scripture reference. It reads as follows: "Of these, let the adorning be not what is outward only, of plaiting of hair, and of putting round golden chains, or of putting on clothes." The NKJV has a similar rendering: (1 Pet. 3:3) "Do not let your adornment be merely



outward—arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel.” The language contained in these verses is known as a Hebraism, which is common in sacred languages. Guy N. Woods makes the following significant observation:

So here Paul does not forbid women to wear jewels, or to adorn themselves with modest apparel; he does admonish them to regard such as utterly worthless in comparison with the graces which adorn the Christian character, and which alone determine one's worth in God's sight...Paul also gave attention to the vanity characteristic of worldly women in adorning themselves with 'braided hair, gold or pearls or costly raiment' (1 Tim. 2:9), and from the historians of the period in which Peter wrote, we learn that women were disposed to go to extreme lengths in braiding and plaiting their hair, often arranging massive whorls of it several inches above the head into which had been woven twisted strands of gold and chains of pearls which glistened and scintillated in the light, thus making an impression of great brilliance.

### 1 Timothy 2:9-10

In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; but (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works.

Some argue that Paul is giving instruction for the woman's adornment in the public assembly of the church. While his instructions would certainly include the assemblies, I believe he was concerned for the Christian woman's adornment and behavior in general. I do not believe the verses in this text are limited to the assembly. I will later give you the reasons why I believe this to be true. In this passage, Paul is concerned with Christian women being adorned modestly. First, he speaks of modest apparel. It will be helpful to define some of the wording of this verse.

W. E. Vine defines the word “modest”:

*kosmios*, orderly, well-arranged, decent, modest.

He defines the word “apparel”:

*katastole*... connected with *katastello*, “to send or let down, to lower” (*kata*, “down,” *stello*, “to send”), was primarily a garment let down; hence, “dress, attire,” in general (cf. *STOLE*, a loose outer garment worn by kings and persons of rank—Eng., “stole”); <1 Tim. 2:9>, “apparel” (Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words).

Thayer defines **katastole**, "A garment let down, dress, and attire." Young defines this word, "long robe." **katastello** is found in no other text in the Bible. When I read this definition of apparel, my mind envisions our godly sisters with their beautiful uncut hair and their modest dresses. We should not overlook this significant word, **katastello**, meaning "to send or let down, to lower."

It is evident that modest apparel means a woman's clothing should not be such as would expose her body in a way to suggest evil thoughts. Shamefacedness means womanliness; the opposite of brazenness. The Greek word for sobriety is also defined 'self-control' in Thayer's lexicon. (E. M. Zerr).

A woman may be so skimpily clad that she reveals her body, provoking lust, or she may be fully clothed, and yet her clothing be so tight that it reveals her anatomy to the point that she is no longer decent. Either is the opposite of "modest or seemly" attire. There are items of clothing that cannot be worn modestly in public. The woman may be attired so elaborately that it would call undue attention to her and, hence, would not be modest.

Brother Mike Criswell gave the following good rules concerning modest apparel. He wrote of the three "L's"—Lots, Loose, Long. He states:

This seems to be a good rule of thumb for both men and women. Lots, loose, and long, so it doesn't reveal the form and shape of the body so as to incite lust in the opposite sex...What principles are Christians to follow in deciding what to wear? a. The garment must distinguish the person from the opposite sex. b. The garment must not be too flashy but must depict a heart of modesty. c. The garment must not incite lust in the opposite sex.

"Shamefacedness" is defined by W. E. Vine: "Shamefastness: *aidos*, a sense of shame, modesty, is used regarding the demeanour of women in the church, 1 Tim. 2:9...Shamefastness is that modesty which is 'fast' or rooted in the character" (Davies; Bible English, p. 12).

In our immoral world, so many have no sense of shame, and they openly show that to be true by their demeanor and their mode of dress. The Apostle is saying that a godly woman will have that inward modesty, "shamefastness," rooted in her character. By the indecent behavior and the improper attire worn by many, we are reminded of the words penned by Jeremiah: "Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? Nay, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush..." (8:12). May God's people never become so like the world that they lose their ability to blush.

Sobriety is another quality that composes the godly woman's character. "Sobriety" is defined by W. E. Vine: *sophrosune*, denotes soundness of

mind...Acts 26:25, "soberness;" 1 Tim. 2:9, 15, "sobriety;" 'sound judgment' practically expresses the meaning.

It is that habitual inner self-government, with its constant rein on all the passions and desires, which would hinder the temptation to these from arising, or at all events from arising in such strength as would overbear the checks and barriers which *aidos* (shamefastness) opposed to it (Trench, *Synonyms*, pp. xx, end).

In the first part of verse 9, he discusses the importance of wearing modest clothing and the inward qualities of the godly woman that govern her choices in that clothing. In the latter part of the verse, he speaks of undue emphasis being placed upon outward ornamentation. As we noted from Guy N. Wood in his commentary on 1 Peter, it was a common practice at that time to weave strands of gold and pearls and other costly array in the hair, calling undue attention to one's self. Shamefastness and sobriety would rule against this practice. We should not conclude from this that all makeup and jewelry are forbidden, but moderation is the key. The real emphasis is not to be on the outward adornment. Paul says that the godly woman should adorn herself instead with good works (v. 10). This is not a contradiction of Peter when he said, "But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price" (1 Pet. 3:4). Her meek and quiet spirit and her good works are the adornment that will make her truly attractive. When we study these verses, surely we are reminded of the "virtuous woman" in Proverbs. "Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the LORD, she shall be praised. Give her of the fruit of her hands; and let her own works praise her in the gates" (Prov. 31:30-31). The "virtuous woman" dressed in a way that was becoming to her station: "She maketh herself coverings of tapestry; her clothing is silk and purple" (Prov. 31:22).

There are several points that lead us to the conclusion that the verses in 1 Timothy 2 are not limited to the assembly. We will notice a couple of those at this point. It is absurd to think that Paul is only concerned with modest apparel in the assembly. Godly women are to dress always in a way that is indicative of inward modesty and sobriety. Furthermore, her real adornment is to be that of good works that is becoming a woman professing godliness. Are we to suppose that these good works are only performed in the assemblies? Quite the opposite is true. Most good works performed by women are outside of the church assembly.

**I Timothy 2:11-12**

Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.

After instructing the woman on her apparel and adornment, Paul next turns to the subject of the woman's role. I am indebted to Brother Alan Bonifay for the following information, along with a good outline explaining these two verses. Alan noted in his study:

1. There are three distinct kinds of teaching situations described in the Scripture.
2. The Word of God is to be taught in the worship assemblies of the church.
  - a. Whether such assemblies are public or private is immaterial.
  - b. When the church is called together for worship the rules of 1 Corinthians 14 apply.
  - c. In such situations, only faithful men may teach.
  - d. Women must remain silent.
3. The Word of God may also be taught in public situations.
  - a. When it is, it must be done by faithful men.
  - b. Women may not teach in such situations.
4. The Word of God may be taught in "house to house" situations which are narrowly circumscribed "private sessions" under the authority of the Christian home and generally comprising a group only as large as one might expect to encounter in a house-- in practical terms, it will probably be limited to less than a dozen participants on almost all such occasions.
  - a. The question remains as to who is authorized by Scripture to teach in such situations.
  - b. In order to answer that question, we must examine another passage and its ramifications (1 Tim. 2:12).

**II. What does the Bible say about women teaching God's Word?**

Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence (1 Tim. 2:11-12).

- A. What does this passage preclude?
  1. Women are prohibited from teaching the Word of God.
  2. Women are also prohibited from usurping authority over a man.
- B. What does the passage teach women to do positively?

1. It teaches her to learn in silence.
  2. Silence can mean "rest, quiet, tranquility; a quiet tranquil life as it does in 2 Thessalonians 3:12, or it can mean silence as it does here and in Acts 22:2" (AGL, p. 189).
  3. It also teaches that women are to learn "with all subjection."
  4. Subjection means "to place or arrange under; to subordinate, 1 Corinthians 15:27; to bring under influence, Romans 8:20 passively, to be subordinate, 1 Corinthians 14:32; to be brought under a state or influence, Romans 8:20; in the middle voice it means to submit one's self, to render obedience, be submissive, Luke 2:51; 10:17" (AGL, p. 419). Here it conveys the idea of submissiveness as in 2 Corinthians 9:13 or Galatians 2:5.
- C. Does this passage refer only to the assembly of the church for worship?
1. Many, if not most, commentaries say that it does.
  2. Many study Bibles and Bibles, which are arranged in paragraph form with subheadings added, say so.
  3. Notwithstanding such authority, we say that the answer is "No" for at least three reasons.
    - a. There is absolutely nothing in the text, the context or even the remote context, which indicates that the assembling of the congregation for worship is in view-not one shred of evidence exists for such a notion.
    - b. Verse 8 instructs men to "pray every where." Obviously, Paul's command is not limited to church assemblies.
    - c. In verse 9, if the assembly were in view, then outside of the assembly, women would not be prohibited from wearing immodest apparel. Such a contrived position approaches the absurd.
  4. Why, then, do many commentaries take the view that Paul references the worship assemblies of the church in this passage?
    - a. Roman Catholic and Protestant churches are so rife with error that this position is more convenient.
    - b. Likewise, digressive churches of Christ have their own agendas to sustain.
- D. Then, does this passage teach that women are forbidden to teach God's Word at all?
1. If this were all the New Testament said about women teaching the Scriptures, the answer would be "yes."
  2. However, it is not all that is said.

- a. In 2 Timothy 1:5 and 3:14-17, Timothy's mother and grandmother are commended for teaching Timothy the Scriptures from his infancy.
  - b. In Titus 2:3-5, older Christian women are commanded to be "teachers of good things" in order that they might equip or train the younger women concerning their Christian obligations as wives and mothers.
    - (1) **kalodidaskalos**—teaching what is good, a teacher of good (AGL, p. 211).
    - (2) **sophronizo**—properly to render any one...to restore to a right mind; to make sober-minded, to steady by exhortation and guidance" (AGL, p. 396).
  - c. Acts 21:9—Philip had four daughters who possessed the gift of prophecy.
  - d. 1 Corinthians 11:5—This passage gives regulation to women concerning praying and prophesying.
  - e. Acts 18:26—Priscilla assisted her husband, Aquilla, in instructing Apollos.
3. In view of all of these passages instructing women to teach, what then does 1 Timothy 2:11-12 mean?
    - a. In light of verses 8-9, the scope of the passage is broader than the worship assembly.
    - b. It is not, however, so broad in scope as to be without limit, for women are instructed to teach God's Word in certain circumstances.
    - c. Acts 20:20 provides the clue, for Paul separates public teaching from that conducted on the intimate basis of "house to house" teaching.
      - (1) "Publicly" here includes the teaching that is open to or accessible to the public.
      - (2) "House to house" teaching is that which occurs on the privacy level of someone's home.
    - d. Conclusively, then, what is forbidden to women in 1 Timothy 2:11-12 is any form of public teaching of God's Word.

### Comments from Others

Though most commentators hold the public assembly view, commentator E. M. Zerr is an exception. He writes beginning at 1 Timothy 2:1:

Some commentators think this instruction has reference to the public services of the congregation. Doubtless it includes that, but verse 8

commands that men pray everywhere, which makes the exhortation general.

Matthew Henry writes concerning prayer in his comments on 1 Timothy 2:8: "Men must pray everywhere: no place is amiss of prayer, no place more acceptable to God than another." Ellicott comments on the Greek word for "learn," **manthano**, and states that it is "in antithesis (contrast) to **didasko**." On the subject of Christianity changing the primal relationship of women to men, he also states:

While it animated and spiritualized their fellowship, it no less definitely assigned to them their respective spheres of action; teaching and preaching to men, 'mental receptivity and activity in family life to women' (Neander, **Planting**, vol. 1, p. 147. [Bohn]).

"What grave arguments these few verses supply us with against some of the unnatural and unscriptural theories of modern times!" (Ellicott, p. 52). Thus, the role of the woman is 'in antithesis to' or in contrast to being a teacher. Thayer defines **didasko** as "to hold discourse with others in order to instruct them, deliver didactic discourses," while **manthano** is defined as "to learn, be appraised." Ellicott also says, "Every form of public address or teaching is clearly forbidden as at variance with the woman's proper duties and destination" (Ibid.).

Alford states on 1 Timothy 2:11-12:

Let a woman learn (in the congregation, and everywhere: see below) in silence in all (possible) subjection (the thought of the public assemblies has evidently given rise to the precept (see 1 Cor. xiv. 34); but he carries it further than can be applied to them in the next verse); but (the contrast is to a suppressed hypothesis of a claim to do that which is forbidden; c. a similar *de*, 1 Cor. xi. 16) to a woman I permit not to teach (in the church primarily), or, as the context shews, anywhere else (Alford, p. 319).

Before leaving this passage, we must discuss the clause, "usurp authority over the man." There are two things that the woman is prohibited from doing. She is prohibited from teaching (delivering a didactic discourse) and from usurping authority over the man. These are two independent phrases separated by the conjunction "or." This Scripture does not say anything about "teaching over the man," as some allege. For obvious reasons, the Sunday School brethren want to give it that construction to sustain their unscriptural practice of women teaching a Bible class so long as men are not present.

Brother Jerry Cutter states the following in a tract called "The Teaching," pages 18-19:

"Usurp authority over" is...only one word in the Greek, and means "Exercise dominion over one ....I Tim. 2:12" (Thayer's Lexicon, p. 84). In short, "over" is not connected with "teach" in I Tim. 2:12, but only with having dominion over the man, or the second part of the verse. b. The Bible does not say, "I suffer not a woman to teach over the man!" The passage says nothing about "teach-over." Rather, it, says, "I suffer not a woman to teach," nor do something else. c. Compare these two parallel passages: (1) I Tim. 2:12: "I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man." If "over the man" modifies both "teach" and "usurp authority," consider the following and see the contradiction: (2) Lev. 19:14: "Thou shalt not curse the deaf, nor put a stumbling block before the blind..." Shall we say that the prepositional phrase, "before the blind," modifies the first prohibition? If so, the passage merely means, "Thou shalt not curse the deaf before the blind." In other words, according to such logic, it would be perfectly all right to curse the deaf, provided it is not done before the blind."

What may we conclude from 1 Timothy 2:11-12 and the other passages concerning the woman teaching? First, we learn that a woman is prohibited from being a public teacher of God's Word, and in that sphere she is to remain silent. Second, we further learn that she is never to usurp authority over the man, but to be silent, or in subjection.

### **1 Corinthians 14:34-35**

Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church.

There is nothing difficult to understand about the wording of this text. We have already shown by 1 Timothy 2 that the woman is not permitted to teach except in private situations. Obviously, in the assembly she is prohibited from doing such. Paul emphatically says that she "is not permitted to speak," but that she is to be "under obedience, as also saith the law" (1 Cor. 14:34). The NKJV reads, "...but they are to be submissive, as the law also says." I have wondered about the expression, "as also saith the law." MacKnight refers the reader to that law given in Genesis 3:16.

Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.

Paul shows that her role is one of submission. She is to be a learner in the assembly and not a teacher. She is not to ask questions in the assembly; but if



she has questions, let her ask her husband at home. Paul says, "Let your women keep silence in the churches" (v. 34), and then in verse 35, "...for it is a shame for women to speak in the church." Some have labored to explain away these strong prohibitions because they plainly condemn their women preachers and teachers. Some argue that this was written to the church at Corinth during the age of spiritual gifts and does not apply to the church today. First, we would point out that this message was not only for first-century Corinth. At the introduction of this epistle, Paul wrote, "Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours" (1 Cor. 1:2). In the present chapter, he wrote, "For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints" (1 Cor. 14:33). It is evident that these inspired words were for the benefit of the Lord's church throughout the whole world and for infinity.

Brother Bennie Cryer wrote the following in the O.P.A. April 1, 1988, under the caption, "Some Thoughts on 1 Corinthians 14":

WHAT 1 CORINTHIANS 14 IS NOT TEACHING 1. Its main purpose is not teaching rules to be used to regulate the use of spiritual gifts only. It does teach rules for edifying an assembly when the church gathers for the purpose of rendering spiritual service to God. The reason spiritual gifts were regulated by the rules for edification found in this chapter is because these rules could be violated by one with spiritual gifts in the same fashion they could be by teaching using knowledge he had acquired through study and meditation. It is not considering how that knowledge got into the teacher's mind but how that knowledge is dispersed to the audience. It is to be done in such a way all may learn and all may be comforted. v. 31...

Brother Cryer writes in his fourth point:

It is not teaching that only the wives of inspired prophets were to keep silent in the assemblies. It is teaching that the prophets' wives were to keep silent in the assemblies, not because they were wives of prophets, but because they were women. "For it is a shame for women to speak in the church," vv. 34-35.

These verses obviously regulate the woman's role when the church convenes an assembly. It is required that she remain silent in all such assemblies.

### **1 Timothy 2:8-15**

Now we wish to return to the verses recorded in 1 Timothy 2:8-15. In verse 8 he particularly addresses the men, telling them, "I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting."

Some have concluded that since he addressed men in this verse, it shows that he has in mind the public church assembly. Nowhere in the entire chapter does he name the church assembly. He does say, "I will therefore that men pray every where..." "Every where" is surely more general than the assembly, although the woman certainly would be excluded from leading a prayer or a song in the assembly by this divine injunction. It is the men who are to take the lead when public prayers are offered. My wife recently related a story to me about the time in a public gathering she was asked to return thanks for the meal by her supervisor. The supervisor, who was a woman, knew that Alberta was a preacher's wife. Alberta was probably the only Christian in the gathering, but she declined because there were men present. I firmly believe that she did the correct thing.

Let us look back to 1 Timothy 2:1-2: "I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty." He began this chapter with an exhortation to prayer. Should we conclude that the only times we are to pray for kings and all that are in authority is in the public assembly? E.M. Zerr in his commentary says that the "every where" in verse 8 makes it general.

In verse 8, Paul wrote that men were to "pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting." E. M. Zerr makes the following observation regarding "lifting up holy hands":

LIFTING UP HOLY HANDS means hands of men who are living holy or righteous lives. The lifting of the hands is merely an allusion to the ancient practice of presenting the uplifted hands in respectful petition to God (Neh. 8:6; Psalms 141:2; Lam. 3:4). The command pertains to the kind of hands being lifted up, and not as to the posture of the body during prayer. The Lord is not concerned about that matter..."

"Without wrath and doubting" are more qualifications to acceptable prayer wherever it is offered. Adam Clarke writes concerning "Without Wrath": "Having no vindictive feeling against any person; harbouring no unforgiving spirit, while they are imploring pardon for their own offences."

Concerning "Doubting," W. E. Vine, page 337, offers the following: "**dialogismos** expresses reasoning or questioning hesitation, 1 Tim. 2:8, See "Dispute, A, No. 1." On page 324, W. E. Vine says "Dispute" denotes, primarily, an inward reasoning, an opinion."

Dr. James MacKnight writes: "**dialogismos** sometimes signifies reasonings in one's own mind, sometimes reasonings and disputings with others. See Luke ix. 46,47. The disputings of which the apostle speaks in this passage, are not those only about the times and places of prayer, but those about other

points of religion, whereby bigots inflame themselves into rage against those who differ with them."

After his directive to men about prayer, Paul then turns his attention to the women. We notice that he begins his dialogue with women by writing "In like manner." E. M. Zerr comments,

In like manner is all from the Greek word HOSAUTOS, and one word in Thayer's definition is 'likewise,' and that word does not necessarily mean a repetition of some previous action, but rather that the writer has something more to say. It is as if the apostle said, 'furthermore, I have something to say about the women.'

In the remaining verses of this chapter, the apostle discusses issues concerning modesty, adornment, and the woman's role. He finishes up by explaining why woman has been assigned a submissive role. He shows why it is that she may not be a public teacher. We have already discussed modesty, adornment, and her restriction concerning the teaching in verses 9-12. Without rehashing material that we have already covered, let us proceed to verses 13-15:

For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression. Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety.

We read the following in the Gospel Advocate Commentary:

*For Adam was first formed, then Eve* The reasons for this teaching are here given, which show the reach or extent of the principles. Adam had priority in creation. He was the original human being. Eve was from him and subordinate to him, and was formed a help suited to him. The argument here based on priority of creation is much strengthened by the following statement: "For the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man." (1 Cor. 11:9). This teaching of Paul respecting the public position of woman as regards man, in which he shows that she is to hold a subordinate place, is based upon no arbitrary human speculation, but upon God's original order in creation—that divine order which first created man and after man's creation formed woman as his helpmeet.

This provides one of the reasons that the woman is not to exercise authority over the man, but to be in submission. Furthermore, she is not to be a public teacher.

In verse 14, we are furnished with the second reason. "And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression" (1 Tim. 2:14). MacKnight comments:

The serpent did not attempt to deceive Adam; but he attacked the woman knowing her to be the weaker of the two. Hence Eve, in extenuation of her fault, pleaded, Gen. iii.13. "The serpent beguiled me and I did eat." Whereas Adam said, ver. 12. "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat;" insinuating, that as the woman had been given him for a companion and help, he had eaten of the tree out of affection to her.

Now let us look at the final verse in this discussion, verse 15: "Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety." There are at least four different ideas about the woman's salvation in childbearing. I believe that Dr. James MacKnight is correct in his translation of verse 15. It reads as follows:

However, though Eve was first in transgression, and brought death on herself, her husband, and her posterity, the female sex shall be saved equally with the male, through childbearing; through bringing forth the Saviour; if they live in faith, and love, and chastity, with that sobriety I have been recommending.

His comments on this verse are insightful:

The word saved, in this verse, refers to the woman in the foregoing verse who is certainly Eve. But the apostle did not mean to say, that she alone was to be saved through child-bearing; but that all her posterity, whether male or female, are to be saved through the child-bearing of a woman; as is evident from his adding, "if they live in faith, and love, and holiness with sobriety." For safety in child-bearing doth not depend on that condition at all; since many pious women die in child-bearing, while others of a contrary character are preserved—the salvation of the human race through child-bearing was intimated in the sentence passed on the serpent, Gen. iii.15. "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head." Accordingly, the Saviour being conceived in the womb of his mother by the power of the Holy Ghost, he is truly 'the seed of woman' who was to bruise the head of the serpent; and a woman, by bringing him forth, hath been the occasion of our salvation—Vulg.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, we have determined from these words of Holy Writ that God has assigned a distinctive role for the woman, one that we are bound to honor. It is perhaps significant to point out that none of the apostles, elders, deacons, and evangelists of the New Testament were women. This is not to say that woman is inferior in intelligence or talent, but that God made her to be a help mate to man and assigned her a role of submission. He has explained

to us why she cannot be a public teacher of God's Word, and that matter should be settled. Not only does God expect her to behave in accordance with her femininity, but to look the part as well. Her wearing apparel is to be modest, and her adornment is to depict a character of shamefastness and sobriety. Truly the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit is of great price in the sight of God. *214 Pearl Street, Cleburne, TX 76031*

# Commonly Misapplied Passages

*by Allen Bailey*

The verses assigned for this presentation are familiar to most Bible students. We hope to shed some light on each passage under consideration within its proper context along with any pertinent historical data. The four passages under consideration are as follows:

- The "law" passages in Galatians,
- "Lay hands suddenly on no man" in 1 Timothy 5:22,
- "The dead in Christ will rise first" in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17,
- "Be thou faithful unto death" in Revelation 2:10.

## The "Law" Passages in Galatians

### History of Galatians

There is much controversy in the religious world on the intent of Galatians. Unfortunately, there is also controversy within the New Testament church over how Galatians should be understood and applied.

In order to understand this great book, it is imperative that we have a working knowledge of the historical background. Behind the scenes of this great book are issues that must be identified in order to gain a better understanding of the individual passages. The apostle Paul was the first to preach the gospel to the Galatians. Judaizers, however, had crept into the church and had brought a false doctrine about justification, requiring the Gentile converts to submit to the Jewish rite of circumcision and to live as a Jew.

The Judaizers also discredited Paul's apostleship so the Galatians would lose confidence in him. "They discredited both him as a messenger and his message" (**A Commentary on Galatians**, Contending for the Faith, Bennie Cryer, p. 2). Paul writes this letter to defend his apostleship and to respond to the false doctrines being promoted.

A careful study will reveal his chief purpose was not how to establish the correct relationship with God but how to maintain that relationship once it existed. The false teachers said it was by the law of Moses. Paul counters with the truth that it is through faith and obedience to the gospel of Jesus Christ (Cryer, p. 3).

The Judaizers were causing great confusion in the churches and were seriously distorting "the gospel of Christ" (Gal.1:8). They taught that Gentiles must become Jews by circumcision before they could become Christians and that all Christians, Jewish and Gentile alike, were righteous before God only if

they remained bound under the Mosaic laws, regulations, and ceremonies (see 2:3-5, 11-14; 3:3-5; 4:8-11, 21-31; 5:1-4; 6:12-13)

In addition to teaching the necessity of being circumcised and of keeping the Mosaic law, the false teachers also attacked Paul personally, seeking to undermine his authority and thereby his teaching. He aggressively defended what he taught and his apostleship.

### Concerning the "Law" Passages

Unfortunately, there are false ideas floating around the religious world, some of which have landed in our pulpits at times. Brethren should be careful with the sources they use for sermon material so as to avoid falling prey to false teaching. Martin Luther wrote in his commentary on Galatians:

The epistle to the Galatians is my epistle. To it I am, as it were, in wedlock. Galatians is my Katherine (the name of my wife).

Merrill C. Tenney wrote of Galatians

Christianity might have been just one more Jewish sect, and the thought of the Western world might have been entirely pagan had it never been written. Galatians embodies the germinal teaching on Christian freedom which separated Christianity from Judaism, and which launched it upon a career of missionary conquest. It was the cornerstone of the Protestant Reformation, because its teaching of salvation by grace alone became the dominant theme of the preaching of the Reformers (*Galatians*, Eerdmans, 1957, p. 15).

In their commentary on Galatians, Hogg and Vine write:

Once more the fundamental antagonism between law and grace, works and faith, is emphasized (p. 147).

This teaching is wrong. There is never a contrast between the "grace of Christ" and the "law of Christ." Rather, Paul contrasts the "law," meaning the Law of Moses, with the gospel of Christ. As Bennie Cryer wrote:

Paul does not want his readers to forget how he is contrasting the law of Moses with the gospel of Christ. The contrast is not between grace and any law. The "law" refers to the law of Moses and to no other (p. 79).

Let me offer examples.

Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified (2:16).

I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain (2:21).

We need to explain these truths to others so they are not misled by popular denominational preachers of our day. When law is contrasted in Galatians, it is not contrasted with faith in Christ or grace. It is a contrast of Old Law with New Law that should be emphasized.

### **A List of the "Law" Passages in Galatians**

**Galatians 2:16** Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.

**Galatians 2:19** For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God.

**Galatians 2:21** I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.

**Galatians 3:2** This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?

**Galatians 3:5** He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, doeth he it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?

**Galatians 3:10** For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.

**Galatians 3:11** But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith.

**Galatians 3:12** And the law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth them shall live in them.

**Galatians 3:13** Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree:

**Galatians 3:17** And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect.

**Galatians 3:18** For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise.



**Galatians 3:19** Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator.

**Galatians 3:21** Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law.

**Galatians 3:23** But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed.

**Galatians 4:4** But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law,

**Galatians 4:5** To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.

**Galatians 5:4** Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace.

**Galatians 5:14** For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

**Galatians 5:18** But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law.

**Galatians 5:23** Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.

**Galatians 6:2** Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.

**Galatians 6:13** For neither they themselves who are circumcised keep the law: but desire to have you circumcised, that they may glory in your flesh.

### **"Lay Hands Suddenly on No Man"**

#### **1 Timothy 5:17-25**

Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine. For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The labourer is worthy of his reward. Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses. Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear. I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, that thou observe these things without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality. Lay hands suddenly on no man, neither be partaker of other men's sins: keep thyself pure. Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities. Some men's sins are open beforehand, going before to judgment; and some men they follow after. Likewise also the good works of some are manifest beforehand; and they that are otherwise cannot be hid.

The key phrase for our study is "Lay hands suddenly on no man." There are three views of this phrase:

- Do not be too quick to restore a sinning member;
- Do not be too quick to ordain a man as an elder;
- Do not be too quick to take a man out of the office of an elder.

### **Do not be too quick to restore a sinning member.**

The words, "Lay hands suddenly," have to do with the restoration of a sinning church member back into the fellowship of the local church...In verse 19, we see the accusation, in verse 20, the conviction and sentence, and in verse 22, the restoration to church fellowship...Timothy is bidden to restrain by deliberate prudence, the impulses of mere pity. A hasty reconciliation tempts the offender to suppose that his offence cannot have been so very serious after all; and smooth the way to a repetition of the sin; 'good-natured easy men' cannot escape responsibility for the disastrous consequences of their lax administration of the law (Wuest, **Word Studies**, Vol. II, p. 86).

Probably with reference to that rite in the formal restoration of those who had been expelled from the church for gross sins. [With an asterisk he adds the following note] Various explained, of ordination, of reception into the communion of the church; of the reception of heretics who, having been excluded from one congregation, should present themselves to another as candidates for membership (**Vincent's Word Studies of the New Testament**, Vol. IV, p. 269).

There is historical evidence for this practice (laying on of hands for readmission) in the 3rd Century church, but no evidence for the practice in the first century church (Hiebert, **First Timothy**, Moody Press, 1957).

### **Do not be too quick to put a man in as an elder.**

This position is the most advocated in the churches of Christ.

Paul is speaking of the ordination of an elder, which should not be performed until the candidate has had time to prove himself (NIV Study Bible, p. 2327).

The best way to prevent unqualified elders from serving in the ministry is to not lay hands upon anyone too hastily. To lay hands upon someone in this context was to affirm their suitability for and acceptance into public ministry (**The MacArthur New Testament Commentary on First Timothy**, p. 224).

Timothy is urged not to be hasty in commissioning elders (**A Handbook on Paul's Letters to Timothy and Titus**, p. 132).

Paul speaks of the ordination of elders (Don DeWelt, **Paul's Letters to Timothy and Titus**, Bible Study Textbook, College Press, p. 107).

Timothy is not to ordain a man as an elder too quickly. This entire section deals with elders hence the laying on of hands pertains to this act in connection with the induction of an elder into his office by means of a public ceremony before the congregation (Lenski, p. 688).

This would mean that, in hastily ordaining elders without first ascertaining whether they are qualified for the office or not, and especially without ascertaining their moral standing. By hasty ordination, Timothy would, in a real sense, be participating in and accepting responsibility for their sins. So Timothy is urged to keep himself morally pure and blameless by making sure that those whom he ordains to the office of an elder are morally blameless as well (**A Handbook on Paul's Letters to Timothy and to Titus**, United Bible Societies in New York, p. 133).

### **Do not be too quick to take an elder out of office.**

Contextually, discipline of an elder is the primary thought under consideration. Timothy is instructed not to be too quick to take him out of office.

We finally got to the place about laying on of hands of elders, but lo, it wasn't to put them in. It was to take them out (Orville Smith, *New Testament Study* in Irving, TX, 1989; audio).

Paul had just dealt with the disciplining of elders, hence this verse means for Timothy not to be hasty in laying hands of discipline on any man. Neither should he be indifferent or unduly tardy in handling the charge, for that would encourage such a man in his wrong, and the evangelist would thereby become a partaker of other men's sins. By avoiding both extremes, Timothy would keep himself pure as regards the evil at hand (Zerr).

This phrase implies the seizing of another and removing him from his place. Even though this action is not to be performed literally, the context demands that removal from office is being considered. Paul commands Timothy to show no partiality even in the case of an elder and warns him to give due consideration to the matter and to conduct a thorough investigation before any action is warranted (Irvin Barnes, **A Commentary on 1 Timothy**, Contending for the Faith, p. 94).

This verse has given rise to much diversity of thought. Some consider it to mean to lay hands on no man, to ordain him as an elder hastily, or without due trial and proof of his fitness. But there is nothing in the context that refers to ordaining elders. To throw in a highly figurative expression on the subject without any connecting links to show

its meaning is unnatural and harsh, and would lead to great doubt as to the meaning.

Others maintain that this passage refers to laying violent hands on a man. This would indicate that Paul did not think it would be wrong for Timothy to deliberately and with due consideration strike a man for wrongdoing. This is so contrary to the whole teaching of Christ and the apostles to be inadmissible.

Paul is speaking of the accusation and trial of elders, and it seems that the connection leaves but one possible construction—do not hastily lay hands on an elder to draw him up for trial. Since elders are presumed to be good, true, and faithful men proved by experience; let no accusation be brought against them hastily (David Lipscomb, *1 Timothy*, Gospel Advocate, p. 174)

**Neither be partaker of other men's sins: keep thyself pure.** Lipscomb explains, "Do not become partakers of the sins of other men by permitting them to bring hasty and unjust accusations against elders, keep thyself pure from all sinful complications." Irvin Barnes writes:

If an elder has so sinned as to demand that he be removed from office, he must be removed. An evangelist who refuses to see that steps are taken to remove him becomes guilty of partaking of the sins of the elder. This situation would, in modern terms, be likened to a coverup (pp. 94–95).

After the side note Paul made in verse 23, he returns to his instruction on "Selecting Elders." He now gives four principles concerning that selection process.

**1. "Some men's sins are open beforehand, going before to judgment."** Some are obviously unfit to serve as elders and can be rejected out of hand. Their sins are quite evident to all, and precede them to judgment. They rush in before them like heralds announcing their guilt in advance. The judgment here is not the final judgment, or the believers' judgment. Rather, it refers to the church's assessment of a man's suitability to serve.

**2. "Some men they follow after."** Their sins are not evident beforehand, but come to light during the church's assessment process. As Lenski put it, "Their sins march right into the meeting behind them and refuse to be left outside" (*The Interpretation of St Paul's Epistle to Timothy*, Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1964).

**3. "Likewise also the good works of some are manifest beforehand."** It is obvious from the quality of some men's character that they are qualified to serve. A long discussion of their qualifications is thus unnecessary.

4. "and they that are otherwise cannot be hid." The good deeds of some are not readily apparent. They cannot be concealed, however, and will come to light during the examination process. Such men will also be found qualified to serve as elders.

The church desperately needs qualified men to serve as elders, bishops, pastors, overseers. Their lives must meet the standards of 3:2-7, and their ministries those of 4:6-16. The church's responsibility to them is to honor and protect them, to rebuke those who sin, and, above all, to be very cautious in selecting them. If those four principles are implemented, the church will be well on its way to restoring a biblical eldership.

The NIV makes this passage come alive

The sins of some men are obvious reaching the places of judgment ahead of them; the sins of others trail behind them. In the same way, good deeds are obvious, and even those that are not cannot be hidden.

It may be best to consider it like Robertson:

It is not clear whether it is the case of ministers just ordained as in 4:14 or of warning against hasty ordination of untried men, or the recognition and restoration of deposed ministers as suits the context. The prohibition suits either situation, or both (Robertson's **Word Pictures in the New Testament**, Vol. 4, p. 589).

### **"The Dead In Christ Shall Rise First"**

#### **1 Thessalonians 4:13-18**

But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

One of the most profound thoughts to enter the mind is the fact that this life is not all there is. The precious old song we sing tells many truths, "'Tis a sweet and glorious thought that comes to me, I'll live on, yes, I'll live on." Death is much more of a beginning than it is an ending. Numerous New Tes-

tament references teach about life, death, resurrection, judgment, the second coming of Jesus Christ, heaven, and hell.

The section is filled, not only with translational difficulties, but also with theological difficulties of which the translator should be aware, even though they may not directly affect the shape of his translation. It is therefore even more important than usual to consult general commentaries in addition to this handbook (*A Handbook on Paul's Letters to the Thessalonians*, Ellingworth and Nida, p. 92).

The Thessalonian Epistles are commonly regarded as the earliest written New Testament books. They are about the Lord's Coming again. The last of the New Testament books is Revelation, of which the final word is, "I come quickly," "Even so, come, Lord Jesus" (Revelation 22:20). Thus the New Testament begins, and thus it ends (*Halley's Bible Handbook*, p. 627).

The Lord's second coming is the main topic of the first Thessalonian epistle. It is mentioned in every chapter of this writing showing that it was the emphasis of Paul's preaching. It is commonly called the Lord's "coming" or "appearing;" it is called the "second coming" in Hebrews 9:28. Jesus uses the word "again" in John 14:3, meaning a second time. It is scriptural to speak of this event as the "second coming."

"Fallen asleep" is a scriptural expression for the Christian's death. It is found often in Christian epitaphs. The death of a child of God is a glory to God. It is sad for those left behind who will miss their loved one and friend, but it is glory to them who are "asleep in Jesus." In these few verses, Paul makes reference to death as sleep and to the second coming of Jesus Christ. "But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep...the dead in Christ shall rise first" (1 Thess. 4:13, 16).

And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed *are* the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them (Rev. 14:13).

It is interesting to note how this segment of Scripture is entitled in translations that have subdivisions. It is noted as follows: "Those who Died in Christ" (NASB), "The Coming of the Lord" (NIV), "The Comfort of Christ Coming" (NKJV).

The question often arises, "If the dead in Christ shall rise first, first before whom?" Some people falsely conclude the dead in Christ will rise before the dead out of Christ. This thought does not coincide with other passages that clearly teach that when the resurrection occurs, everyone will be resurrected at the same time. There will not be two resurrections, one for the righteous and

one for the wicked. There will be only one resurrection when the Lord returns. Jesus said:

Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation (Jn. 5:28-29).

Ellingworth and Nida write:

The temporal expression first implies a comparison, and this is brought out clearly in the beginning of verse 17, but in some languages the temporal relation is better expressed by a transitional alone, such as "then," for example, "those believers in Christ who have died will come back to life, and then we who are living at that time" (*Handbook on Paul's Letters to the Thessalonians*, p. 102).

Jesus went away in the clouds, and He will come again in the clouds (Acts 1:9-11; 1 Thess. 4:17). The context addresses those who are alive in Christ and those who are "dead in Christ." This series of verses are meant to be comforting. Please note verse 18, "Wherefore comfort one another with these words."

Paul wanted the Thessalonians to be informed about how events would unfold. Ignorance often causes a certain amount of anxiety and lack of comfort. Paul writes these words to calm the nerves and inform the Christians about the second coming of Christ and how the dead would be raised first and then we who are alive would also be raised to meet the Lord in the air.

It should be clear from a careful reading of these verses that the contrast is between the dead in Christ and those alive in Christ. Those who are alive have no advantage over the dead in Christ, or vice versa.

Timothy brought Paul news concerning the great anxiety of the Thessalonians about the dead saints. They needed to know how the second coming of Christ would impact the life and death of the Christian. The Thessalonians had misunderstood the facts regarding the second coming of Christ and assumed it would happen in their generation.

Some of the Thessalonian Christians were converted from paganism even at a great sacrifice. For them to be converted to Christianity and then die before the Lord's coming took place created an uneasiness among their families. Paul wrote this segment of Scripture to explain how it would all take place. He wanted to speak words of comfort to them.

Today, when we hear of the Judgment Day, or the coming of the Lord, it is taught more negatively than positively. Paul spoke of the coming of the Lord to be comforting to these Christians. We should likewise find comfort in

the reality that Christ will come again. In sum, this passage teaches the resurrection will occur before the ascension of those Christians yet alive.

### **"Be Thou Faithful Unto Death"**

#### **Revelation 2:8-11**

And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive; I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan. Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches: He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.

The letter to the church at Smyrna is unique. Not only is it the shortest of the seven letters, it is one of only two letters that has no words of condemnation. These four short verses are power-packed, containing information and words of encouragement badly needed by the brethren who were the faithful in Christ at Smyrna.

#### **Historical Background**

We can better appreciate what is said in this passage if we know something about the city of Smyrna. If we lived in Asia Minor at that time and in the city of Smyrna, what would have been our impressions of the city?

**A great trade city.** Smyrna stood on a deep gulf thirty-five miles north of Ephesus. This city had a magnificent harbor that was especially valuable during times of war because it could be enclosed. The city stood at the end of a road that served the valley of Hemus, and all the trade of the valley passed through its harbor. The climate was conducive to growing numerous crops, which also contributed to her wealth.

**A beautiful city.** William Ramsay in his book *The Letters to the Seven Churches* records that Aelius Aristides, who lived much in Smyrna, could hardly find fitting words to paint the beauty of the crown of Smyrna. After describing various points of beauty, he concluded, "Thus Smyrna city was a flower of beauty, such as earth and sun had never showed to mankind" (p 257). Smyrna was an outstandingly beautiful city. She was famous for the wide, paved streets that ran from one end of the city to the other. Edward Myers writes in *Letters From the Lord of Heaven*:



The most well-known of her thoroughfares was called "Golden Street." Along this lovely avenue stood many imposing heathen temples; she was a city filled with religious idolatry. On Golden Street toward the sea end of the city was the great Temple of Cybele. As the road headed through the city toward the foothills many other temples lined its way, including temples to the god Asklepios and the goddess Aphrodite. In the inland foothills was the Temple of Zeus. These temples were magnificent structures and added to Smyrna's reputation for beauty and glory (p. 21).

Smyrna possessed a famous stadium, an impressive library, and claimed to have the largest public theater in all of Asia Minor. She claimed to be the birthplace of the ancient Greek poet Homer, and a monument to him stood in the city (Ramsay, p 263). No wonder this splendid city was known as "The Glory of Asia."

**An important political city.** Smyrna was on the winning side in all the civil wars that took place during her history, and Rome was mindful of that. She was granted the status of "free city," allowing her to govern herself and be free of Roman troops. About a thousand years before Christ, Smyrna was destroyed and was generally considered to be a dead city. However, it revived through the years to where it became one of the most respected cities of its day. The history of the wars and difficulties was a heritage that perhaps instilled in its citizens the stability to handle adversity. This endurance through hard times came in handy years later when New Testament Christians would again face serious oppression.

### **Difficulties for Christians**

It may sound like Smyrna was an ideal place to live, but there were two factors that made life there very difficult for Christians: (1) Emperor worship and (2) a large Jewish population

**Emperor Worship.** As Rome conquered more and more of the world, she allowed people to govern themselves as long as they were loyal to Rome and faithfully paid their taxes. Rome endeavored to create unity among all the people through a national religion. This unity could not be found among any of the existing religions because of the diversity of gods and practices.

This led to the concept of Dea Roma—the goddess of Rome. The worship of Rome itself as a deity was conceived as a unifying force. Issuing from this was the worship of Caesar. Since Caesar represented the nation of Rome to the people, the Caesars began to look upon themselves as gods. Myers writes:

Once a year every citizen of the Roman empire (including Smyrna) was required to place a pinch of incense on the altar to the emperor,

say the words "Caesar is lord," and received a token as evidence that the worship had been performed. It was a very brief ceremony, taking perhaps thirty seconds (*Letters from the Lord of Heaven*, p. 22)

New Testament Christians were put in a difficult position because refusal to participate in emperor worship resulted in persecution. Some began to practice "**mental reservation**." They rationalized that as long as they acknowledged in their minds that Jesus was Lord, it would be all right to comply with the requirements of emperor worship and thus be protected against the persecution or even death that might result from their refusal. They felt it would not be wrong to say "Caesar is lord" under those circumstances, even though they did not agree with the statement.

Rome would not object to this practice as long as a person went through the motions to demonstrate their loyalty. It did not matter to the authorities what god he worshiped. Emperor worship was not so much a question of religious loyalty as it was political loyalty.

**A Large Jewish Population.** The large Jewish population was a second factor that created difficulties for the Christians in Smyrna. The Jews used their influence to persuade the local governor to unleash an attack on Christians. Christians faced severe persecutions, even to the point of martyrdom.

### Death of Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna

The most famous historical personage who died a martyr's death in Smyrna was Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, some sixty to seventy years later. It was a multitude of people who cried for Polycarp to be found, arrested, and condemned to death. Along with the Gentiles, the Jews cried this accusation against Polycarp:

This is the teacher of Asia, the father of Christians, the destroyers of our gods, the one who teaches many not to sacrifice nor to worship ("The Martyrdom of Polycarp," 12.2 in *The Apostolic Fathers*, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1978)

As he entered the arena, Polycarp was instructed to recant his faith in Christ. He acknowledged that he was a Christian and gave the following response:

Eighty and six years have I served him, and he never once wronged me; How then shall I blaspheme my King, Who hath saved me?" (*Fox's Book of Martyrs*, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1967, p.9)

The Jews not only demanded his arrest, they led the mob in gathering the sticks to burn Polycarp to death, even though it was the Sabbath. Polycarp said:

You threaten fire which burns for a hour and is soon quenched; for you are ignorant of the fire of the coming judgment and eternal punishment reserved for the wicked. But why do you wait? Come, do what you will! (Martyrdom, 11.2)

As Polycarp was being burned to death, he prayed:

I bless you because you have considered me worthy of this day and hour to receive a portion, among the number of the martyrs, in the cup of your Christ unto the resurrection of eternal life... (Martyrdom, 14.2)

And so Polycarp died, and it was the Jews primarily who were responsible for his death. Keeping this background material in mind will help us better understand the significance of some of the things said in the letter. Let us consider the letter again and this time from the New International Version.

To the angel of the church in Smyrna write: These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again. I know your afflictions and your poverty yet you are rich! I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death.

### **Brief Explanation of the Letter to Smyrna**

**Verse 8.** Jesus Christ, the writer of this letter through the apostle John, was dead but came back to life. He offers them the encouragement that those who face trials bravely will live again, also.

...Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades (Rev. 1:17-18, NIV)

Christians in Smyrna faced severe persecutions because of emperor worship and because of the hatred of the Jews. What a great hope it must have been to read, "To the angel of the church in Smyrna write: These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who was dead and who lives again." That is what the original language literally says "who was dead and who lives again."

The writer was one who had victory over death, and that was especially meaningful to people who knew they faced the possibility of death. The Lord identifies himself as "the First and the Last, who was dead and lives again." Thus, He tells them that He has been through what they are suffering. He is

well qualified to comfort them and bring them assurance from firsthand knowledge.

**Verses 9–10.** Consider Jesus' beautiful words of commendation: "I know your afflictions and your poverty yet you are rich!" The word "affliction" in the original means pressure that is brought to bear upon someone from without. It carries the idea of grapes in a winepress that were crushed by pressure or by trampling of feet. It was used of a man being crushed to death by the weight of a great boulder. G. K. Chesterton said it was the sign of a real man who could pass the breaking point and not break.

"I know your poverty." There are two Greek words in the original for one who is poor: **Penia** and **Ptocheia**. **Penia** means a person who could afford nothing beyond the barest necessities of life. He and his family might have the minimum of food, clothing, and shelter; but nothing in addition to that. **Ptocheia** is the word used here and specifically identifies one who could not even afford the necessities of life.

Why were the Christians in Smyrna that poor? Remember the emperor worship? Doing business in Smyrna depended upon having a little token that proved a person was loyal to Caesar. People without the token were black-listed. Merchants were afraid they would be in danger if they dealt with customers who were considered disloyal to the state. The result was deep poverty for the Christians at Smyrna.

According to the world's standards, the Christians at Smyrna were in terrible shape, undergoing persecution and suffering poverty; but by the Lord's standards, they were rich. The word for "rich" conveys the idea of being in a position of power and authority because of wealth. The Lord is telling them that in spite of their situation in the world's eyes, in the eyes of heaven's banker they were rich in a spiritual way and had power because of that wealth. This thought is taught elsewhere in Scripture.

Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions" (Lk. 12:15, NIV).

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also (Mt. 6:19–21, NIV).

Jesus refers to those who slander Christians as a "Synagogue of Satan." They may have claimed to be God's people, but in reality they belonged to the devil. Many people claim to be Christians today, but if that is not the Lord's

evaluation of them, they belong to Satan. These words must have comforted the Christians at Smyrna. Christ knew the nature of the Jews, and justice would be done. The Jews would be punished for their blasphemy, and the Christians would be rewarded for their faithfulness.

"Persecution." The Christians at Smyrna had endured tribulation, poverty, and slander; and there was more to come. Jesus said, "Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer." These Christians were suffering because of their loyalty to Jesus Christ. Jesus did not tell them things would get better, but that things would get worse. Some would be cast into prison and would have trials.

Christ told them, "be faithful unto death." Other translations read: "be faithful, even to the point of death" (NIV) and "be faithful, even if you have to die" (NCV).

**Verse 11.** The Christians in Smyrna were told they would not be hurt by the second death. In each of the seven letters of the Revelation, Jesus leaves a beautiful promise symbolizing eternal life. Summers comments:

Christ tells them not to fear death, because eternal life awaits them. He will give to them the crown of life—a reward for a race won. They shall not be hurt by the "second death," which symbolizes eternal punishment. The unbeliever dies and finds another "death" awaiting him; the believer dies and finds eternal life. Here as always the promise is to the overcoming life (**Worthy Is the Lamb**, p. 113).

It is not likely that Christians today will face the kind of persecution those at Smyrna faced. The letter to Smyrna reminds us that Christians will all too often be faced with periods of testing. Living in a world where evil is ever present, Christians must be alert to the temptation to compromise their faith and to take the path of least resistance. Polycarp could have compromised his faith and survived his trial, but he knew that such would ultimately lead to the defeat of all for which Jesus had died, namely his salvation. For centuries, Polycarp's faith has been a living testimony of love for Jesus and commitment to principle.

The message for today is the same as the one for the first century. Stand firm and face what has to be faced, knowing the Lord understands and will bring about justice; be steadfast in the faith; and be confident of the ultimate reward that is of more worth than whatever must be endured, even death. 1633 Trinity View, Irving, TX 75060

# Angels and the Gospel

*by Glen Osburn*

Fascination with the gospel and the salvation it was to bring existed before Christ was ever born into the world. The Scriptures record:

As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful searches and inquiries, seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you, in these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things into which angels long to look (1 Pet. 1:10-12, NASB).

The prophets made “careful searches and inquiries” into the application of their prophecies, trying their best to understand when Christ would come and how God was going to offer grace through a suffering Savior. It was “revealed to” them, however, that regardless of how much energy they expended, they would not precisely know when all this was going to happen. Their predictions were written to benefit a future generation, those of us in the Christian Age.

This passage also reveals, almost as an afterthought, that there were others curious about the gospel of grace and salvation that Christ was to bring—angels. Why were angels longing to look into or understand the things concerning grace and salvation? To try and answer this question, let us investigate the nature of angels. Perhaps through understanding the nature of angels, we can gain insight into their curiosity.

## **Spiritual Creatures Called “Angels” Live Within the Spiritual Realm**

This spiritual realm is called “in heavenly places” in the King James Version. This phrase, translated literally, is “in the heavenlies.” This specific Greek phrase is found five times in Ephesians (1:3, 20; 2:6, 3:10; 6:12) and nowhere else in the New Testament. It is:

- where our blessings are located (Eph. 1:3),
- where Christ sits at God’s right hand (Eph. 1:20),
- where we now sit with Christ (Eph. 2:6),
- where rulers and authorities observe God’s wisdom (Eph. 3:10),
- where evil spiritual forces oppose us (Eph. 6:12).

"In the heavenlies" is a term signifying the unseen spiritual world of existence and activity (New International Biblical Commentary, **Ephesians**, Patzia, p. 151). These "heavenly places" are within the realm of reality extending beyond what is earthly in nature. It is within this spiritual realm that we struggle "...against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Eph. 6:12, NASB). As Christians, "...though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses" (2 Cor. 10:3-4, NASB). Since "spiritual forces of wickedness" are not in that spiritual location called "heaven" where God dwells (Is. 63:15), but are located within "the heavenlies," we can understand that "the heavenlies" is a spiritual realm that includes both "in the presence" (Lk. 1:19, Heb. 9:24) and "away from the presence" (2 Thess. 1:9) of God. Within this spiritual realm is also the place called Hades, a place where the spirit of a man goes when it leaves its earthly body (Lk. 16:19-31). Angels, evidently, help escort the saved to the location of paradise (Lk. 16:22), which is a sub-location within the realm of Hades, which is located within "the heavenlies."

An important aspect of the message to the Colossians is that these spiritual forces are inferior to Christ because He initially created them (Col. 1:16), and they are made subject to Christ through His victory on the cross, where He "...disarmed the rulers and authorities...[and] made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him" (Col. 2:15, NASB). Because of Christ's victory over these evil powers, He has been exalted to God's "...right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in the one to come" (Eph. 1:20-21, NASB). By virtue of a believer's union with Christ in baptism (Rom. 6:3-9), he shares in Christ's victory and thereby rules with Christ in the heavenly realm (Eph. 2:6; see 1 Cor. 4:8; Rev. 1:6.) Also, note these evil powers (as well as the good angels) are observing God's wisdom manifested and demonstrated through the church (Eph. 3:10).

The sphere within which the church exists is the heavenly realm (Jn. 18:36; Phil. 3:20). The Scriptures teach that God "...delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son" (Col. 1:13, NASB). It was common in ancient times for the triumphing army to relocate a conquered people from their homeland to another country (this is the meaning of the word "triumph" in 2 Cor. 2:14). In a similar way, Christ, having defeated Satan in our lives, has transferred us into His kingdom.

The kingdom of Christ not only exists within the earthly realm but is within the heavenly realm as well. Noting that within this "heavenly realm" is

where the "spiritual forces of wickedness" (Eph. 6:12) dwell (Eph. 3:10), it does not seem that "the heavenlies" and the church are synonymous. Christ rules His church (Eph. 1:20-22), and He is "above all rule and authority and power and dominion" (Eph. 1:21). But there are evil powers and dominions that have not yet subjected themselves to Christ nor are they in His church; however they *are* found "in the heavenly places" (Eph. 6:12). There is more *in* the "heavenly places" than just the church. The phrase "in the heavenlies," therefore, signifies the unseen spiritual world (or realm) of existence and activity.

We are given a rare peek into this realm in an account recorded in the book of Daniel. Daniel writes:

In those days, I, Daniel, had been mourning for three entire weeks. I did not eat any tasty food, nor did meat or wine enter my mouth, nor did I use any ointment at all until the entire three weeks were completed. On the twenty-fourth day of the first month, while I was by the bank of the great river, that is, the Tigris, I lifted my eyes and looked, and behold, there was a certain man dressed in linen, whose waist was girded with a belt of pure gold of Uphaz. His body also was like beryl, his face had the appearance of lightning, his eyes were like flaming torches, his arms and feet like the gleam of polished bronze, and the sound of his words like the sound of a tumult. Now I, Daniel, alone saw the vision, while the men who were with me did not see the vision; nevertheless, a great dread fell on them, and they ran away to hide themselves. So I was left alone and saw this great vision; yet no strength was left in me, for my natural color turned to a deathly pallor, and I retained no strength. But I heard the sound of his words; and as soon as I heard the sound of his words, I fell into a deep sleep on my face, with my face to the ground. Then behold, a hand touched me and set me trembling on my hands and knees. He said to me, "O Daniel, man of high esteem, understand the words that I am about to tell you and stand upright, for I have now been sent to you." And when he had spoken this word to me, I stood up trembling. Then he said to me, "Do not be afraid, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart on understanding this and on humbling yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to your words. "But the prince of the kingdom of Persia was withstanding me for twenty-one days; then behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I had been left there with the kings of Persia. "Now I have come to give you an understanding of what will happen to your people in the latter days, for the vision pertains to the days yet future." When he had spoken to me according to these words, I turned my face toward the ground and became speechless. And behold, one who resembled a human being was touching my lips; then I opened my mouth and spoke and said to him who was



standing before me, "O my lord, as a result of the vision anguish has come upon me, and I have retained no strength. "For how can such a servant of my lord talk with such as my lord? As for me, there remains just now no strength in me, nor has any breath been left in me." Then this one with human appearance touched me again and strengthened me. He said, "O man of high esteem, do not be afraid. Peace be with you; take courage and be courageous!" Now as soon as he spoke to me, I received strength and said, "May my lord speak, for you have strengthened me." Then he said, "Do you understand why I came to you? But I shall now return to fight against the prince of Persia; so I am going forth, and behold, the prince of Greece is about to come. However, I will tell you what is inscribed in the writing of truth. Yet there is no one who stands firmly with me against these forces except Michael your prince" (Dan. 10:2-21, NASB).

Here we have recorded a conflict between good and evil angels. Daniel prays and an angel is immediately dispatched to give Daniel the answer to his prayer. This angel is kept from getting to Daniel for "twenty-one days" by an evil angel. Michael (an archangel, Jude 9) shows up to help the God-sent angel. This good angel then is able to go and deliver his message to Daniel. When his mission is completed, he must return and continue his "fight against" the evil angel (Dan. 10:20).

We are given another rare glimpse into this realm in 2 Kings 6:8-17:

Now the king of Aram was warring against Israel; and he counseled with his servants saying, "In such and such a place shall be my camp." The man of God sent word to the king of Israel saying, "Beware that you do not pass this place, for the Arameans are coming down there." The king of Israel sent to the place about which the man of God had told him; thus he warned him, so that he guarded himself there, more than once or twice. Now the heart of the king of Aram was enraged over this thing; and he called his servants and said to them, "Will you tell me which of us is for the king of Israel?" One of his servants said, "No, my lord, O king; but Elisha, the prophet who is in Israel, tells the king of Israel the words that you speak in your bedroom." So he said, "Go and see where he is, that I may send and take him." And it was told him, saying, "Behold, he is in Dothan." He sent horses and chariots and a great army there, and they came by night and surrounded the city. Now when the attendant of the man of God had risen early and gone out, behold, an army with horses and chariots was circling the city. And his servant said to him, "Alas, my master! What shall we do?" So he answered, "Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them." Then Elisha prayed and said, "O LORD, I pray, open his eyes that he may see."

And the LORD opened the servant's eyes and he saw; and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.

We cannot see the angels (Col. 1:16, Heb. 1:14) that inhabit these "heavenly places;" but, like Elisha's servant (2 Kgs. 6:17), we could if God would open our eyes.

### Angels Are Created Beings

Some think that angels are created by a transformation of our spirits when we die, that is: we become angels when we die. When we die, however, we go into the place called Hades (Lk. 16:19-31), which is located within the spiritual realm. Once within Hades we wait for the resurrection and the redemption of our bodies (Rom. 8:23). The Bible teaches that we do not *become* angels when we die but in the resurrection we will become *like* the angels (Mt. 22:30), i.e. spirit beings.

Colossians 1:16 reads, "For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him." This list is not given to enumerate earthly political systems and to teach that they were created by Christ, but rather it refers to differing positions of angels. This passage teaches that Christ created the angels that dwell in the "invisible" or spiritual realm. Psalms 148:1-5 reads:

Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD from the heavens; Praise Him in the heights! Praise Him, all His angels; Praise Him, all His hosts! Praise Him, sun and moon; Praise Him, all stars of light! Praise Him, highest heavens, and the waters that are above the heavens! Let them praise the name of the LORD, for He commanded and they were created.

The first chapter of Hebrews teaches that Christ is not an angel but is superior to angels and that, because of His superior nature, He is worthy to be worshiped by angels (Heb. 1:6).

### There Are Different Kinds of Angels

- All angels are spiritual creatures (Heb. 1:14), with spiritual bodies.
- Seraphim, who have six wings (Is. 6:2-6), are mentioned by name only in this passage.
- Cherubim, who have four wings (Ezek. 1:5-18, 10:12), are mentioned often, and their image is portrayed on the Ark of the Covenant (Ex. 37:9).

There is only one controversial passage where angels *seem* to have appeared as women, with two wings (Zech. 5:9). Many commentators (correctly, I think) affirm that this is a vision, not an angel sighting. (Note that an angel is

explaining this vision to Zechariah in v. 10.) Both the Hebrew (**malakh**, used 108 times) and Greek (**angelos**, used 186 times) words translated "angel" are in the masculine gender, never feminine or neuter (**Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testaments Words**, W. E. Vine, p. 55).

Angels appear as men to us (Jgs. 13:6; Gen. 19:1, 5; Dan. 10:5, 13, 18; Mk. 16:5; Acts 1:10-11, etc.).

### **Angels Are Stronger and Mightier than Men**

In 2 Kings 19:35, one angel killed 185,000 Assyrians in one night. Psalms 103:20-21 reads:

Bless the LORD, you His angels, mighty in strength, who perform  
His word, obeying the voice of His word! Bless the LORD, all you  
His hosts, you who serve Him, doing His will.

In 2 Peter 2:11, angels are said to be "greater in might and power" than man. When Jesus became flesh, He became "lower than the angels" (Heb. 2:7, 9; Ps. 8:5).

Sometimes the words translated "angel" are used to refer to earthly messengers (2 Sam.2:5; Hag. 1:13; Lk. 7:24). Perhaps this is the meaning in Revelation 2:3 ("angel of the church") and Hebrews 13:2 ("entertained angels").

### **Angels (Good and Bad) Have Different Ranks of Authority**

And angels who did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode, He has kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day (Jude 6).

For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities— all things have been created through Him and for Him (Col. 1:16).

Again, this list is not given to enumerate earthly political systems and to teach that they were created by Christ, but rather it refers to differing positions of angels. This list reflects differences in rank, yet it does not necessarily show the ranking of the angels.

It is strongly inferred that "archangel" is the top rank of angel; however, an archangel may be a different type of angel. Michael (an archangel, Jude 9) has angels under his authority (Rev. 12:7-9).

These differing ranks among angels are alluded to in Romans 8:38, Colossians 2:15, and Ephesians 1:20-21, 3:10, 6:12.

Note: We will not attempt here a study of "the Angel of the Lord" (Gen. 16:11-13; Ex. 3:2, 6, 14; etc.). The Scriptures seem to suggest that these are pre-incarnate appearances of Christ (Keil and Delitzsch, Vol. 1, *Genesis*, p. 191).

### **Angels Have Different Responsibilities**

- Children have "their angels" (Mt. 18:10).
- Daniel had Michael as his "prince" (Dan. 10:21).
- Angels are "ministering spirits" to the saved (Heb. 1:14).
- Countries are said to have angels (Dan. 10:13, 20).

### **Angels Have Names**

- Michael (Dan. 10:13; Jude 9).
- Gabriel (Lk. 1:19).

### **Angels Have Emotion**

I tell you that in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance. Or what woman, if she has ten silver coins and loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, "Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin which I had lost!" In the same way, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents (Lk. 15:7-10).

In Job 38:7 the angels are said to have "shouted for joy." Angels are aware of what happens to us, for they observe us (1 Cor. 4:9; 1 Tim. 5:21).

### **Angels Have Free Will**

For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment (2 Pet. 2:4).

And angels who did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode, He has kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day (Jude 6).

### **Conclusion**

Angels are like us in many ways, in that they have identity, free will, responsibilities, and emotions, and they can sin. But unlike us, when they sin, they do not have access to the grace brought by Christ:

For He did not subject to angels the world to come, concerning which we are speaking...for assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the descendant of Abraham (Heb. 2:5, 16).

Perhaps this is why "angels longed to look" into the things concerning salvation, wondering if in Christ there was hope or grace for their fellow fallen angels (1 Pet. 1:10-12). This "mystery which for ages has been hidden" (Eph. 3:9) from men and angels, has now been "made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places" (Eph. 3:10).

Why has man been offered grace? We do not know, but we will someday. We speculate that it may be because angels are in the presence of God, but we "walk by faith."

There are angels who have sinned (Jude 6) who would love to have the opportunity to obey the gospel and receive the forgiveness of God. We should deeply appreciate the gracious opportunity that has been offered to us. Angels do. Remember, angels rejoice when a sinner repents.

When we accept the grace of God, through obedience, Jesus will "confess" us "before the angels of God." Jesus said:

And I say to you, everyone who confesses Me before men, the Son of Man will confess him also before the angels of God; but he who denies Me before men will be denied before the angels of God (Lk. 12:8-9).

The Lord desires to confess your name to the angels; let Him. We need to "obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus" now so that we will not fear the coming of Christ or "His mighty angels," which are coming

in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed for our testimony to you was believed (2 Thess. 1:7-10).

If we fail to accept the grace of God, through obedience, "...at the end of the age; the angels will come forth and take out the wicked from among the righteous, and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Mt. 13:49-50). *Rt. 4, Box 918, Blanchard, OK 73010*

# Questions About Evangelists and Pastors

*by Dennis E. Smith*

As outlined, our study will focus on two questions:

- **Philippians 1:15–18; Mark 9:38–42:** Do these Scriptures indicate that we should not oppose differing doctrines as long as they teach about Christ?
- **2 Timothy 4:5:** Does this passage allow evangelists to do the work of an elder and thus be on a par with the denominational pastor system?

The general goal of this study is to examine the attitudes, instructional efforts, and the works of preparation that are being put forth by many congregations and preachers of the gospel in the light of Scriptures that define the work we are to be doing as evangelists, pastors, and teachers.

## **Part 1. Do Philippians 1:15–18 and Mark 9:38–42 indicate that we should not oppose differing doctrines as long as they teach about Christ?**

Consider the teaching in the following passages:

And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands. As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love... Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him. Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work (2 Jn. 1:6, 9–11).

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned! Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ. I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ (Gal. 1:6–12).

Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple (Rom. 16:17-18).

Because of these plain condemnations of teaching or promoting ways or doctrines that differ from the teachings of Christ and His divinely-inspired apostles, I must conclude that such is not being taught in the two passages that we will now examine.

### **Philippians 1:15-18**

Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife, and some also from good will: the former preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my chains; but the latter out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice.

I believe that in this text Paul was condemning the self-seeking motivation of these preachers. They were evidently opposing Paul for some reason and questioning his authority. It appears to me that they were possibly leaders to some degree in the church at Rome, who were jealous of Paul's influence and thus became his personal enemies. Their message was evidently designed to impress their hearers that they were preachers of importance and authority. Their motive was not a pure one, though they might call themselves ministers of Christ.

Rather than showing sympathy for their brother who was suffering (in bonds) for preaching the gospel of Christ, they used Paul's suffering to seek advancement for themselves and their party (faction).

Notice Paul's conclusion: What does he have to say concerning their preaching? What judgment does he pass on their motives and conduct? "Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth (sincerity), Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice."

Paul's conclusion on this matter is a great example of his toleration toward brethren and of his power to forget himself when the cause of Christ was at stake. He did not commend their method of preaching. Their attitude toward Paul had not been cooperative, but mean, ungenerous, and painful; but these preachers were proclaiming the gospel of Christ. Thus, Paul was willing to suffer all things that Christ might be proclaimed. He rejoiced because the people heard the gospel and could thereby be saved from their sins, even though it was proclaimed to them by envious partisans.

However, if those being converted followed the envious partisanship and kept promoting strife and division, they would have to be corrected as erring brethren. They needed, therefore, to be taught that sects and parties were sinful; and if they followed the spirit of such, they sinned against God.

**Mark 9:38-42**

Now John answered Him, saying, "Teacher, we saw someone who does not follow with us casting out demons in Your name, and we forbade him because he does not follow with us." But Jesus said, "Do not forbid him, for no one who works a miracle in My name can soon afterward speak evil of Me. "For he who is not against us is on our side. "For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink in My name, because you belong to Christ, assuredly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward. "But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him if a mill-stone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea.

My understanding is that this individual was actually casting out demons by Christ's authority (in His name). He seems to have been a follower of Jesus, though he did not accompany Jesus and the twelve. We must remember that the faith of the disciples was very imperfect at this point. They apparently thought that no one other than the chosen twelve ought to be honored with this power, and when they encountered this man who did not travel with Christ and the twelve casting out demons, they forbade him.

If this man had been teaching people to follow someone other than Jesus; or if had he been doing these things in the name of someone else; or if he had been unsuccessful in casting out the demons in the name of Christ, then they would have had some justification in forbidding this man's work. Jesus told them that if God had given the power of working miracles to him, then that gave evidence that he could not soon be found among the enemies of Christ. Jesus did not praise nor condemn the man for following an independent course for working as an individual and not traveling with the disciples. Christ declared that he must not be forbidden, and that those who work the same kind of work that we do should not be regarded as enemies, but allies.

In every period of church history, there have been those who spend a good portion of their lives duplicating the mistake John made. They strive to stop everyone who will not subscribe to their way of working from working for the Lord at all. We should not be so finely critical of the labor of brethren who are doing good in obedience to the Lord's orders and by His authority.



**Part 2: Does 2 Timothy 4:5 allow evangelists to do the work of an elder and thus become on a par with the denominational pastor system?**

According to this writer's understanding, no Scripture will justify or allow a preacher to occupy the position that is held by most denominational pastors. The position that is held by a pastor in the denominational world is far removed from that which is revealed in the inspired record. In fact, the misuse of the term, and the work that is associated with it, is so foreign to scriptural teaching that many Christians refrain from even using the term for fear that they will give the wrong impression about the work of the pastor.

Ephesians 4:11-16 teaches that God's plan is that the church be built up and brought along to maturity by those who function as evangelists and pastors, teaching His disciples (the saints).

There is definitely some overlapping in the work that preachers and pastors do in building up the body of Christ, but they are separate functions, nevertheless, designed to provide for different needs in the body (the church).

In the broad sense of the word, it may be said that an evangelist is anyone who preaches or teaches the gospel of Christ; but in careful consideration of a few other Scriptures, we learn that there were some who were given distinction by being called an evangelist. Ephesians 4:11 reads, "And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers." Paul instructed Timothy, "But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry" (2 Tim. 4:5). A brief word study of this latter passage will greatly improve our understanding of the work of an evangelist and how he proves his ministry.

**Work** —*ergon*, er'-gon; from a prim. (but obsol.) *ergo* (to work); toil (as an effort or occupation); by impl. an act:—deed, doing, labor, work.

**Make full proof**—*plerophoreo*, play-rof-or-eh'-o; from to carry out fully (in evidence), i.e. completely assure (or convince), entirely accomplish:—most surely believe, fully know (persuade), make full proof of.

**What Work Is the Evangelist to Do?**

The following passages outline the work to be done by evangelists.

And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints, for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ (Eph. 4:11-12).

Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching (2 Tim. 4:2).

For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you (Tit. 1:5).

A summary of the evangelist's work, according to these passages, is as follows:

- Preach
- Reprove (el-eng'-kho)—convict, convince, tell a fault.
- Rebuke—censure or admonish; by impl. forbid:—(straitly) charge, rebuke.
- Exhort (par-ak-al-eh'-o) to call near, i.e. invite, invoke (by imploration, exhortation or consolation):—beseech, call for, (be of good) comfort, desire, (give exhortation), intreat, pray.
  - (1) Using patience
  - (2) Using doctrine
- Set in order the things that are lacking
- Perfect (mature) the saints
- Instruct and train others to do works of service
- Appoint elders

### **What Work Is the Pastor (Elder) to Do?**

The analogy between the saints and sheep occurs often in the Bible. The need for the flock to have pastors to shepherd them is stressed often, also. In Matthew 9:36, Jesus was "moved with compassion when He saw the multitudes, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd."

It is alarming to hear brethren say, "It's not unscriptural for a congregation to exist without pastors (elders)." This cannot be the understanding that God would have us possess when He has given us so much instruction on the need for each flock to have shepherds and has shown us the terrible things that may happen when there are no pastors to watch over, care for, and feed the sheep.

It is the Lord's will and it is scriptural for each congregation (or flock) to be loved, led, fed, healed, and overseen. We need what the New Testament calls "pastors"!

**poimen** (pastor/shepherd). The Greek noun **poimen** means "shepherd" and is used figuratively with reference to the elders/overseers of the church. It is used of literal shepherds in Luke's story of the birth of Christ (2:8). Many examples of the metaphorical use of "shepherd" exist in the Old Testament. God is pictured as a shepherd on several occasions. Psalm 23 shows that He supplies needs (v. 1), leads us to green pastures (v. 2), and comforts (v. 4). Isaiah 40:11 reads, "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those

that are with young." Moses urged God to select a leader over the congregation who would go before them and lead them so that "the congregation of the Lord be not as sheep which have no shepherd" (Num. 27:17). Jesus expressed a similar concern when He pictured the multitudes as "sheep having no shepherd" (Mt. 9:36).

The metaphorical use of "shepherd" is also applied to the relationship between Jesus and His people. John 10:11-12 reads, "I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. He who is a hireling, and not a shepherd, who is not the owner of the sheep, beholds the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep, and flees" (NASB).

The shepherd imagery suggests intimate knowledge of the flock. Jesus said, "...the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name, and leads them out...and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice...My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me" (Jn. 10:3-4, 27). The shepherd's concern for the wayward can be seen in his leaving the ninety-nine and seeking the lost one (Mt. 18:12-14).

"Shepherd" is the more correct term in expressing the original meaning of **poimen**, for the modern connotations associated with "pastor" make it unacceptable for those interested in knowing who these church leaders really were.

### **The Verb Forms of **poimen****

Church leaders are called "shepherds" in a metaphorical sense. This term is not an ecclesiastical title for a church office, but a term expressing the work and ministry of church leaders. This becomes clear when one considers usages of the verb **poimaino** (m. "I shepherd").

If one is a shepherd (noun), he must be able to shepherd (verb). The verb **poimaino** often is used to describe the work of church leaders. The relationship between the noun and verb is difficult to connect in most English versions because the English words are not always similar as they are in Greek. For example, elders are told "to feed [**poimaino**] the flock of God which is among you" (1 Pet. 5:2). Again, Paul told the Ephesian elders "to feed [**poimaino**] the church of God" (Acts 20:28).

Shepherding the flock is to feed the flock as well as to tend and care for them. Shepherds smell like their sheep because of their close contact. The work of the shepherd involved guarding the sheep from thieves (Jn. 10:1, 8) and wild beasts (Jn. 10:12). Paul describes false teachers as wolves. The elders are to shepherd the church of God and watch for wolves attempting to enter the flock (Acts 20:28-31). This work requires intimate knowledge of the sheep and intimate contact with them. "They smell like their sheep!" This loving,

compassionate care cannot be provided by one who is hired to come in and take care of sheep of whom he has no knowledge (except hearsay) and with whom he has no intimate relationship.

The requirement of Scripture is that shepherds be selected from among the flock:

To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers--not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock (1 Pet. 5:1-3).

Is this what we are preaching and practicing in our congregations? Look around at congregations that you know. Is that the practice that you see? My observation has been that in many congregations a new or hybrid form of pastor system has developed, and they are perfectly content to go on with such a system. Not even a minimal effort seems to be put forth to satisfy scriptural teaching as to how God wants us to accomplish the work of shepherding His flock. May I just mention a few of the systems that I have observed and to which I am referring:

1. We call in a preacher and support him to various degrees. We expect him to take care of the work and functions that the Scriptures designate for pastors (shepherds) of the church. We call him an evangelist, minister, or preacher so as to distinguish our system from the denominational pastor system. But he does the work attributed to pastors in the New Testament.

2. We allow leading members within the congregation, who are usually the better teachers of the congregation, to take care of the work and functions that the Scriptures designate for pastors (shepherds) of the church. We are willing to allow them to do the work that the Scriptures reveal that the shepherd is to do, but for one reason or another we do not believe that he is "qualified" to be recognized or designated as a shepherd.

3. Some have developed a system of mutual shepherding. "I'll watch you, and you watch me. If I step out of line, you'll correct me; and if you step out of line, I'll correct you. And if some situation comes up in which we can't agree on who is really out of line, we will call in a preacher or group of preachers from outside the flock to resolve the dispute." The result of this method is quite often the development of two or three flocks out of what was one.

A variety of other systems might be noted that do not fit the pattern we read about in God's Word. Many have digressed from God's plan!

Should we allow preachers to do the work of an elder? Does 2 Timothy 4:5 in any way allow such? Not to my understanding! I do understand from what is said in 2 Timothy 4:5, Titus 1:5, and Ephesians 4:12-13 that to do the work of an evangelist a man *must* be doing all he can to ordain shepherds/pastors/elders! If he is not doing this, he is not doing the work of an evangelist; he is not fulfilling his ministry. *P.O. Box 10868, Fort Smith, AR 72917*

# Difficult Passages on the Kingdom

*by Doug Edwards*

One of the very first religious books I bought when I was a younger man and wanted to start teaching was one that dealt with the subject of the end times. I went into a denominational bookstore in Norman, Oklahoma, and made the mistake of judging a book by its cover. When I began to read the book, there were points being made that just did not quite seem right—they did not add up. The authors made statements about Israel's being restored to Palestine in 1948 in fulfillment of Biblical prophecy and being the chosen people of God. Other statements were made about some mysterious coming of Jesus called the "rapture" that would be only for the righteous people. Something was said about a seven-year tribulation period in the near future. But the section that really grabbed my attention was one that tried to persuade the reader to understand that the kingdom of God was not established back on Pentecost day, but had been rejected by the Jews and would come into existence during our lifetime. Something was wrong with this position, but I did not know how to disprove it. That book sparked an interest and a love that I have developed for study on the kingdom of God.

## **The Kingdom and Redemption**

I would like to both introduce and conclude my study with an important truth—the kingdom of God must be closely associated with the theme of redemption that flows throughout the pages of the Bible. Please listen to the Scriptures as they relate these two themes together:

He has delivered us from the power of darkness and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins (Col. 1:13-14).

And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, "Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down (Rev. 12:10).

As one traces the redemptive plan from the fall of Adam, to the promise made to Abraham, to the establishment of Israel, to the death and resurrection of Jesus, to the establishment of His church, and to His final return to take the redeemed to their final home in heaven, one finds the kingdom of God at work. When the angel made his announcement to Joseph about the Lord's upcoming birth, he said, "And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins" (Mt. 1:21). Here we

see in capsule form the nature of the Lord's work and His kingdom--it was to be spiritual, emphasizing the forgiveness of sin. The rest of the New Testament merely enlarges this great fact. When we begin to emphasize a different purpose for the kingdom, we take a detour into error.

The word "kingdom" occurs approximately 155 times in the New Testament. Some of these are somewhat difficult to understand when we first read them. We will consider some of these difficult passages in this study. Please consider this list:

And I say to you that many will come from the east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Mt. 8:11-12).

Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force (Mt. 11:11-12).

But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come to you (Mt. 12:28).

The field is the world, the good seeds are the sons of the kingdom, but the tares are the sons of the wicked one. The enemy who sowed them is the devil, the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are the angels. Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age. The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness (Mt. 13:38-41).

So you, likewise, when you see these things coming to pass, know that the kingdom of God is near (Lk. 21:31).

And the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!" (Rev. 11:15).

### **The Meaning of Kingdom**

Before we look at these verses, we must define the word as it was used in the first century. That is important because words sometimes change in meanings over the years. When we think of a kingdom, we usually think of a territory or a group of people, such as the United Kingdom (England) or the kingdom of Saudi Arabia. However, this definition denotes the modern usage of the word. It may come as a surprise to know that in ancient times the term

"kingdom" primarily referred to the reign or rule of the kingdom, and only in the secondary sense did it refer to realm or territory. The term is more complex than we may initially imagine with different shades of meaning. The lexicons define the word "kingdom" as:

1. Royal power, kingship, dominion, rule (Lk. 1:33; 19:12, 15; 1 Cor. 15:24; Heb. 1:8);
2. A kingdom, i.e. the territory subject to the rule of a king (Mt. 4:8; 12:25; 24:7);
3. Frequently in the New Testament in reference to the reign of the Messiah (Thayer, pp. 96-97).

Alexander Campbell in *The Christian System* summarizes the definition of kingdom as follows:

...it is very evident that frequently the original word *basileia* ought in preference to be rendered reign, inasmuch as this term better suits all of those passages where coming or approaching is spoken of: for, while reigns or administrations approach or recede, kingdoms have attributes and boundaries which are stationary (p. 126).

The Old Testament teaches that God's reign, or His kingdom, is universal (Ps. 29:10; 93:2; 103:19; Jer. 10:10; 1 Chron. 29:11-12). It is universal because He created all and continues to sustain all today. Within this universal rule there are some who willingly obey God. At times, the Scriptures call this smaller group a kingdom. At Mount Sinai God told Moses, "Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex. 19:5-6). This arrangement may be called a kingdom within a kingdom, or a kingdom within a reign. Israel was a manifestation of God's kingdom among the nations. They were to show the world the advantages of being faithful to God within His kingdom.

The New Testament continues this teaching concerning the kingdom of Christ. His kingdom, or His reign, in one sense, is universal (Mt. 28:18; Eph. 1:22-23; 1 Pet. 3:22). This reign began after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus to God's right hand. It was announced to the world on Pentecost (Acts 2:29-33). Within this universal reign, there are those who willingly obey Jesus. At times, the Scriptures also call this smaller group a kingdom (Jn. 3:5; Col. 1:13; Rev. 1:6). This arrangement may also be called a kingdom within a kingdom or a kingdom within a reign.

### The Kingdom's Future

What does the future hold for the kingdom? We have seen that the Messianic reign began with the sitting of Jesus at God's right hand after His resurrection and ascension. The Scriptures point to an end of this Messianic reign when He returns at the second coming. Paul says:



But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming. Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom back to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet (1 Cor. 15:23-25).

When Christ returns, the kingdom's redemptive element is over and the judgment stage begins (2 Tim. 4:1). The Messiah's handing the kingdom back to the Father describes a future time that will include the Christian's glorious entry into heaven. Those passages that describe our future entrance into the kingdom refer to this entrance into heaven where the reign of God will continue for all eternity (Mt. 25:41; 2 Pet. 1:11).

We may summarize the kingdom in this way: since the term "kingdom" primarily refers to the reign of God, and since God is eternal, His kingdom must be eternal. In that sense, the kingdom is past, present, and future. The kingdom of God existed during the times of the Old Testament. During the times of Christianity, the kingdom of God continues to exist during the reign of Jesus the Messiah. The kingdom of God will reach its ultimate purpose when God finally destroys Satan and His people inherit eternal life at the Lord's second coming.

We are ready now to look at some of these individual passages dealing with the kingdom that may seem to be a little difficult. Hopefully, this brief study of the kingdom that we have just concluded will help in understanding these difficult passages.

### **Casting the Sons of the Kingdom into Outer Darkness (Mt. 8:11-12)**

And I say to you that many will come from the east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

What is meant by the phrase "sons of the kingdom?" If the church is the kingdom, how could the sons of the kingdom be cast into outer darkness? The context, as usual, provides the answer. Jesus had entered Capernaum, and a centurion approached Him asking for help for his servant who was paralyzed and suffering. Jesus stated that He would go home with him. The centurion humbly said he did not deserve One like Jesus to come to his home, and if Jesus would only speak the word, his servant would be healed. Jesus marveled at his faith and said He had not found anyone in Israel with this kind of faith. The passage deals with a contrast between this Gentile's faith and the lack of faith among some Jews. When Jesus said that many would come from the east

and west and sit down in the kingdom of heaven. He was referring to the coming of the Gentiles into the kingdom. The prophets predicted this same thing would happen, yet many of the Jews did not seem to understand it. Some Jews thought of the kingdom as a great feast with only the Jews being invited and the Gentiles would be destroyed. Jesus simply tells them their view is erroneous. He seems to use the phrase "sons of the kingdom" in an unusual way to describe the unbelieving Jews.

Why would the Jews be called the "sons of the kingdom"? It is because the promises of the Old Testament were made to them first. They should have been the ones who received the Messiah with open arms. Their Scriptures foretold that He was coming. Instead, many Gentiles would come into the kingdom through their belief, and many Jews would be left out because of their unbelief. Jesus referred to this same group when He said the kingdom would be taken from them and given to another nation (Mt. 21:43). Paul referred to them in Romans 11 when he talked about the natural branches that were broken off because of their unbelief.

### **The Kingdom Advances Forcefully (Mt. 11:11-12)**

Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force.

The passage raises some difficult questions. How could the least in the kingdom be greater than John? How do the violent take the kingdom of heaven by force?

The context shows us that when John had been placed in jail, he sent his disciples to ask Jesus if He was the One who was to come or should they look for another. Jesus answered these disciples with references from Isaiah that deal with the Messiah's doing His work (Mt. 11:4-5). As John's disciples were about to leave, Jesus spoke in glowing terms to the rest of the crowd about the faithfulness of John the Baptist.

It is at this point that Jesus said that among those born of women, there has not risen a greater than John the Baptist, and yet the least in the kingdom is greater than John. That statement sounds contradictory or, at the least, confusing. How could the least in the kingdom be greater than John? I think the answer is simply that John was never in the Messianic kingdom (in this case referring to the church). He preached the nearness of the kingdom, yet he was not a citizen of it. The new age held greater blessings and privileges than those he enjoyed (Mt. 13:16-17). What did John lack? John never saw the cross, the

full revelation of God's love. It is possible for the humblest Christian to know more about God than the greatest of the Old Testament prophets. A nineteenth century writer described seeing a blind man carefully lighting the gas street lights in an English town. The blind man brought light to others which he himself could not see. John did the same thing. He brought spiritual light to others that he would not get to see.

Verse twelve is the most difficult part of this passage. The NIV renders the passage: "From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it." Jesus metaphorically describes the kingdom as a besieged city with men forcing their way in. What kind of men are the ones trying to get in? Scholars are divided on this point, suggesting two different views. One is positive and one is negative. The negative view suggests that those with erroneous views on the kingdom would try to force the kingdom to meet their expectations. That would include those who tried to make Jesus king by force (Jn. 6:14-15); the mother of James and John who sought to obtain secular appointments for her sons in the kingdom (Mt. 20:21), the Pharisees who wanted an earthly kingdom (Lk. 17:20-21); the Zealots who wanted a militarily strong and material-minded kingdom; and even the apostles who at first misunderstood the spiritual nature of the kingdom (Lk. 22:24-30). This attitude about the kingdom would be like one who impatiently seizes a bud and seeks with his fingers to force it to bloom.

The second major interpretation of this verse suggests that Jesus has in mind the spiritual struggle necessary to enter the kingdom of heaven. Sincere men struggle in leaving sin to be a part of this spiritual kingdom. Jesus said, "Strive to enter in at the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter in and will not be able" (Lk. 13:24). The word translated "strive" means "to endeavor with strenuous zeal" (Thayer, p. 72). This same word translates in other passages as "fight, compete, wrestling." The thought may be paraphrased: forceful men, who break away from faulty human traditions, no matter the cost to them, are eagerly taking possession of the kingdom. That simply tells us the kingdom of heaven is not entered accidentally. One must struggle with sin, human traditions, and one's own emotions in order to enter the kingdom.

One of the difficulties of this verse is knowing how to translate "suffers violence." The Greek word can be either passive or middle in mood. If translated passive, it means the kingdom is being forced; if translated middle, it means the kingdom forces its way violently. The KJV, NKJV, and NASB translate the word as passive in mood. The NIV translates it as middle.

The context may help us determine the meaning of this passage. Jesus has been describing the work of John the Baptist. He was faithful to his calling, so it appears that Jesus describes the kingdom from a positive point of view. If that is the case, then the Lord's statement about the kingdom is that it is forcefully advancing in an evil world.

### **In Casting Out Demons, the Kingdom Comes Near (Mt. 12:28)**

But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come to you.

The Lord spoke these words after being accused by the Pharisees of being in partnership with the devil. Jesus had just healed a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute. The releasing of this man from the clutches of evil caused great astonishment to come upon the people, and they wondered if He could be the Messiah. This should have been a time of great rejoicing. Instead, the Pharisees found fault with the Lord's actions and the people's statement. They could not remain idle and allow Jesus to sway the people to His side. Their problem, though, was that they could not deny the miracle. They could not say that Jesus was faking this miracle because they knew a great miracle had been performed. Therefore, they determined to discredit Him in the eyes of the people. They told the people that Jesus worked hand-in-hand with Beelzebub, the prince of the demons.

Jesus immediately pointed out the folly of their reasoning by showing the inconsistency of their logic (Mt. 12:25-27). Was it logical to think that a kingdom or a city divided against itself would stand and prosper? Can a nation prosper during a civil war? Obviously, the answer was no. He also pressed the Pharisees with this question, "And if I drive out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your people drive them out?" Their false accusations were simply illogical, and the people could see through them.

It is at this point that Jesus said, "But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come to you." What connection was there between demon exorcism and the kingdom of God? Sometimes the demonstration of God's power was called a "coming of the kingdom." It was an emphasis on the power of God's reign. The power that Jesus demonstrated in overcoming Satan and his demons was a demonstration of God's power, His reign. This demonstration shows that the kingdom of God, His royal dominion, has come on earth and is active in the person of Jesus.

### **Gathering Out of the Kingdom (Mt. 13:38-41)**

The field is the world, the good seeds are the sons of the kingdom, but the tares are the sons of the wicked one. The enemy who sowed

them is the devil, the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are the angels. Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age. The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness.

These words are the Lord's explanation of the parable of the tares. In these verses, He tells us what the different parts of the parable mean. The parable is one that deals with the problem of evil in this world and the eventual separation of good and evil at the judgment. The problem in the parable is that in one breath Jesus said the field was the world and then in another breath He said the separation of good and evil occurs within the kingdom. What is the relationship between the world and the kingdom? This passage is a good example of where the term "kingdom" does not seem to primarily refer to the church but to God's reign that is universal.

There is a parallel thought in these verses. First, in describing the field as the world, Jesus indicates there will be a separation between the good seed and the tares, the righteous and the wicked. Second, when describing the kingdom, Jesus says there will be a separation of the good and evil. Notice that what is said will occur in the field will also occur within the kingdom. Thus, the field and the kingdom seem to be referring to the same entity. In other words, the field and the kingdom are the same. How is that possible? It is possible because God's reign is universal and all are under His dominion.

This passage has sometimes been mistakenly applied to church discipline. The argument runs like this. The kingdom in this passage is the church. The servants are told not to gather up the tares until the time of harvest. The conclusion is that Christians do not have the right to disfellowship unfaithful Christians but must wait until the Lord disciplines them at the judgment. The problem with this interpretation is twofold. First, the kingdom in this passage refers to God's reign over the world; hence, it is more than just the church. Second, this view contradicts several other passages that deal with church discipline (1 Cor. 5; Tit. 3:10-11; 2 Thess. 3:6).

### **The Kingdom of God and the Destruction of Jerusalem (Lk. 21:31)**

So you, likewise, when you see these things coming to pass, know that the kingdom of God is near.

The context of Luke 21 deals with the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in A.D. 70. This chapter parallels Matthew 24 and Mark 13. As the disciples left the temple, they pointed out the beautiful stones of this magnificent building to Jesus. He startled them with the statement that someday none

of these stones would be left standing. His disciples then asked Him when these events would take place and what would be the sign of His coming and the end of the world. Jesus told them the signs that would precede the destruction of Jerusalem. There would be civil wars, famines, earthquakes, and persecutions. Then an army would surround Jerusalem, destroy it, and carry its remaining survivors into captivity. When one sees these terrible events, he is to know the kingdom of God is near.

We run into a problem, though, when we link the coming of the kingdom with the destruction of Jerusalem. After all, when John the Baptist came preaching, he told the people that kingdom of heaven was near (Mt. 3:1-2). Peter later announced this kingdom was in existence on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). If that is so, how could Jesus say concerning the destruction of Jerusalem, some forty years after Pentecost, that the coming of the kingdom was near? How do we reconcile these two passages?

The coming of the kingdom in A.D. 70 was a special usage of the word "kingdom." Sometimes the coming of the kingdom does not refer to the establishment of the kingdom but was a public manifestation of His already existing sovereignty. That seems to be the case here. Jesus had already been made Lord at Pentecost, and that kingdom (reign) was manifest publicly in the judgment of Jerusalem. It was a demonstration that God was still in control. A parallel situation is found in terms describing the coming of Jesus. Not all of the passages that tell of a coming of Jesus actually describe His second coming. Sometimes the coming of the Lord refers to something else. For instance, Jesus said, "and then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory" (Lk. 21:27). This coming is not His second coming, but His coming in judgment upon Jerusalem. Likewise, the destruction of Jerusalem displayed the power of the reign of God.

### **The Kingdom of this World Has Become the Kingdom of Christ (Rev. 11:15)**

And the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!" (Rev. 11:15)

There are many who understand this verse to teach that at the second coming of Christ, He will destroy His enemies and reign on earth for a thousand years. However, the passage should probably be understood much like Luke 21:31 where the kingdom referred to a manifestation of God's rule—a visible proof in history that God still is on His throne.

By no stretch of the imagination do I make any claims to be an expert on Revelation. But I do know this: Revelation does not introduce doctrines that contradict those in the rest of the New Testament. There are other passages in Revelation that indicate Jesus was already reigning within His kingdom when John wrote this book:

- Jesus is "ruler over the kings of the earth" (1:5)
- Christians are "a kingdom and priests" (1:6)
- John was "in the kingdom" (1:9)
- Jesus had already received authority to "rule with an iron scepter" (2:27)
- Jesus already held "the key of David" (3:7)
- Jesus had already "sat down with my Father on his throne" (3:21)
- Christians have been made "a kingdom and priests" (5:10)
- Jesus is called "King of kings and Lord of Lords" (19:16)

Even the internal evidence of Revelation does not contradict the New Testament teaching that Christ's reign over His kingdom began with His glorification and was announced on Pentecost. In other words the Messianic kingdom had been in existence some sixty years when John wrote Revelation.

For some reason, both the KJV and the NKJV translate "kingdom" as a plural. However, the evidence seems to favor the singular. The NIV renders the passage, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever."

Passages in prophetic writings, which at first reading seem to refer to the second coming and final judgment, may often refer to God's coming in judgment on a nation. These passages may actually predict the destruction of that nation and not the actual end of the world. I understand that to be the case here. Notice the kingdoms "have become." The verb in the Greek is an aorist tense verb, indicative that the kingdom of the world became the Lord's at some point in the predictive past. It is not speaking of some future event. The fall of the Roman Empire and the missionary success of the church proved conclusively that the world belonged to the LORD and His Christ. This is what the vision of the throne revealed. It was not the Roman emperors who were sovereign, but God and Christ. The downfall of Rome proved again that God still reigns. What was briefly alluded to here will be described more in detail in the latter half of Revelation. At various times, John seems to introduce a thought and then return to it at later times in his book.

### **Conclusion**

At the beginning of our study I said there was a direct connection between the kingdom of God and the redemption of man. The kingdom of God must be

closely associated with the theme of redemption that flows throughout the pages of the Bible. I want to conclude our study with the same thought.

The kingdom is restorative in nature. Its purpose is not to restore a small group of people to some ancestral homeland but to restore fallen man back into the graces of his Creator. Jesus describes John the Baptist's mission with these words, "To be sure, Elijah does come first, and restore all things. Why then is it written that the Son of Man must suffer much and be rejected?" (Mk. 9:12). John's mission was spiritual—to call Israel back to God. This time of restoration signified the religious renewal of the people in terms of repentance and forgiveness. This restoration was a spiritual one.

Peter appeals to this same spiritual restoration in his sermon to the Jews after healing the lame man when he says concerning Jesus, "He must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets" (Acts 3:21).

Paul also appealed to the redemptive purpose of the kingdom when he told the Ephesian elders:

I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me--the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace. Now I know that none of you among whom I have gone about preaching the kingdom will ever see me again" (Acts 20:24-25).

Note that Paul preached the kingdom, but he also preached the gospel of God's grace, illustrating the redemptive purpose of the kingdom. 104 N.E. 8th Street, Moore, OK, 73160



# Jesus and the Holy Spirit

*by Jimmie Smith*

Paul proclaimed, "...great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh..." (1 Tim. 3:16). For those who saw Jesus in the flesh, the difficulty was not in believing that he was man, but in believing he was God. For those of us who read the New Testament and see the overall picture of such a tremendous life, the difficulty is not in believing he was God, but man as well. Our hope of heaven cannot stand in anything less than a firm conviction of both.

The Bible unveils many truths about God, about the things of God, and about the Persons of God. Though we, as finite beings, are not able to fully fathom all the mysteries that yet shroud the Godhead, we can believe what is written. There are many things that I do not understand but yet I "accept them." If the Bible says it, it is imperative that I accept it. Absolute, finite understanding of the infinite is a contradiction within itself.

## The Godhead

Jehovah God is revealed in the Bible as a Triune Being. To the Corinthians Paul said, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all" (2 Cor. 13:14). In this verse, God the Father, Christ the Son, and the Holy Spirit are presented to us as working together, just as they always have from the "beginning."

God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit are fundamentally one, yet they are at the same time regarded as three distinct personalities. Admittedly, these truths are difficult to comprehend, but we must believe them because that is what the Bible teaches.

Just as it is difficult to separate, in one's mind, the three members of the Godhead in the work of redemption, it is equally difficult to separate Christ and the Holy Spirit during Christ's earthly ministry. This is true because of the complete cooperation between the two, a fact clearly set forth, not only in the Old Testament prophecies, but in the New Testament teachings of the life of Christ as well.

The Holy Spirit foretold of His coming. Peter tells us, "...men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet. 1:21, ASV 1901). Through these prophets, the Holy Spirit foretold the major facts in the life and death of Christ before He came to earth.

We will address the Scriptures specifically assigned in this study and the questions associated with these Scriptures. They are Luke 2:40, 49, and 52, and Hebrews 4:15 and 5:8 (and while John 3:34 is not included in the list, it is inferred as a background to the questions related to these Scriptures). John 3:34 says, "For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him." The questions to be addressed are as follows:

- Did Jesus have a full measure of the Holy Spirit from birth to age thirty, or was it limited until the Holy Spirit fell on Him at His baptism?
- If He was perfect, filled with a full measure of the Holy Spirit, how did He "increase in wisdom"?
- How did He "learn obedience" through the things that He suffered?

## Luke 2:40, 49, 52

And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him...And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business? And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.

## Luke 2:40

J. W. McGarvey said:

**And the child grew.** This verse contains the history of thirty years. It describes the growth of our Lord as a natural, human growth (compare 1.k. 1:80); Luke 1:80, "And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his shewing unto Israel" (of course this was written of John the Baptist) for, though Jesus was truly divine, he was also perfectly man which is too subtle for our dull and finite minds. To try to distinguish between the divine and human in Jesus, is to waste time upon an impracticable mystery which is too subtle for our dull and finite minds.

**And waxed strong.** His life expanded like other human lives. He learned as other boys; he obeyed as other children. As he used means and waited patiently for growth, so must each individual Christian, and so must the church. Though the latter is a mystical body, and animated by the Holy Spirit, it must nevertheless make increase of itself before coming to the perfect man (Eph. 4:16).

**Filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him.** These words describe briefly the life of Christ during the preparatory period at Nazareth. It was a quiet life, but its sinless purity made the Baptist feel his own unworthiness compared to it (Mt. 3:14), and its sweet

reasonableness inspired in Mary, the mother, that confidence which led her to sanction, without reserve, any request or command which Jesus might utter (Jn. 2:5) (Source: *Power Bible* CD).

The Geneva Bible Notes said, "As Christ grew up in age, so the virtue of his Godhead showed itself more and more" (ibid).

Adam Clarke said of Luke 2:40:

**Strong in spirit.** In mind, intellect, understanding. Jesus had a human soul, and that soul was subject to all the proper laws of a human spirit. It therefore increased in knowledge, strength, and character. Nor is it any more inconsistent with his being God to say that his soul expanded, than to say that his body grew.

**Filled with wisdom.** Eminent for wisdom when a child--that is, exhibiting an extraordinary understanding, and wise to flee from everything sinful and evil.

**And the grace of God, &c.** The word grace in the New Testament commonly means unmerited favour shown to sinners. Here it means no more than favour. God showed him favour, or was pleased with him and blessed him. It is remarkable that this is all that is recorded of the infancy of Jesus; and this, with the short account that follows of his going to Jerusalem, is all that we know of him for thirty years of his life. The design of the evangelists was to give an account of his public ministry, and not his private life. Hence they say little of him in regard to his first years. What they do say, however, corresponds entirely with what we might expect. He was wise, pure, pleasing God, and deeply skilled in the knowledge of the divine law. He set a lovely example for all children; was subject to his parents, and increased in favour with God and man (*Power Bible* CD-Lk. 2:40).

Albert Barnes said:

[The child grew] As to his body-being in perfect health.

[Waxed strong in spirit] His rational soul became strong and vigorous.

[Filled with wisdom] The divinity continuing to communicate itself more and more, in proportion to the increase of the rational principle. The reader should never forget that Jesus was perfect man, as well as God.

[And the grace of God was upon him.] The word *karis*... but it means also favour or approbation: and this sense I think most proper for it here, when applied to the human nature of our blessed Lord; and thus our translators render the same word, Lu 2:52. Even Christ himself, who knew no sin, grew in the favour of God; and, as to his human nature, increased in the graces of the Holy Spirit. From this we learn

that, if a man were as pure and as perfect as the man Jesus Christ himself was, yet he might nevertheless increase in the image, and consequently in the favour, of God. God loves every thing and person, in proportion to the nearness of the approaches made to his own perfections.

### Luke 2:49

Albert Barnes said:

**How is it, &c.** Why have ye sought me with so much anxiety? Mary should have known that the Son of God was safe; that his heavenly Father would take care of him, and that he could do nothing amiss.

**Wist ye not.** Know ye not. You had reason to know. You knew my design in coming into the world, and that design was superior to the duty of obeying earthly parents, and they should be willing always to give me up to the proper business for which I live.

**My Father's business.** Some think that this should be translated "in my Father's house" -that is, in the temple. Jesus reminded them here that he came down from heaven; that he had a higher Father than an earthly parent; and that, even in early life, it was proper that he should be engaged in the work for which he came. He did not enter, indeed, upon his public work for eighteen years after this; yet still the work of God was his work, and always, even in childhood, it was proper for him to be engaged in the great business for which he came down from heaven. "

### Luke 2:52

J. W. McGarvey said:

And Jesus advanced in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men. He did not literally grow in favor with God. This is a phenomenal expression. The favor of God and man kept company for quite awhile; but the favor of God abode with Jesus when man's good will was utterly withdrawn. Men admire holiness until it becomes aggressive, and then they feel an antagonism against it as great, or intense, as their previous admiration.

Albert Barnes said:

In favour with God. That is, in proportion to his advance in wisdom. This does not imply that he ever lacked the favour of God, but that God regarded him with favour in proportion as he showed an understanding and spirit like his own. Happy are those children who imitate the example of Jesus--who are obedient to parents--who increase in wisdom--who are sober, temperate, and industrious, and who thus increase in favour with God and men.

Now addressing the question concerning the measure of the Holy Spirit Jesus possessed from birth until age thirty, consider the case of John the Baptist in Luke 1:15, "For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb." On Luke 1:15, Adam Clarke writes:

Shall be Divinely designated to this particular office, and qualified for it, from his mother's womb—from the instant of his birth. One MS., two versions, and four of the primitive fathers read ἐν τῇ κοιλίᾳ, IN the womb of his mother—intimating that even before he should be born into the world the Holy Spirit should be communicated to him....To be filled with the Holy Ghost, implies having the soul influenced in all its powers, with the illuminating, strengthening, and sanctifying energy of the Spirit.

Are we to presume that John had the Spirit's influences and Jesus did not? Jesus was certainly Immanuel at twelve. Luke 2:46–47 reads, "And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions. And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers." From his parents, synagogue, and personal study, a twelve-year-old boy could learn a great deal about the Scriptures, but by no stretch of the imagination could he discuss Scripture with men like Gamaliel and leave them amazed ("driven out of their senses"—Vincent) at his understanding and answers. He did not just ask, he answered! This is recorded, not to impress us with how bright Jesus was, but to demonstrate His omniscience and that, therefore, this boy was Immanuel. "God with us."

Verse 52 sums up the experience of Jesus' life prior to age thirty. His advancing in wisdom during those years does not deny His omniscience, but refers to the manifestation of His wisdom as exemplified in the previous verses.

Immanuel was worshiped. The wise men "came into the house and saw the young child with Mary his mother; and they fell down and worshiped him" (Mt. 2:11, ASV 1901). As a baby, Jesus Christ was God. Define God, and you will have defined the Godhood of Christ when He was only a baby.

He was not potential God; He did not have to grow into Godhood. To deny His omnipotence, omniscience, etc., when He was a baby is to deny His Godhood (deity). God is God! To say that the baby Jesus was called Immanuel, "God with us," and then say that as a baby He was something less than God is to redefine God and make the wise men idolaters. As Immanuel was worshiped by the wise men, He was worshiped many times during His minis-

try (Mt. 8:2; 9:18; 14:33; 15:25, etc.), and He Himself said, "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve" (Mt. 4:10).

## Hebrews 4:15

For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.

James Burton Coffman comments on this verse:

Could Christ have sinned? Regarding the temptation of Christ, the question inevitably appears as to the possibility, even, that Jesus could have sinned; but there seems to be no satisfactory explanation of how any person, even the Son of God, could be tempted to do anything impossible for him to do. Without the possibility of yielding to sin, how can there, in fact, be any such thing as temptation? To be sure, this is an old theological battleground...in advocating the view that Jesus could have sinned, there is no intention to reflect in any way against the purity and holiness of the Master, so beautifully mentioned by Milligan thus:

No inclination to evil ever defiled his pure spirit. The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life had no place in his affections. And hence, though tempted by the devil through all the avenues and natural desires of the human heart, he was still "without" sin.

However, it should be remembered that Christ had taken upon Himself the handicap of human flesh, even the blood of harlots and Gentiles. As a man, Christ certainly had the capability of doing wrong if He had elected to do so, and absolutely no logical refutation appears in any of the writings seen on this subject that can explain how any person can be tempted to do that which it is impossible for him to do. If one may hazard a conjecture as to the greatest temptation of Christ, it was likely an impulse to call the whole thing off, abort His mission of redemption, call for the legions of angels, overwhelm His enemies with destruction, and consign the human race to oblivion, a fate fully deserved; and that just such a temptation did occur is seen in Christ's mention of the twelve legions of angels (Mt. 26:53). Only His great eternal love for people enabled our Lord to forego such a termination of His heavenly mission. This whole field of thought is clouded with the veil through which we see "darkly" (1 Cor. 13:12); dogmatism is certainly out of place, and none is intended here.

People may exclaim, "How could Christ be tempted in all points, since he had no child, did not grow old, never married, was not in business, etc., and therefore did not pass through every situation that produces temptation in

men?" Such a question overlooks the fact that the basic elements of temptation are actually very few in number; and, just as all of the melodies ever written can be broken down into a few notes of the musical scales, all human temptation resolves into three basic principles: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life (1 Jn. 2:16). Christ, of course, was thoroughly tempted and tested in all of these areas, yet did not sin.

### Hebrews 5:8

Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered.

James Burton Coffman comments:

In a sense, all people learn obedience by the things which they suffer. Usually people learn obedience through the disastrous consequences of their disobedience; but not so with Christ. From the first he set forth on a course of the most absolute and perfect obedience; and the sufferings which he endured were the consequence of that obedience, as witness his sufferings on the cross. To learn obedience, as here, implies the tasting of every consequence of obedience. The savage antagonisms of a sinful and rebellious world against all truth and honor were pointed squarely against him who knew no sin. His perfect obedience was the cause of bitter hatred against him and provided the occasion for every blow that fell upon his person. That hatred of Christ was exactly in the pattern of the hatred of Abel, who was murdered by his brother Cain; "And wherefore slew he him? because his works were evil, and his brother's righteous" (1 Jn. 3:12).

Albert Barnes comments:

Yet learned he obedience. That is, he learned experimentally and practically. It cannot be supposed that he did not know what obedience was; or that he was indisposed to obey God before he suffered; or that he had, as we have, perversities of nature, leading to rebellion, which required to be subdued by suffering;—but that he was willing to test the power of obedience in sufferings; to become personally and practically acquainted with the nature of such obedience in the midst of protracted woes. Comp. Php 2:8. The object here is, to show how well fitted the Lord Jesus was to be a Saviour for man-kind; and the argument is, that he has set us an example, and has shown that the most perfect obedience may be manifested in the deepest sorrows of the body and the soul.

Hebrews 2:17–18 reads:

Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things

pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted.

Coffman comments:

"Like unto his brethren" is suggestive of the great prophecy concerning "that Prophet" (Deut. 18:15) who was specifically promised as one who would be "like unto his brethren." That Christ was made "in all things" like his brethren should be qualified by the considerations that: (1) in his birth; (2) in his sinlessness; and (3) in his death for our sins according to the scriptures, Christ was utterly different from all others who ever lived. The expression "merciful and faithful high priest" involves a dual relationship, toward God and toward man... "Being tempted," as used here, seems to make Christ's temptations to consist chiefly of his sufferings. He might well have thought, "Why bother with it all? Why go through such an agony as the cross for the sake of saving people who constantly seemed to prove themselves unworthy of it?" That some such thoughts did occur to Jesus is implied by his reference to the twelve legions of angels whom he had the power to summon to his aid (Mt. 26:53). Only his great eternal love could have strengthened and steadied him against aborting his mission of salvation and calling it off.

As for the alleged impossibility of Christ's committing a sin, such has never appeared reasonable to this writer; because, in the very nature of all things, no man can be tempted to do that which he is incapable of doing. The value of Christ's temptations is seen in the enhanced position it gave him as one able to comfort his human children. Cargill explained this thus,

He did not suffer in vain. If you have never known temptation, you cannot succor another. I have observed that there is no comforter for a widow like one who has lost her husband. The mother who has lost her child is the most comforting to another mother.

### John 3:34

For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him.

Albert Barnes writes:

For God giveth not the Spirit. The Spirit of God. Though Jesus was God as well as man, yet, as Mediator, God anointed him, or endowed him with the influences of his Spirit, so as to be completely qualified for his great work.

Henry writes:



By measure. Not in a small degree, but fully, completely. The prophets were inspired on particular occasions to deliver special messages. The Messiah was continually filled with the Spirit of God. "The Spirit dwelt in him, not as a vessel, but as in a fountain, as in a bottomless ocean."

McGarvey says:

If Christ had received the Spirit "by measure," then his gift of the Spirit might be exhausted.

Adam Clarke comments:

The Jews observe, that the Holy Spirit was given only in certain measures to the prophets; some writing only one book, others two." (Adam Clarke)

### **Jesus' Baptism**

Now when all the people were baptized, it came to pass, that Jesus also being baptized, and praying, the heaven was opened. And the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven, which said, Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased. And Jesus himself began to be about thirty years of age... (Lk. 3:21-23).

And Jesus being full of the Holy Ghost returned from Jordan, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness (Lk. 4:1).

McGarvey writes:

"And the Holy Spirit descended in a bodily form." Lightfoot suggests that the Spirit thus descended that he might be revealed to be a personal substance and not merely an operation of the Godhead, and might thus make a sensible demonstration as to his proper place in the Trinity.

"As a dove." The descent of the Spirit upon Jesus was in accordance with prophecy (Is. 11:2; 42:1). The dove shape suggests purity, gentleness, peace, etc. Jesus makes the dove a symbol of harmlessness (Mt. 10:16). In fact, the nature of this bird makes it a fit emblem of the Spirit, for it comports well with the fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23). The nations of the earth emblazon eagles upon their banners and lions upon their shields, but He who shall gather all nations into his kingdom, appeared as a Lamb, and his Spirit appeared under the symbol of a dove. Verily his kingdom is not of this world. It is a kingdom of peace and love, not of bloodshed and ambition. Noah's dove bore the olive branch, the symbol of peace, and the Holy Spirit manifested Jesus, God's olive branch of peace sent into this world (Ps. 72:7; Lk. 2:14; Jn. 14:27; Eph. 2:11-18).

Barnes comments on verse 22:

"In a bodily shape." This was a real visible appearance, and was doubtless seen by the people. The dove is an emblem of purity and harmlessness, and the form of the dove was assumed on this occasion to signify, probably, that the spirit with which Jesus would be endowed would be one of purity and innocence. The Holy Spirit, when he assumes a visible form, assumes that which will be emblematic of the thing to be represented. Thus he assumed the form of tongues, to signify the miraculous powers of language with which the apostles would be endowed; the appearance of fire, to denote their power, &c., Ac 2:3.

John the Baptist told the people that he did not know Christ until God said, "...Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God" (Jn. 1:33-34).

Maybe a little light can be shed on the question of the relationship between Christ and the Holy Spirit by saying that they are subject to each other. The earthly life of Christ was under the influence and close supervision of the Holy Spirit. In a very real sense, Christ was subject to the Holy Spirit. Yet, on the other hand, there was a sense in which the Holy Spirit was subject unto Christ. When He promised the apostles another Comforter, the Holy Spirit, He said, "...whom I will send unto you from the Father..." (Jn. 15:26). Again, He said, "But when the Comforter is come, whom *I will send* unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me" (Jn. 15:26). And again He said, "Nevertheless I tell you the truth: It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you" (Jn. 16:7).

Evidently then, the Spirit was also subject unto Christ; however, let us not stumble at this fact. How could these two be subject unto each other? The answer is simply that this is further evidence of the very intimate relationship and close cooperation that existed between these two manifestations of God.

## Jesus Was Tempted; Yet God Cannot Be Tempted

Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man (Jas. 1:13).

Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us (Mt. 1:23).

Jesus was in every sense God and in every sense human. The blending of these two natures in the one man has offered a puzzle for students and will continue to do so till eternity dawns. That He was God, the Only Begotten, is declared in John 1:18; and in John 1:1, "the Word was God." That He "shared in flesh and blood" (Heb. 2:14) is known, as well as in the full humanity He took upon himself. He "...emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man..." (Phil. 2:7-8, ASV 1901). How can He be both human and divine? Earthlings may never comprehend the vastness of this subject.

...in the fact that man was originally made in the image of and likeness of God. The human spirit is the offspring of God (Acts 17:29); God is the Father of the human spirit (Heb. 12:9). This being true, there could be no union of the divine spirit with the brute beast (Roy H. Lanier Sr., **The Timeless Trinity For The Ceaseless Centuries**, p. 268).

The Scriptures do not seem to speak of Jesus in first one and then the other nature. It may well be a mistake to speak of Jesus doing something "only as a man" or "only as God," for the Bible does not speak of such. He did the miraculous actions as the "God-man," and He did the ordinary human things as the "God-man." The Bible only speaks of Him as one person, one consciousness, one will.

Certainly, this "dual-oneness" was conditioned by both natures. He voluntarily limited His knowledge when becoming a God-man, for He grew in wisdom (Lk. 2:52), and said that He did not know the time of the coming (Mt. 24:36). While He retained all the attributes of Deity, such as omnipotence, omnipresence, omniscience, etc., He chose not to exercise them. His emptying Himself (Phil. 2:7) must have included this; He gave up the right to exercise divine powers on His own determination. He evidently exercised such powers through the Holy Spirit after His descent upon Him (Jn. 1:33; Mt. 12:28.) Thus, it is

...one of the mysteries which the Scriptures reveal but which they make no effort to explain. Christ is an absolutely unique person. His personality...remains a profound mystery, in some respects as baffling as the Trinity itself....But the essential facts are clear and are understandable by the average Christian. These are that the Second Person of the Trinity added to His own nature a perfectly normal human nature, that His life on earth, was passed as far as was fitting within the limits of this humanity, that his life remained at all times the life of God manifest in the flesh, that his action in the flesh never escaped beyond the boundary of that which was suitable for incarnate Deity...." (Loraine Boettner, **Studies in Theology**, p. 202)

Lenski said of Jesus' temptation:

Neither the Father nor the Spirit would be tempted by Satan because both are only God. The Son could be tempted because he became man. He alone of the three persons, by assuming our human nature, could suffer human hunger and could be asked to appease that hunger in a sinful way. He alone, by his human nature, was made independent of his Father and could thus be asked to abuse his dependence by a false trust in his Father. He alone, in his human nature, faced the cross, and could thus be asked to evade it and follow an easier course" (R.C.H. Lenski, *Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel*, pp. 160-161).

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# God's Foreknowledge and Control

*by Alan Bonifay*

In this study, we will consider five controverted passages dealing with the foreknowledge and sovereignty of God.

## **Acts 13:48**

And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.

**Question:** Explain the phrase "as many as were ordained to eternal life believed."

John Calvin refers to this passage as the **decretum absolutum**, saying:

We need not doubt that Luke calls these **tetagenous** who were chosen by the free adoption of God. For it is a ridiculous cavil to refer this unto the affection of those who believed, as if those received the gospel whose minds were well-disposed. For this ordaining must be understood of the eternal counsel of God alone (cited by Gloag, 2:40).

However, we must avoid a rush to judgment here, as there are at least three significant arguments that will overturn Calvin's notions about this passage.

**I. First, the Word of God makes it abundantly clear in a host of passages that, while God is sovereign, He has limited His sovereignty in order to allow man to be a creature of truly free choice.**

- A. Deuteronomy 30:19; Joshua 24:14-15; Psalms 119:30, 173; Matthew 11:28-30; 1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9; 2 Corinthians 5:10, 11; Revelation 22:17
- B. The preaching of the gospel always has potentially a twofold effect on the people who listen to it (1 Cor. 2:14-16).
  - 1. For some listeners, the gospel message is like a sweet-smelling aroma; it is the fragrance of life;
  - 2. But to others, that same gospel is an foul-smelling odor that carries the stench of death.
  - 3. Which savor (aroma) the gospel has to a particular person depends entirely upon that person's response to the message.

- a. For those who believe and obey the gospel's call, it has the sweet-smelling aroma of life.
- b. For those who reject the gospel's call, it has the foul-smelling odor of death.

**II. Second, it is an incorrect practice of interpretation that is bound to lead to doctrinal error to lift one phrase out of its contextual setting and force it to convey a desired meaning contrary to that gained from the context itself.**

- A. Acts 13:14-16, 22-23, 28-30, 38-43 (v. 40 exhortation to choose).
- B. Acts 13:44-46— Notice particularly that the Jews:
  - 1. heard Paul preach the gospel—verses 44-45b;
  - 2. rejected what he preached—verse 46b ("put it from you");
  - 3. and consequently judged themselves "unworthy of everlasting life" (v. 46c).
- C. Acts 13:46d-48 By contrast, the Gentiles:
  - 1. heard Paul preach the same gospel sermon (vv. 46-48);
  - 2. "glorified the word of the Lord" (48b) or in other words, accepted as true what Paul taught;
  - 3. "and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed."
- D. Note particularly that the record clearly indicates that the response of the Gentiles was exactly opposite to that of the Jews.
- E. There was no eternal decree being enacted. The Gentiles believed and the Jews did not. Both acted out of free will.

**III. Third, Calvin's view is contrary to the force of the text itself—"as many as were ordained to eternal life believed."**

- A. Ordained is *tetagenoi* which means "to arrange, set, appoint, . . . to dispose, frame for an object, Acts 13:48 (AGL 402).
- B. The word is not *proorisin* (before ordained) as in 1 Corinthians 2:7; nor is it *proetoimasen* as in Ephesians 2:10; nor *proetheto* (set forth) as in Romans 3:25; nor *prognosmenou* of 1 Peter 1:20. In fact, the preposition *pro*, which means "before," is not used in Acts 13:48.
- C. In other words, there is nothing here to suggest—even remotely—an absolute decree or predestination.
- D. Furthermore, God is not mentioned.
- E. The doctrines of Calvinism are false; but more than that, there is nothing here to even suggest them (Bloomfield, 1:610).

- F. Plumptre says the phrase is better rendered "as many as were disposed for eternal life believed" (cited in McGarvey, 2:32).
- G. Farrar says, "All who, by the grace of God, desired to range themselves in the ranks of those who desired eternal life accepted the faith" (**Life of Paul**).
- H. Alford also translates, "as many as were disposed to eternal life. The meaning of the word disposed must be determined by the context. The Jews judged themselves unworthy of eternal life: the Gentiles, as many as were disposed to eternal life, believed" (2:153).
- I. Rotherham, Wordsworth, Rackham, Lumby, Knowling, McGarvey, Campbell, Gloag, all essentially agree.
- J. However, I believe that the truth is presented here even more exactly by the voice of this participle.
  - 1. Most scholars render this as a perfect passive participle—that is, sometime in the past the Gentiles received the action of being appointed to eternal life, and this appointment portrays a lasting result.
  - 2. However, in Greek, the middle voice is the exact same form of the word.
  - 3. While one usually should translate such words as passives (i.e., as receiving the action of the word), when the context warrants, the words may be taken as a direct reflexive middle voice—which in this case would mean, "as many as disposed or ordained themselves to eternal life believed."
  - 4. That such is the case here is evident from both the remote and immediate contexts and from the fact that such a disposition was contingent upon their belief of the gospel. (Grotius, Krebs, Knowling, Wordsworth, Rackham, Stringer, and Kistemaker all argue this very point.)

### Romans 8:28–30

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.

**Question:** "Does God foreknow and predestine individuals?"

**I. The Outline of Romans 1-8—"The just shall live by faith."**

- A. Romans 1-4 explains how a sinner is justified by faith.
- B. Romans 5-8 explains how the justified man shall live.
  - 1. Romans 5 teaches that he is to live free from God's wrath—not that one justified cannot once again become the object of God's wrath, but that the wrath of God does not rest on him any longer with respect either to his own sins or to the consequence of Adam's sin.
  - 2. Romans 6 teaches that the justified man is to live free from sin. It is not that it is impossible for him to sin, but rather that sin's dominion over him has been broken.
  - 3. Romans 7 teaches that he is to live free from law—not in the sense that there is no law for Christians to obey, because there is; but he is to live free from law as the justifying principle.
  - 4. Romans 8 teaches that the man of faith is to live free from death—that is, free from the threat that death holds over the unbeliever.
    - a. Romans 8:1-17 points out that the Christian is to live free from the dominion of spiritual death.
    - b. Verses 18-39 teach that he is to live free from the power that physical death and all of its allies hold over the sinner.
      - (1) First, because he will be resurrected from the dead; and
      - (2) Second, because the blessings requisite in Christ sustain the believer through all of the agonies of physical death and its precursors.

**II. A Closer Look at Romans 8:18-39**

- A. Verses 19-23
  - 1. All men—the saved as well as the lost—shall be subject to the pains that lead to death—even those men with spiritual gifts ("the firstfruits of the Spirit," v. 23) suffer these things.
  - 2. Men have been subjected to these sufferings by God as a consequence of Adam's sin and his subsequent separation from the tree of life.
  - 3. These temporary pains are not worthy to be compared to the glory that shall be revealed to the faithful man.
- B. Verses 24-34 present five blessings which accrue only to those declared righteous and which are given to sustain the faithful during their suffering and death.



1. In verses 24 and 25 Christians are saved by hope.
2. In verses 26 and 27 Christians are supported by the intercessions of the Holy Spirit.
3. In verses 28–30 the righteous are reminded that their salvation cannot be stripped from them by any outside force and that these sufferings can work for the believer's good.
4. In verses 31–33 the believer is reminded that God is on his side and that God will not allow the sacrifice of Jesus to be for naught.
5. Finally, in verse 34 the believer is reminded that Jesus Christ is the one who will condemn at the judgment and that Jesus also is now at the right hand of God interceding for His brethren.

C. Romans 8:35–39 concludes this entire section with a doxology of praise for the Christian's security in Christ.

**III. Focusing now more particularly and accurately on verses 28–30 of Romans 8, the question is: "Does God foreknow and predestine individuals?"**

A. "And we know that all things work together for good..."

1. Verses 35–39 set the parameters of "all things"—notice verse 37, "Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors..."
2. Paul does not say these things that happen to us are good or that they are good for us, but that they can work together for good.
3. Why can these bad things work together for our good? Two reasons:
  - a. The believer's place in Christ cannot be stripped from him.
  - b. These events can purify or refine our faith (Jas. 1:2–4, 12; 1 Pet. 1:7).

B. "...To them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose."

1. This blessing does not accrue to those who simply say they love God, but rather to those who prove their love by answering God's call in obedience to God's will.
2. "The called" are those who have heard the gospel call and have accepted it by submission to its requirements.
3. 2 Thessalonians 2:13–15.
4. These are called "according to God's purpose"—God's will and not their own.

C. Verse 29

1. The word "for" (*hoti*) introduces the explanation of how it is that all things can work together for the believer's good.
2. "Whom he did foreknow"
  - a. The word "foreknow" is **proegnoo**, and it means "to know beforehand, or in advance, to have foreknowledge of something" (**BAG**, 710).
  - b. This word does not imply causation or predetermination. It means simply to know something before it happens.
    - (1) This verb appears five times in the New Testament and it never means to foreordain. It signifies only prescience, not pre-election (Acts. 26:5; Rom. 8:29; 11:2; 1 Pet. 1:20; 2 Pet. 3:17). In 2 Peter 3:17 and Acts 26:5 it is applied to men.
    - (2) The corresponding noun "foreknowledge" appears only twice (Acts 2:23; 1 Pet. 1:2), and it means only "a perceiving, learning, understanding beforehand" and provides the basis for our English medical term "prognosis" (Bullinger, p. 302).
3. "He also did predestinate"
  - a. The word "predestinate" is **proorise**, which means "to decide on beforehand, predestine" (**BAG**, p. 716). The **AGL** says, "to limit or mark out beforehand; to design definitely beforehand, order beforehand, predestine" (p. 348). Robinson says, "to set bounds before...to predetermine, to predestinate, spoken of the eternal counsels and decrees of God" (p. 706).
  - b. This word occurs six times in the New Testament (Acts 4:28; Rom. 8:29-30; 1 Cor. 2:7; Eph. 1:5, 11), and it always entails causation and pre-determination.
4. The Bible clearly teaches that God is omniscient.
  - a. Psalms 139:1-6.
  - b. Hebrews 4:13.
  - c. Jesus says that God knows when every bird falls to the ground and numbers the very hairs of our heads (Mt. 10:29-30).
  - d. As mere men, we dare not presume to set any limits upon God's knowledge that are not expressly stated or necessarily implied in God's Word.
  - e. On the other hand, neither should we presume to determine by our own wisdom the extent of God's foreknowledge.

- f. We do know that God has limited His sovereignty in order to allow man to exercise his free will in choosing the direction he will take in life (Deut. 30:19; Josh. 24:14-15; Ps. 119:30,173; Mt. 11:28-30; 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9; 2 Cor. 5:10-11; Rev. 22:17).
- g. Having said all of these things and recognizing that God knows all things and that God resides outside the concept of time so that there is neither past nor future with God, might we conclude that God foreknows all things about every man?
  - (1) The answer is, "Yes!"
  - (2) Of course, God's foreknowledge does not cancel free will because of two things:
    - (a) Foreknowledge does not imply causation.
    - (b) We have no way of knowing what God has foreknown.
  - (3) We can only operate on the knowledge of God's mind that is revealed and written down in His Word.
  - (4) Therefore, since God's Word presents the blessings that accrue to the righteous and the cursings that mount up against the unbeliever, our choice to serve or reject God's will remains a truly free choice.
- 5. Therefore, we answer, "Yes, God may indeed foreknow anything or everything about any individual," and Scripture seems to indicate not only that He may but that He actually does foreknow individuals.
- 6. But does God predestinate individuals? No.
- 7. What God predestinated (that is, predetermined and caused to be from eternity) was the scheme of redemption whereby God maintained His absolute justice and righteousness and yet displayed His absolute mercy and loving-kindness in enabling man, the sinner, to be declared righteous and forgiven of his sins.
  - a. Such predestination includes all of the events and people required to accomplish God's plan for the salvation of man.
  - b. When people were predestined to do certain things, such determination was based upon God's foreknowledge of that person's free choices.
  - c. Thus, in some instances, predestination and foreknowledge join hands in such a way that man's free moral agency is compromised in no way.

8. Specifically, in this context, what God predestined was that a class of men would choose of their own volition to become "conformed to the image of His Son."
  - a. Some writers believe that this is a reference to the resurrection because of the last clause of the verse, "...that he might be the firstborn among many brethren" that is, the firstborn from the dead.
  - b. The purpose behind this artful position is to avoid the import of a man's choice, leaving the salvation of all a matter of pre-determined decree from eternity.
  - c. However, in the light of several passages, becoming conformed to the image of God's Son describes a process which involves a lifetime of choices to do what is right.
    - (1) 2 Corinthians 3:18 "But we all with open face beholding as in the glass the glory of the Lord are changed into the same image from glory to glory even as by the Spirit of the Lord."
    - (2) Galatians 4:19 "My little children of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you."

**D. Verse 30**

1. The answer here is to the question: How did God decide to accomplish His predestined plan to save a certain class of men?
2. The answer is that those he predestined to salvation:
  - a. He called by the preaching of the gospel.
  - b. Those he called He justified on the basis of their obedient faith.
  - c. And those justified by their faith He glorified—that is, He gave them a heavenly home.
    - (1) Notice Romans 8:18 for the meaning of the word "glory."
    - (2) This is a prophetic past tense— a figure by which a future event's certainty is pronounced by referring to it in the past tense as though it had already occurred.
    - (3) For that class of men who abide faithful to Christ Jesus to the end, their future glory in heaven is so certain it can be spoken of in the past tense.
3. In answer to our question, God does not predestinate the salvation of individuals. He predestinated His plan and all its attendant parts. He predestinated the class of people whom He would save

any and all out of every nation who would fear Him and work righteousness.

- a. That is, those who would respond to the call of the gospel by belief and compliance;
- b. Who, upon doing so, would submit obediently to the conditions articulated in the gospel and would thus become justified by their faith;
- c. And finally, those obedient children who would remain faithfully obedient to the very end and who would thus be glorified.

### Romans 9:13-16

As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated. What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid. For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy.

**Question:** Does God arbitrarily show mercy to individuals?

#### I. The Outline of Romans 9-11

##### A. Romans 8:35-9:5

1. In order to understand the issues voiced in Romans 9-11, once more we must examine the landscape to see how this section integrates with the total message of the book.
  - a. Paul has revealed how that God has given Christ to us in order that, by faith in Him, all men can be declared righteous.
  - b. In addition, He has taught us how those who have been justified by their faith shall live.
  - c. Consequently, Romans 8 appropriately closes with a doxology to the praise of God and Christ.
2. But in Romans 9 immediately a question raises our eyebrows: How can it possibly be that the song of joy in chapter eight has issued into the terrible heart-wrenching anguish of the very next paragraph in chapter nine? What is wrong and how could things have changed so dramatically in such a twinkling of the eye?
  - a. The problem is that most of Israel has rejected the gospel and consequently stands condemned not only nationally but, what is worse, individually.

- b. How is it possible that Israel, to whom God has given such great advantages, can now stand rejected?
- c. Does it mean that God has revoked the promises He made to the fathers?
- 3. The dilemma to be resolved is the apparent choice between two alternatives.
  - a. It appears that Paul must either stand by the gospel plan he has preached the righteousness of the faith revealed through Christ; or
  - b. He must stand by God's truthfulness and faithfulness.
  - c. Since Israel, by and large, stands rejected, it does not appear that both of these alternatives can be true.
  - d. Can it be that the righteousness of faith is contrary to the promises of God, so that God takes back the promises He has made previously?
  - e. Such a position, if established, would completely overthrow all of Paul's preaching.
- 4. As long as these issues remain unresolved, all that has proceeded in Romans 1-8 hangs in the balance.
- 5. Therefore, Paul's argument in these three chapters demonstrates clearly and beyond doubt that there is no contradiction between the righteousness of faith and the promises of God.
  - a. However, it should also be noted that while this discussion is absolutely essential in order to reconcile this apparent contradiction, it is also an issue close to Paul's heart.
  - b. He is deeply aggrieved that almost all of his own nation has rejected the Savior of the world.
  - c. He would give anything for them to come to Christ in obedient, submissive faith.

## **II. The Context: Romans 9:8-16**

### **A. Verse 8**

- 1. The point is, just as the physical descent from Abraham (v. 7) did not necessarily qualify one to be in the chosen line of descent through whom Christ, the Seed, should come, neither did being an Israelite in the flesh qualify one to receive the promise of God for salvation.
  - a. The "children of the flesh" included Ishmael as well as the sons of Keturah. These were not "the children of God"—that

is, they were not those adopted by God to bring the Seed into the world.

- b. In the line of physical descent through whom Christ came, it was the "children of the promise" that is, Isaac's children who were counted for the seed.
  - c. In the same manner, in the Christian Age, only those who respond to the gospel of Christ in faithful obedience are counted as Abraham's spiritual seed.
2. The overarching point reveals that the one whom God recognizes as Abraham's Seed (whether for the purpose of physical descent to the Seed or for the purpose of spiritual seed) depends not on the will of man but on the sovereign will of God.

**B. Verses 9-13**

1. Paul supplies two examples illustrating that man's blessing, whether physical or spiritual, depends on God's promise and not on man's will, man's deeds, or man's personal worthiness.
2. The first of these examples concerns God's promise to Abraham that within a year Sarah would have a child.
3. Since some might well misconstrue God's choice of Isaac over Ishmael, arguing that God chose Isaac because Isaac was the son of the freewoman, Abraham's real wife, whereas Ishmael was the son of the bondwoman, Paul introduces in verses 10-13 his second example, which demonstrates that such considerations were not the basis of God's choice.
  - a. In this example, the two children have the same mother and the same father and were even conceived at the same time.
  - b. God's choice of Jacob did not depend on man because God chose him before he was born.
  - c. God's choice did not depend on the behavior of either of the twins because God's choice was made before either had acted at all.
  - d. God's intent was to demonstrate that His purpose by election might be accomplished completely independent of all human merit.
  - e. God's election was grounded solely in His own sovereign will.
    - (1) One must remember that the election under consideration had nothing whatever to do with salvation but rather of the nation through whom the Seed should come.

- (2) On the other hand, just as the line of descent was altogether independent of human merit a point all the Israelites should have recognized—so also the election of God to salvation is totally independent of human merit.
  - (a) This is not to say that election for salvation has no conditions, for it does.
  - (b) This is not to say that election for salvation obviates man's free will, for it does not.
  - (c) It is simply to say that the process of election, together with the conditions under which it will be applied, depends upon God alone. It comes by virtue of God's choice and not on the basis of human merit.
- (3) However, to be clear, the election discussed here in verse 11 has nothing whatsoever to do with salvation per se, but rather with the birth of Jesus.
- f. "It was said to her, the elder shall serve the younger" (v. 12).
  - (1) It was said in Genesis 25:23.
  - (2) In that verse an ellipsis is clearly implied in the last phrase.
  - (3) Consequently, it means the elder "nation" shall serve the younger "nation."
- g. In verse 13 Paul cites proof that the message to Rebecca concerned the nations in her womb, saying, "As it is written, Jacob have I loved but Esau have I hated."
  - (1) A good question is always: Where is it written?
  - (2) This was not said to Rebecca.
  - (3) In fact, it was not said until some twelve hundred years later by Malachi (1:1-5).
  - (4) Obviously, the reference is to nations and not individuals.
  - (5) God loved Jacob in that He chose Jacob and his descendants to be the nation through whom Christ came. He hated Esau in that He did not choose Edom for this work.
  - (6) None of this had anything to do with Jacob or Esau as individuals or with their salvation or condemnation.

### C. Verse 14

- 1. Paul frames his question in order to accomplish three things:



- a. He draws the conclusion that God by His own sovereign authority has the right to choose whomever He would to be the progenitors of Christ.
  - b. He sets up his next argument in which he asserts and defends God's equal right to reject whomever He will.
  - c. He establishes both of these points to lay the groundwork for demonstrating God's sovereign authority in electing some men to salvation and rejecting others.
2. The question is: Can God be charged with injustice because He makes such choices without reference to man's work?
  3. The answer is: God forbid.
- D. Verse 15
1. This is cited from Exodus 33:19.
  2. God's mercy can neither be earned nor controlled by man.
  3. God is free to extend His mercy to whomever He will within the limits of His own divine personality.
    - a. In other words, He is not free to extend His mercy capriciously, for His justice constrains His mercy, prohibiting such a distribution.
    - b. However, it remains that God alone has the sovereign right to extend mercy to man.
  4. R. L. Whiteside asks the right question, saying: "No one can keep God from showing mercy to whom He will. But to whom will He show mercy (p. 204)?" Proverbs 28:13 says, "He that covereth his transgressions shall not prosper but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall obtain mercy" (ASV 1901).
  5. The answer to this question is found in the revelation of God's will contained in God's Word.
- E. Verse 16
1. God's choice of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as the founders of the line through whom Christ came did not occur on the basis of the wills of those men or any other.
  2. It also did not occur on the basis of their earnest striving (running).
  3. It came to pass purely on the basis of God's decision to extend His mercy to them and their successors.
- F. The answer to our original questions Does God arbitrarily show mercy to individuals?—is "No!"

1. Arbitrarily means "based on one's preference, notion, or whim, hence capriciously."
2. God is sovereign.
  - a. He does extend His mercy to whomever He wills, and He does it without reference to human merit.
  - b. However, He cannot extend His mercy capriciously because He who is absolutely merciful is also absolutely just.
  - c. The question is: To whom does He extend His mercy, and on what basis?
  - d. The answer is: To him who believes in God's Son and willingly submits to God's will written down in God's Word.

### **Romans 9:17-20**

For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth. Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will? Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?

**Question:** Does God choose people for destruction?

#### **I. Romans 9:17-18**

- A. Paul has established that God will have mercy on whomever He will have mercy, irrespective of man's will or man's actions (see section on Romans 9:8-16). By the same token, God will reject whom He wills.
  1. God's power is absolute. He alone is sovereign.
  2. His justice is unimpeachable—both in His determination to show mercy and in His determination to reject.
  3. Paul offers Pharaoh as an example proving that God has the right to harden or reject men according to His own will. Man's will has nothing to do with God's sovereign right to harden whomever He pleases to harden.
  4. Remember—Paul's overarching argument is God has not been unjust to the Jews even though almost all of them stand rejected by God, both nationally and individually.
- B. Pharaoh was raised up—that is, brought upon the field of history—for two reasons:

1. First, he was raised up in order that through him God might make known His sovereign power.
2. Second, he was raised up in order that, as a result of this display of divine power, God's name would be declared throughout the world.
3. God raised up Pharaoh for these purposes, and He intended to accomplish His will through Pharaoh regardless of the direction of life chosen by Pharaoh.
  - a. Whether Pharaoh chose to be good or bad, obedient or disobedient, did not alter God's purposes and use of him.
  - b. Pharaoh was a free moral agent throughout, but God would nevertheless be glorified regardless of how Pharaoh chose to live.
    - (1) If Pharaoh had chosen to release God's children as he was instructed to do by Moses, then God's will would have been accomplished i.e., God's sovereign power would have been made known and God's name would have been declared throughout the world.
    - (2) As it was, Pharaoh's refusal to obey Moses' commands did not interfere with the accomplishment of God's will, for God's sovereign power was made known anyway and furthermore His name was declared throughout the world (1 Sam. 6:6).
  - c. The Scripture does not say that God raised up Pharaoh for the purpose of condemning him or for the express purpose of hardening him.
4. The point is, God was not only just in His selection of Israel for His service even though most Jews currently stood condemned, He also is under no obligation to save them as a consequence of His choosing them for service.
5. However, lest we be misunderstood, Paul is not saying that God is arbitrary in His choices or in His rejections.
  - a. God is not capricious.
  - b. Furthermore, Paul is not speaking here of salvation in heaven or condemnation in hell.
  - c. He never says or implies that God has created man for the purpose of damning him

- d. What he does say is that in His arrangement of the world God reserves to Himself perfect freedom to deal with man on His own conditions and not on man's.
- 6. It seems more than likely that God foreknew that Pharaoh would harden his heart against the revelation of God's power demonstrated through Moses.
  - a. However, whether God actually did or did not foreknow Pharaoh's heart is unimportant.
  - b. Three things are important:
    - (1) God did not cause Pharaoh to harden his heart against his own will. God did not take from Pharaoh his free will.
    - (2) If Pharaoh had at some point relented and obeyed God, then God would have been glorified and His power established.
    - (3) As it turned out, Pharaoh hardened his heart; but in spite of his recalcitrance, God was glorified. He led Israel out on an outstretched arm, and Pharaoh was finally slain by his own stubborn rashness.

### C. Verse 18

- 1. The key question is not whether or not God is absolutely sovereign, nor whether He is just in exercising His sovereignty.
- 2. The question is: On whom does God have mercy? Whom does He harden? Is God fickle or capricious in the decisions He makes? Of course, He is not!
- 3. Cutting to the chase, with respect to salvation God has mercy on all men, whether Jew or Gentile, who accept His system of righteousness declared on the basis of faith in Christ Jesus.
- 4. By the same token, He hardens all who reject Jesus Christ and who fail to live faithful to the gospel.
- 5. The same sun that softens butter hardens clay. The difference is not in the sunlight but in the response of the object upon which it falls.

## II. The Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart

### A. Verse 17—The process by which this occurred is interesting.

- 1. This passage is cited from Exodus 9:12, 16. Moses approaches Pharaoh to announce the sixth plague is about to break out upon Egypt.

2. Fully half of the plagues has already occurred.
3. The Old Testament references to the hardening of Pharaoh's heart fall in an interesting pattern:
  - a. Twenty times the Old Testament speaks of the hardening of Pharaoh's heart.
    - (1) Ten times Pharaoh is said to harden his own heart.
    - (2) Ten times God is said to harden Pharaoh's heart.
  - b. But the pattern becomes still more interesting:
    - (1) In the first two references God, foreknowing Pharaoh's heart, said, "I will (that is, in the future) harden Pharaoh's heart" (Ex. 4:21; 7:3).
    - (2) In the next seven references, covering the first five plagues, Pharaoh is either expressly said to harden his own heart or the context seems to bear out the fact that he did (Ex. 7:13-14, 22; 8:15, 19, 32; 9:7).
    - (3) Only at the outbreak of the sixth plague does the Bible finally declare that God overtly hardens Pharaoh's heart (9:12, 16).
    - (4) After that, Pharaoh twice more hardens his own heart (Ex. 9:34-35).
    - (5) Then seven straight times God actively hardens Pharaoh's heart (10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14:4, 8, 17).
    - (6) Finally, after many years this process is mentioned once more. The Philistines recall the fact that Pharaoh hardened his own heart (1 Sam. 6:6).
  - c. Notice the repeated but inverse pattern:

| The Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart |                           |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Two times God hardens            | Two times Pharaoh hardens |
| Seven times Pharaoh hardens      | Seven times God hardens   |
| One time God hardens             | One time Pharaoh hardens  |

4. The last Old Testament reference to the hardening of Pharaoh's heart demonstrates that God's name was indeed declared throughout the earth and for generations concerning this matter. In this passage (1 Sam. 6:6), the Philistines rebuke their own people for hardening their hearts as Pharaoh had in Egypt some 350 years earlier.

5. Obviously, God gave Pharaoh numerous opportunities to relinquish before He actively hardened the man Himself.
  6. But the question remains: How did God harden Pharaoh's heart?
    - a. Did God compel Pharaoh against his will to oppose God?
    - b. Did God cause him to be hardened in some way beyond his control?
    - c. The answer is a resounding "No!"
  7. God hardened Pharaoh's heart in at least five ways - none of which arbitrarily forced Pharaoh to become hardened.
    - a. Throughout, Pharaoh was in control of his own will.
    - b. Throughout, he maintained his free moral agency.
    - c. At any time, he could have chosen to humble himself and obey God's will.
- B. How Did God Harden Pharaoh's Heart?**
1. God hardened Pharaoh's heart by the way He spoke to him. God commanded Pharaoh who was the ruler of all the civilized world, to let Israel go. He did not ask or beg or in any way cater to Pharaoh's power. He demanded that he let Israel go.
  2. God hardened his heart by what He demanded of Pharaoh. Egypt's economy depended on Israelite slave labor. The price of conceding to God's wishes was too much for Pharaoh. What would life in Egypt be like without millions of Hebrew slaves to fuel the markets and provide every want of the Egyptians?
  3. God hardened Pharaoh's heart by the messenger He used. Moses was eighty years old. He was a renegade murderer who had rejected the beneficence of Pharaoh himself. Instead he had become an odious shepherd. He was so halting in his speech that he could not even speak for himself. His 83-year-old brother was his spokesman, and he was nothing but a common slave. To cap it all, these wretched, rebellious ingrates threatened Pharaoh, the most powerful man in the world.
  4. God hardened Pharaoh's heart by the mercies He continued to show to Pharaoh. Every time Pharaoh asked, God relented and lifted the plague.
  5. Finally, God hardened Pharaoh by repeated demonstrations of overwhelming miraculous power. The first two plagues Pharaoh's magicians were able to imitate but the third plague, the one of lice, they could not copy. In fact, they said to Pharaoh, "This is the fin-

ger of God" (Ex. 8:18, 19). From that point on --until the death of Pharaoh's own firstborn-- Pharaoh and all of the Egyptians were helpless against the overwhelming power of God.

- C. In all of these ways, God hardened Pharaoh's heart; but in none of them did God act capriciously. Not once did He force Pharaoh to do anything against his own will.
1. Moses Lard punctuates this scene properly when he concludes, "Faultless remains the justice of God" (p. 308).
  2. No, God does not arbitrarily choose people for destruction.

### **Romans 9:21-23**

Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory,

**Questions:** Does God's sovereignty overrule man's free will? How can "one vessel be chosen unto honor and another unto dishonor" without God becoming a respecter of persons?

#### **I. Paul's Pharisee Critic**

##### **A. Verse 19**

1. Based on what he has taught in verses 15-18, Paul now anticipates the typical Pharisee critic's objection.
2. Paul, if God shows mercy to whom He will and if He hardens whom He will, then it is God who has hardened us Jews in unbelief against the gospel.
  - a. Why then does He still find fault with us, since He Himself, according to your argument, has excluded us from blessedness and made us unfit for mercy?
  - b. How can God hold us responsible for our unbelief and therefore condemn us to hell if our hardening and therefore our unbelief are His doing?
  - c. Does this not suggest, after all, that He is unjust?
3. The objector bolsters his argument by pointing out that no one can resist God's sovereign will and if He hardens whomever He wants to harden, then our sin and rebellion are actually His will, are they not?

4. Why is He punishing us as if we are resisting His will, when in reality we are not resisting because we cannot—no one can?
  5. However, Paul's objector has made a fatal flaw in his assumption that in extending mercy or in hardening whomever He so desires, God does so on the basis of capricious decisions and that these decisions are unconditional.
    - a. The truth is, God has set forth His will for all to hear and read.
    - b. He extends mercy to those who love and obey Him.
    - c. He hardens those who hate and reject Him.
    - d. In the next section (9:29–10:21), Paul establishes these facts beyond question.
    - e. Before that, however, the audacity of this objector who dares to question God's sovereign right and authority must be hammered.
- B. Verse 20
1. Paul begins by reminding his typical Jewish objector that not only has he, the created, no right to complain against God, the Creator, but also God does have the Creator's right to do what He will with those He has Himself shaped and fashioned.
  2. Weymouth translates this: "Nay but who are you a mere man to cavil against God?"
    - a. Lamsa: "who are you to question God?"
    - b. Goodspeed: "to answer back to God?"
    - c. Moffat: "to speak back?"
    - d. NIV: "to talk back?"
  3. Paul's first words attack the audacious and presumptuous attitude of the carping critic. This man has not simply raised a sincere question designed to clear up confusion. No, he has arrogantly assumed a debater's stance against God.
    - a. Paul severely rebukes the man.
    - b. In the remainder of chapter nine and all of chapter ten, Paul answers his cavil.
  4. In his potter and clay analogy, Paul points out the obvious: it is the potter who decides how to use the clay and not the other way around. It is absurd to consider the potter's creation criticizing the potter for the shape it has been given.



- a. Contextually, this metaphor describes God's relationship with His creation—the nation of Israel.
- b. Paul rebukes his objector, not as a creature in God's creation and not as a particular condemned sinner, but as a representative of the nation of Israel.
- c. Through this objector, Israel is whining because God had been treating the nation unfairly because, by and large, most of the nation stood rejected by God.

#### C. Verse 21

1. To put it another way, the potter has absolute authority over the clay.
  - a. The potter and not the clay will decide how to use the clay.
  - b. The clay has no basis upon which to stage a complaint such as, "Why did you make me like this?"
2. Clearly, the Potter here is God; but to whom does "the lump" refer?
  - a. Contextually, "the lump" refers not to all mankind but rather to the nation of Israel.
  - b. From the nation God has fashioned two vessels—or two groups of people.
    - (1) Physical Israel, and
    - (2) Spiritual Israel
3. Who in Israel are the vessels of honor and who are the vessels of dishonor, and how is this distinction determined?
  - a. It is evident that Paul refers to the nation of Israel and to the eternal destinies of the individual Israelites in each group.
  - b. Where the Calvinist errs is not in saying that "vessels of honor" refer to those God has decided to save and "vessels of dishonor" to those He has decided to condemn, for this is precisely Paul's argument.
  - c. The Calvinist errs in thinking that God makes a man a vessel unto honor or dishonor contrary to or in spite of that man's behavior and belief.
  - d. Where a particular Israelite finds himself in eternity depends on his own acceptance or rejection of God's way revealed through Jesus Christ in the New Testament.

#### D. Verse 22

1. This verse and the next are at the heart of the Calvinistic debate. However, the Calvinistic viewpoint is completely at odds not only with this passage, but also with the entirety of the Word of God.
  - a. Unconditional individual election to salvation and unconditional individual reprobation to hell are not the issues of this chapter.
  - b. The issue in this chapter and the next two is God's faithfulness to the nation of Israel.
    - (1) Does God keep His promises?
    - (2) Can you trust His word?
  - c. The point stressed throughout this chapter is that God is absolutely sovereign.
    - (1) He has the sovereign right to choose and to use both individuals and nations in whatever way He pleases for the accomplishment of His purposes.
    - (2) This verse and the next simply reaffirm God's right as the Potter to mold and shape His clay according to His own design.
2. What does Paul mean when he says that these "vessels of wrath" are "fitted to destruction"?
  - a. First, they refer not to all men but to those Jews who had rejected God's promise of grace and thus stood accursed.
  - b. Second, the Greek word "fitted" is *kataertismena*.
    - (1) It is a participle in the perfect tense.
    - (2) As we noted earlier in Acts 13:48, in Greek, in the perfect tense the endings for the passive and middle voices are identical and can only be distinguished when examined in context.
    - (3) Here the context clearly establishes an instance of the rare use of the direct middle voice, which is reflexive.
    - (4) In other words, "they fitted themselves" to destruction by their sin and unbelief and refusal to repent and obey the gospel.
      - (a) See Bauer, Arndt, & Gingrich—p. 419
      - (b) Numerous scholars, ancient and modern, support this interpretation: Theophylact, Chrysostom, Oecumenius, Grotius, Bengel, Godet, McGarvey-Pendleton, Cottrell.

3. Looking at the verse as a whole, the NASB translates: "What if God although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction?"
4. The point is that even though God actually wanted to go ahead and abolish the nation of Israel and send unbelieving Israelites to hell, still He bore with them in order to achieve His ultimate saving purposes.
5. The question is: Why did God endure Israel with such longsuffering? The answer is in verse 23.

**E. Verse 23**

1. God put up with Israel's unbelief in order to "make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy."
2. The "vessels of mercy" are those Jews and Gentiles (v. 24) who constitute spiritual Israel—that is, the New Testament church.
3. God bore with the unbelieving ethnic Israel for centuries—long after they fitted themselves for destruction—in spite of His desire to pour out His wrath upon the vessels of wrath, because it was His purpose to produce through them, in the fullness of time, the true, spiritual Israel.
4. Therefore, the "vessels of mercy" are those individual Jews and Gentiles who respond in faithful obedience to the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ.
  - a. Upon these, the overflowing riches of God's mercy and grace are poured out.
  - b. The "riches of God's glory" are the riches of salvation bestowed upon the new Israel.
5. "Which he had afore prepared unto glory" is different from "fitted" in verse 22.
  - a. It is in the active voice and means God "made ready or prepared in advance" the vessels of mercy.
  - b. The reference is to the plan that God "foreordained before the foundation of the world" (1 Pet. 1:18-20), which He began to effect when He called Abraham and Isaac and Jacob.
    - (1) The plan was whereby He would use national Israel to lay the groundwork for the establishment of the church.
    - (2) In such a case, the glory refers to the riches of salvation poured out upon all (Jew and Gentile) who accept Jesus

as the Christ, the Son of God, and respond in obedient faith to the gospel.

6. Thus, God has kept His promises to Israel.
7. As Cottrell observes:

Here is the most glorious truth of all; no unbelieving Jew—no individual vessel of wrath—needs to remain such. Though the nation in general remains under God's curse because of unbelief, any individual Jew can respond to the gospel of Jesus Christ and become a vessel of mercy! (2:132).

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# The Head and Its Covering

*by George Battey*

This study involves an exposition of 1 Corinthians 11:1–16. Before studying verse by verse, consider the following five points:

- 1) **This passage is not merely a custom of the first century, nor is it a local custom peculiar to Corinth.** It is assumed by many that Paul is regulating a custom already in practice. This is not true. Paul does not use argumentation that would indicate a first-century custom or a localized custom. He appeals to: (a) the divine “chain of command” (v. 3); (b) the principles of creation (vv. 7–9); (c) the angels (v. 10); (d) the law of nature (v. 14); (e) the entire “apostolic college” (v. 16); (f) the common practice of all the churches of Christ (v. 16).
- 2) **This passage is not specifically discussing a worship service.** This is almost universally assumed, but it cannot be proven. No worship service is mentioned. In verses 17–18, there is clearly a worship service in view because Paul writes of “coming together as the church,” but there is no such indication in verses 1–16.

Additionally, women may not “prophesy” in a worship assembly (14:34–35), but verses 1–16 speak of women praying or prophesying. Women, of course, pray silently in their own hearts during worship assemblies (cf. 1 Sam. 1:13; 1 Cor. 14:28), but it is impossible for a woman to prophesy without violating the instructions to remain silent. Hence, these instructions for women to be covered apply when they pray anywhere—including worship assemblies or when they prophesy in private capacities (cf. Acts 21:9). The point is, while the passage includes the worship services of the church, it is not restricted to just the worship services.

- 3) **Hair is the only covering being considered in this chapter.** The idea that an artificial covering is being discussed is erroneous, as this study will point out.
- 4) **These teachings did not expire with spiritual gifts.** Though “prophesying” is mentioned, this does not necessarily imply spiritual gifts. Besides, “praying” is also mentioned, and praying is an activity of all Christians, not just a “gifted few.”
- 5) **The covering for the woman is uncut hair,** not simply hair alone, or some subjective length that measures “long” by a tape measure. This, too, will be expounded upon during the course of this study.

With these thoughts in mind, let us look at the verses in detail.

### **Verse 1**

**"Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ."** Most feel this pertains to the previous chapter. The exhortation is to follow Paul's example of foregoing liberties for the sake of the church.

### **Verse 2**

**"Now I praise you..."** Here is an obvious contrast with verse 17 when Paul will write, "I praise you not." Paul takes advantage of the opportunity to praise the brethren while he can.

**"...that you remember me in all things..."** That they remembered Paul is evidenced by the fact that they had written him when questions and problems arose. As one observed, "There seemed to be a disposition on their part to abide by his teaching. Otherwise, why would they have written to him?" (Appleberry, p. 202).

**"...[You] keep the traditions as I delivered them to you."** The word "traditions" refers to things handed down from generation to generation. This generally refers to things not found written in the law (Shaw, p. 81).

The two words "you keep" come from a single Greek verb. The verb is either in the indicative or imperative mood. Both moods take the same Greek ending in the second person plural. If the mood is taken as indicative, then Paul is giving another reason for praising the brethren; that is, he praises them (a) because they remember him in all things, and (b) he praises them because they keep the traditions delivered to them. If the mood is taken as an imperative, then Paul is giving the brethren a command to keep; that is, he (a) praises them for remembering him, and (b) then commands them to keep the traditions just as they were delivered. The indicative mood seems to fit the context better.

### **Verse 3**

**"But I want you to know..."** Here is the reason for keeping the traditions: because the ordinances delivered by Paul were based on divine authority.

**"...the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God."** "Head" means "head of authority" (cf. Jgs. 11:11; 2 Sam. 22:44). The verse shows plainly that God submits to no one. Christ submits to God the Father (cf. Jn. 14:28; 1 Cor. 15:27-28). Man must submit to the authority of Christ (Phil. 2:10-11). Finally, woman must submit

to the authority of man (1 Cor. 14:34-35). God is mentioned last in this verse so that it stays in our minds longer. If a man dishonors his head (of authority), he also dishonors all above his immediate head (i.e., God, also). If a woman dishonors her head (of authority), she also dishonors all above her immediate head (i.e., both Christ and God, for they placed the man over her). People cannot reject an authoritative figure without rejecting the One who placed that authority over them (Lk. 10:16).

### Verse 4

**"Every man..."** "Man" is from the Greek word *aner* rather than the more generic *anthropos*. It means man as opposed to woman. "Every" man means just that—all men, not just married men. Keep this point in mind when looking at verse 5.

**"...praying or prophesying..."** "Praying" here is the ordinary word for praying. Nothing necessarily implies an "inspired prayer."

"Prophesying" means to "(a) proclaim a divine revelation, (b) prophetically reveal what is hidden, (c) foretell the future" (Arndt & Gingrich). Though we do not often think about this, all aspects of "prophesying" still occur today. (a) Men today still "proclaim the divine revelation" of God (the Scriptures). The difference is that men in the first century could "proclaim" without studying (cf. Mt. 10:19-20), whereas men today "proclaim" the same message naturally after studying. (b) Men today still "reveal what is hidden," but naturally after first studying the written Word. (c) Men today still "foretell the future" when they preach about the second coming of Christ, the end of the world, and the Judgment Day. Whereas first century "prophets" preached these things by direct inspiration, gospel preachers today proclaim the very same message after much study in the written Word. Vine observes,

In his measure the teacher has taken the place of the prophet, cp. the significant change in 2 Peter 2:1. The difference is that, whereas the message of the prophet was a direct revelation of the mind of God for the occasion, the message of the teacher is gathered from the completed revelation contained in the Scriptures.

Notice that praying and prophesying are mentioned together in 1 Corinthians 11:4. Whatever interpretation is applied to one must be applied to the other. In times past, elaborate theories were constructed to explain why a woman needed to have her head covered while praying and why a man should not have his head covered. Somehow these theories never took into consideration the "prophesying" that is also mentioned in this verse.

**"...having his head covered..."** The Greek construction (*kata kephales echon*) is unique in relation to the man. This wording is not used of the woman—an important thing to remember. Echols observed correctly, "'Having his head covered' is a commentary, not a translation. Lenski translated the sense correctly: 'having something down from his head.'" (Echols, p. 2).

**"...dishonors his head."** "Head" here refers to the man's spiritual head—Christ (v. 3). If "something" hangs down from the man's head, it shames Christ. What is this "something" that, if it hangs down from the head, brings shame to the man and his spiritual head? "Hair that keeps on growing" (v. 14). More on this later. When a man's hair gets so long that it begins to "hang down from" his head, it is too long and shames both him and his spiritual head—Christ.

Does this instruction include artificial coverings? Is it wrong for a man to pray or teach with a hat on his head? No. While it may be culturally inappropriate in the United States for a man to have a hat on when praying, it is not scripturally wrong. The covering being discussed in this chapter is clearly the hair (v. 15).

Consider the apostle Paul. He often went into the synagogue—even in Corinth (Acts 18:4). It is common knowledge that in the synagogues Jewish men wore (wear) a skullcap or a "tallith." Paul said, "To the Jew I became as a Jew that I might win the Jews" (1 Cor. 9:20). This means that he conformed to Jewish customs, when possible, in order to have a converting influence upon the unbelieving Jews. The fact that the unbelieving Jewish leaders cheerfully and unhesitatingly called upon Paul to speak in the synagogue (Acts 13:15) points to the fact that He was conforming to the customs prevailing—including the skull cap.

Romans 14 applies here. The Jew should not be required to remove his skull cap because it does not matter. In fact, if he has doubts about it, he must keep wearing it (Rom. 14:23). Furthermore, we have Bible examples of godly men praying and prophesying with artificial veils upon their heads, and there is nothing inherently disgraceful about it. Moses prophesied with a veil on his head (2 Cor. 3:14). David prayed with his head covered (2 Sam. 15:30ff). While "nature itself teaches" that a man growing "long hair" is a disgrace (1 Cor. 11:14), neither "nature" nor revelation teaches that a man with a hat on his head dishonors Christ when prayer or prophesying occurs. There is nothing inherently shameful for a man to pray or prophesy with a literal hat on his head.

For emphasis sake, we remember "praying and prophesying" are mentioned together. Whatever is said about one must be said about the other. If it



is a shame for a man to pray with a hat on his head, the most natural question arises, "May a man prophesy with a hat on his head?" In Russia, our brethren meet people on the street and speak about the Scriptures. No one feels the brethren should remove their hats when it is 20° in order to discuss the Scriptures.

As a final comment on this verse, we merely observe that Paul is stating a fact of what constitutes shame and dishonor to the man and his head. How do we know it is shameful for a man to pray with hair long enough to hang down from his head? Because Paul is telling us in this passage it is a shame. No need to dig through all the artifacts of history to see if society in those days thought it was a shame. Paul declared that it was a shame—a fiat decree.

### Verse 5

**"But every woman..."** Every sister in Christ is included in this expression—not just married women. Just as every man is under the authority of Christ (married or unmarried), every woman is under the authority of man (married or unmarried). The idea of a woman being "independent of a man" and without authority is clearly refuted in verse 11.

**"...praying or prophesying..."** As observed in the "preliminary remarks," this does not necessarily imply a worship assembly. In all likelihood, Paul mentions these two items for two reasons.

First, praying and prophesying are the times when the shame of an uncovered woman becomes the most outrageous and the most noticeable—when her "head" is most vulnerable to criticism and shame. Matthew 23 mentions "praying" and "prophesying" together, also, not because a worship service is occurring, but because sins were then most repulsive. The Pharisees "taught" others (23:2-4), but were not practicing what they preached. They were "praying" (23:14), but hypocritically. (cf. Mt. 5:19). When women reject God-given authority, their attempts to pray or teach others become the more repulsive. (cf. Tit. 2:5).

Second, "praying," in this passage, carries with it the idea of "leading" a prayer orally (cf. 1 Tim. 2:8). When a woman prays orally or prophesies, it carries with it the appearance of being a "leader" in spiritual matters. Thus, she wears long hair (her natural veil) to demonstrate that, though she appears to be leading, she acknowledges that man is the true spiritual leader in these matters. Does this imply that there are times when a woman does not have to be covered? Does this necessarily imply a removable covering? No, a removable covering is not necessarily implied just because praying and prophesying are specified. By way of illustration, the Scripture says, "Despise not your

mother when she is old" (Prov. 23:22). Does this mean we may despise our mother when she is young? Of course not. Again, "Remember your creator in the days of your youth" (Eccl. 12:1). Does this mean we do not have to remember the Creator when we get old? Obviously not. Just because a passage mentions a specific time ("when she is old," "in the days of your youth," or "while praying or prophesying"), it does not necessarily mean this is the only time the instructions apply. Such "time" indicators may merely be pointing out occasions when certain instructions are most critical. In 1 Corinthians 11, the point would be that a woman needs to be covered at all times, but especially when praying or prophesying. The woman's head (man, Christ and God) is shamed at any time she does not have her head properly covered, but especially when she is praying or prophesying.

**"...with her head uncovered..."** The word "uncovered" in the Greek (*akatakalyptos*) is used only here and in verse 13. This rare adjective is used only once in the Septuagint (Lev. 13:45). Smyth describes it as an "adjective of one ending" (p. 86) — it looks masculine or neuter when declined, but it is actually a feminine adjective.

The woman of verse 5 is uncovered because of something she chose to do. In other words, this woman's problem is not because she was not given a covering, for God gave her one (v. 15). Neither is her problem because her covering is inadequate, for had she cared for the covering given to her, it would have been adequate. Her problem is because of what she has done.

**"...dishonors her head..."** What covering will give glory to a woman and keep her from dishonoring her head? Is it some artificial veil? No, it is her hair which she keeps growing long (v. 15). She honors or dishonors her head because of something she does.

Some women do not understand these teachings and need to be taught. But some willfully disobey (cf. Lk. 12:47-48). In either case, sin has occurred (cf. Lev. 5:17-19); but in the latter case, the sin is willful, and the Scriptures abound with examples of the dire consequences of willful rebellion (cf. Num. 12; 16; Heb. 10:26ff).

We are told here by Paul himself that a shaved head is a shame on a woman. There is no need to dig through all the artifacts of history to see if society in the first century thought it was a shame for women to have shorn or shaved heads. Paul declares the shame right here—a fiat decree. This settles the question.

**"...for that is one and the same as if her head were shaved."** If a sister will not "fully cover" her head with the covering God has given her, she may as well shave her head—she would be no worse off. She has shamed her head

of authority, and she might as well shame herself by shaving her head completely.

### Verse 6

**"For if a woman is not covered, let her also be shorn."** This is the first occurrence of the verb **katakalupto**. The three English words "is not covered" come from this one verb. **Katakalupto** is a compound word consisting of a prefix and verb (**kata** + **kalupto**). **Katakalupto** does not necessarily infer an artificial veil, as some have argued in the past.<sup>1</sup> This verb may imply a variety of coverings: God speaks of "fat that covers the inwards" (Ex. 29:22); "[Israel] covers the face of the earth" (Num. 22:5); "waters cover the sea" (Hab. 2:14); "with [two wings an angel] covered his face" (Is. 6:2); "shame covered our faces" (Jer. 51:51; 28:51 in Septuagint); "dust shall cover you" (Ezek. 26:10); "a cloud to cover the land" (Ezek. 38:9). All of these passages use the verb **katakalupto** in the Septuagint. Obviously, the type of covering (noun) does not inhere the verb.

To argue that **katakalupto** necessarily implies an artificial veil is to make the same mistake which some make in regard to the Greek verb **psallo**. Mechanical instrument advocates argue that **psallo** necessarily implies a stringed instrument because it means "to pluck" or "to twang." However, the instrument being plucked must be named so that one knows what is being plucked. Robinson's Lexicon points out that (a) hair, (b) bowstrings, (c) stringed musical instruments (1 Sam. 16:16), and (d) cords of the heart (Eph. 5:19) were all "plucked." The instrument does not inhere the word, but must be named in addition to the word.

To summarize, the Greek verb **katakalupto** means simply "to cover." The covering (noun) must be specifically named. A specific covering does not inhere the word itself. Verse 15 clearly teaches that hair is the covering under consideration.

### Kata Intensifies

Because the preposition **kata** ordinarily means "down from," many have concluded that Paul is speaking of a veil that "hangs down from the head." The argument goes, "If this passage is speaking about an artificial veil, it would mean a veil that hangs down. A hat would not do. Likewise, if the hair

<sup>1</sup> See the Miller-Lindsey Debate. E. H. Miller argued that **katakalupto** necessarily implied the noun **kalumma** (an artificial veil).

is the covering, then it must be hair that hangs down. Wearing the hair up (e.g., in a bun) would not do."

The problem with this argumentation is the assumption upon which it is built. The assumption is that, when the preposition **kata** is prefixed to a verb, the ordinary meaning of "down from" continues and attaches to the verb. Actually, **kata** only intensifies the verb rather than alter the meaning.

- "At times [**kata**] is emphatic; as Matthew 3:12, **to de achuron katakausei**, and he will burn completely the chaff" (Dana & Mantey, p. 107).
- "Nearly every preposition may be prefixed to a word and thus add a new idea to the word or modify or even intensify the meaning of that particular word. A very frequent use of prepositions is in composition with words for the purpose of expressing emphasis or intensity. Grammarians term this the "perfective" use of the preposition" (ibid., p. 98).
- "There is still another very common use of the preposition in composition. It is that of a mere adverb and intensifies or completes the idea of the verb" (Robertson, p. 563).
- **katakalupto**—"to cover up (**kata**, intensive)" (Vine).
- **katakalupto**—"to completely cover" (Hickie, p. 97)

The intensifying effect of the preposition means simply that a woman must be *completely covered* by her hair. Having some hair is not enough. At best, "some" hair would partially cover the head of the woman. The Lord used a word meaning the head must be completely covered by the covering He has given. Hence, cutting the hair in the slightest would render the woman only partially covered at best—a violation of the command to be "completely covered." Mark Bailey gave an excellent illustration of this very point: "If I were to cover my house with roofing and then remove or cut away a small amount of the covering—during the first rain, I would quickly understand that my house is not properly or 'completely covered.' Likewise, when women remove or cut away part of their covering (long hair), they are not properly or completely covered; therefore, they are considered 'uncovered' regardless of how much hair they may have left" (Bailey, p. 36).

**"But if it is shameful for a woman to be shorn or shaved, let her be covered."** Was it shameful for a woman to be shorn or shaved? Yes! Verse 5 has already told us it was! If someone argues, "But today it's not really a shame for a woman to shave her head," the reply must be, "Yes, it is a shame because verse 5 said so."

**Verse 7**

**"For a man indeed ought not to cover his head..."** "Ought" signifies moral obligation. The man is morally obligated not to cover his head. These are not first-century customs of which Paul writes, but a higher law.

**"...since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man."** By looking ahead to the fifteenth verse, we see now three things that give glory: (a) man is the glory of God, (b) woman is the glory of man, and (c) hair is the glory of woman. God respects, cares for, and loves His glory (man). The man will be warned in verses 11-12 not to abuse his authority over the woman. She is his glory, and he must respect that and care for her. The woman, likewise, will be taught in verse 15 to care for her glory (her hair).

**Verses 8-9**

**"For man is not from woman, but woman from man. Nor was the man created for the woman, but woman for the man."** The very order of creation established the fact that man would be the head over the woman. She was to be his helper, hence subordinate in authority and different in function. The idea that man became the woman's head when God cursed the woman in Genesis 3:16 is missing the point of the passage. Adam was Eve's head before sin entered.

**Verse 10**

**"For this reason the woman ought to have [a symbol of] authority on her head..."** "For this reason"—a singular reason is being referenced. This looks back to verse 7. Because the woman is the "glory of the man," she needs a "symbol of authority" upon her head.

"Symbol" is absent from the Greek, though thought by many to be "necessarily implied."

The woman's hair gives her authority to do what otherwise she may not do. She may not pray or teach without being fully covered by her hair.

**"...because of the angels."** Here is an exhortation to remember what happened to the angels who refused submission to the authority of God (2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6). If the angels were punished for rebelling against divine authority, we too should fear! (cf. 1 Tim. 3:6). "Because of the angels" should strike fear in the heart of every Christian woman. If God did not spare the angels who rebelled, He will certainly not spare mortals who rebel against their head of authority. "Rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft" (1 Sam. 15:23).

**Verses 11-12**

**"Nevertheless, neither is man independent of woman, nor woman independent of man, in the Lord. For as woman came from man, even so man also comes through woman; but all things are of God"** The reason man is the head of woman is because of a previous choice made by God, not because of an inherent superiority of the man. Let it be remembered, though, that Deity did make that choice. The Christian's place is not to question choices of God but to respect and honor His decisions.

**Verses 13-14**

**"Judge among yourselves. Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered?"** Based on what has just been stated in verses 2-12, Paul appeals to these brethren to pass a judgment on the matter. He has presented enough sound reasoning to convince the church of the need for men to cut their hair and women to wear their hair long.

"Is it proper?" is a rhetorical question and the answer is understood to be, "No, it is not proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered."

**"Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him?"** "Nature" is the "natural sense, native conviction or knowledge, as opposed to what is learned by instruction and accomplished by training or prescribed by law" (Thayer, p. 660). God placed within each of us the ability to know that a man should not have long hair, but that a woman should.

Because "nature" taught this, Paul could use it as an appeal to the Gentiles at Corinth as well as the Jews—because both Jews and Gentiles have the same "native instinct" of which Paul speaks.

When man refuses these instructions, it shames not only his head of authority (Christ—v. 4), but it shames the man personally.

**Verse 15**

**"But if a woman has long hair..."**

The Greek word to notice in this verse is the verb *koma*—present, active, subjunctive, third person, singular of *komao*. Though one word in Greek, it requires three or more words to translate into English: "has long hair." It is defined as follows:

1. Thayer: "to let the hair grow, have long hair" (p. 354).
2. Souter: "I wear the hair long, I allow the hair to grow long" (p. 137).

3. Pickering: "to let the hair grow long, to abound with hair; to have long hair" (p. 760).
4. Bullinger: "to let the hair grow long, wear long hair" (p. 349).
5. Liddell & Scott: "to let the hair grow long."
6. Arndt & Gingrich: "to let one's hair grow long" (p. 443).
7. Rienecker: "to have long hair, to let one's hair grow long" (p. 424).
8. W. E. Vine: "to let the hair grow long, to wear long hair" (p. 189).
9. Louw & Nida: "to wear long hair as part of one's attire—'to have long hair, to appear with long hair, to wear long hair,' ... *In a number of languages it may be necessary to translate komao as 'to let one's hair grow long' or 'not to cut one's hair.'*" (p. 527).

Here are eight Lexicons that all use "grow" as part of the definition of *komao*. In addition, Louw & Nida say it means, "not to cut one's hair." Louw & Nida are regularly consulted by the United Bible Society for guidance.

The subjunctive mood is called a "potential" mood because the action is only potential and not actually taking place. To illustrate:

- **Indicative Mood** would say, "Jack sees Spot." This is the "mood" of reality. The action is actually occurring and not just "potential."
- **Subjunctive Mood** would say, "If Jack sees Spot, he will kill him." This is a "potential" mood. The action is not occurring yet. It may or may not occur. Everything depends on certain conditions being met.
- **Imperative Mood** would say, "Kill Spot." This is also a "potential" mood. The action is not yet occurring. It may or may not occur. This is the form which commands take, hence the name "imperative."

Let us focus on the subjunctive mood for a moment. In the subjunctive mood, there are two possible tenses:

- **Present tense:** to stress continuous action.
- **Aorist tense:** to indicate action without any reference to duration.

Proof of the foregoing is easily found. I wish to belabor this for a moment, for there are many who doubt the validity of the "continuous action" in the subjunctive mood.

- **Carroll D. Osburn:** "In moods other than the indicative, such as the imperative, subjunctive, and infinitive, the aorist tense is normally used regardless of the type of action involved. However, when the writer wishes to call special attention to the continuity of an action, he uses the present tense of those moods" (p. 237).

- Dana & Mantey: "The progressive force of the present tense should always be considered as primary, especially with reference to the potential moods ..." (p. 181).
- J. Gresham Machen: "The distinction between the present and the aorist concerns merely the manner in which the action is regarded. The aorist subjunctive refers to the action without saying anything about its continuance or repetition, while the present subjunctive refers to it as continuing or as being repeated" (p. 131).
- Perschbacher: (under "Subjunctive Mood: Present Tense") "The tense does not indicate the time of the action, past or present, but the kind of action. The aorist tense refers to punctiliar or undefined action, whereas the present tense refers to stative, durative, or repeated (iterative) action" (p. 340).  
(Under the "Imperative Mood: Present Tense") "The present tense denotes progressive, iterative, or stative action, rather than temporal action" (p. 357).
- Robertson: (under the heading of "Subjunctive") "The rarity of the present subjunctive (and optative, of course) has already been commented upon. The aorist is used as a matter of course here unless durative action is to be expressed ... The subjunctive is very common indeed but not in the present tense" (p. 889).  
(Under "Imperative") "The present imperative was found to be regularly durative" (p. 890).
- Summers: "Except for some very rare occurrences in the perfect tense, the subjunctive mood is used only in the present and the aorist in New Testament Greek" (p. 105).  
"In previous study, it has been observed that two things are indicated in Greek tense: time of action and kind of action. Of these two only kind of action remains outside of the indicative mood. ... The kind of action finds its expression as linear in the present and punctiliar in the aorist" (p. 107).
- Williams: "The tenses of the subjunctive mood rarely have a temporal significance; it is rather their aspect that is significant, the present being used for continuous or repeated action or state, the aorist for a single act" (p. 100).
- Jackson: "The verb is present tense, middle voice, 'let her keep on covering herself'" (p. 3).  
"'HAVE LONG HAIR' is from the Greek *koma*, 'to let the hair grow, have long hair,' The present tense indicates a continuous process. ... Again, *koma* is used in the present tense suggesting 'If a woman lets her hair keep growing long ...'" (p. 5).



- **Crouch:** Lexicographers do not delineate the meanings of verbs in all tenses and moods. They present the basic definition of the word and then show how it is used in various contexts. Thayer, Liddell, Gingrich, et al., define **komao**, "to have or wear long hair." Some may respond, "The lexicographers only say that the hair must be long; they do not define **komao** 'to continually grow long hair.'" True. However, this is because the continuous action is emphasized by the tense and mood of the verb—it is not inherent in the verb's basic definition. This is an important point. Many people unwittingly misuse and abuse Greek lexicons because (1) they do not know how to use them properly, or (2) they do not know how to apply a word's basic definition to a specific context or grammatical construction. The latter error is especially true in respect to Greek verbs.

To illustrate the foregoing, some Bible passages would be helpful. Each of the following passages use the present tense, subjunctive mood, and each of them are stressing continuous action: "Just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them"—i.e., "you keep on doing to them" (Lk. 6:31); "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit"—i.e., "let us keep on walking in the Spirit" (Gal. 5:25); "I pray this, that your love may abound yet more and more"—i.e., "that your love may keep on abounding" (Phil. 1:9); "In order that we may live a quiet and peaceable life"—i.e., "that we may keep on living a quiet life" (1 Tim. 2:2); "I counsel you to put eye salve on your eyes in order that you may see"—i.e., "keep on seeing" (Rev. 3:18).

The point is, 1 Corinthians 11:15 is literally saying, "If a woman keeps on growing her hair long, it is a glory to her." She must "keep on" "continually" doing this. She may not momentarily stop and get some of it cut off.

But the argument to "counteract" this goes as follows: "If continuous growth is part of the definition of **komao**, then it immediately becomes impossible for a man to obey God—for his hair is continually growing and he cannot stop it. Even after he dies, his hair will continue to grow for a while." This argument does not "counteract" the fact that "continuous growth" is required for at least two reasons:

- The Holy Spirit used a present tense verb in the subjunctive mood. All the Greek grammars write that the purpose of the present tense in the subjunctive mood is to stress and emphasize continuous action. (See the quotations above on verb tenses.) The objection is saying the text does not mean what it says. For this weighty reason alone, the objection fails to override the plain meaning of the text.
- The objection being made is actually arguing from the standpoint of the perfect tense rather than present tense. Perfect tense means action that occurred in the past that carries abiding results. The argument says that in

order to obey God, the man must stop his hair from growing completely—once for all with abiding results. But the verb is not perfect tense. The verb is present tense. Present tense tells a man not to “continuously allow his hair to keep on growing long.” He obeys this by getting regular haircuts.

To illustrate, suppose a father told his son, “I’m going out of town for two weeks. I want you to just let the grass grow while I’m gone.” But the son reasons similar to the objection above. He reasons with himself, “The grass is always growing. It is impossible to keep it from growing. Even if I mow the grass every day, it’s impossible to keep it from growing.” Will the son be obedient if he mows the grass every day? Of course not.

Look at Matthew 13:30. The landowner told his servants, “Let the tares and the wheat continue to grow together.” Suppose the servants reasoned like the objection above, “The wheat and the tares are always growing. It is a physical impossibility to keep them from growing. Even if we mow the field every day, they are still growing.” Will the servants be obeying their master if they attempt to mow the field—even once? Of course not.

Putting the facts of the case together, we can clearly see that the woman’s hair is to remain uncut:

1. The covering is the hair that grows long (v. 15).
2. A woman can be “not covered” and still not be shorn or shaven (v. 6).
3. This shows four possibilities:
  - a. Hair that grows long (v. 15)
  - b. Hair that does not grow long, but is not shorn or shaved either (v. 6)
  - c. Hair that is shorn (v. 6)
  - d. Hair that is shaved off (v. 6)

Aaron Risener worded this well when he wrote:

It seems to me we can use this verse to prove the covering of verse 15 is uncut hair without ever grabbing a lexicon. Paul says, “For if a woman does not cover her head, let her also have her hair cut off; but if it is disgraceful for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved, let her cover her head” (1 Cor. 11:6, NASB). Paul is speaking of a case where a woman is not covering her head, but she, at this point, is not shorn or shaved either (he says she might as well be, but she wasn’t ... she was merely without a covering). That implies that the woman had something less than the covering, but something more than “shorn or shaven.” Since we know the covering is her hair (v. 15), Paul seems to be describing a situation common, unfortunately, to many of our sisters today: trimmed or shortened hair. She may not be shaven or shorn, but she’s not covered.

The conclusion we draw is the only logical conclusion: “Having long hair” means not to cut the hair at all.

## The Nazarite Vow

The Nazarite vow cannot be ignored. "All the days of the vow of his separation no razor shall come upon his head; until the days are fulfilled for which he separated himself to the LORD, he shall be holy. Then he shall let the locks of the hair of his head grow" (Num. 6:5). Although the wording in the Septuagint is not identical to 1 Corinthians 11, the subject matter is too closely related to cast the passage aside completely. Both speak about the hair. Both say, "Let the hair grow long." Notice the following translations of Numbers 6:5:

- NIV—"he must *let* the hair of his head *grow* long"
- NASV "he shall *let* the locks of hair on his head *grow* long"
- ASV—"he shall *let* the locks of the hair of his head *grow* long"
- Hebrew-English Interlinear: "he shall *allow* the locks of the hair of his head to *grow* long"

To "let the hair grow long" is a Bible way of saying, "do not touch the hair with a razor." Furthermore, the Hebrew word *naziyr* (translated Nazarite in Numbers 6) is an interesting word. In Leviticus 25:5, the vines were to grow "untended" (*naziyr*). That is, they were not to be pruned, trimmed, or cut, for every seventh year was to be a sabbatical year for the land. In the same chapter, verse 11 reiterates that the vines were to grow "untended" (*naziyr*), or uncut, because every fiftieth year was a Jubilee and the land rested again. In Judges 13:5, Samson was to be a Nazarite (*naziyr*) from birth and that meant "no razor was to come upon his head." In 1 Samuel 1:11, Samuel was to be a Nazarite from birth, and it specifically said, "No razor shall come upon his head."

Josephus wrote in Greek. When commenting on Numbers 6:5, he used the word *komao* to accurately describe what the passage was teaching. Robinson's *Lexicon* cites this example from Josephus: "Moreover, when any have made a sacred vow, I mean those that are called Nazarites, that suffer their hair to grow long (*komao*)..." (*Antiquities*, 4.4.4). The point is, *komao* can be used to describe the Nazarite who does not "touch his hair with a razor" but merely allows it to "keep on growing long" (*komao*). What, then, are we to conclude when we see the same wording in regard to the Christian woman? Is it not natural to conclude they are to allow their hair to "keep on growing" without cutting their hair?

Again, the Lord told the prophet, "They must not shave their heads or let their hair grow long, but they are to keep the hair of their heads trimmed" (Ezek. 44:20, NIV). There are three hair lengths here: (a) shaved hair, (b) trimmed hair, and (c) hair that grows long. The point is plain enough. When

God told people in the Old Testament to "let your hair grow." He meant by that, "Do not touch your hair with a razor." What, then, are we to conclude when we read the same wording in the New Testament? It seems reasonable to conclude that *komao*, in 1 Corinthians 11:15, means simply that a Christian woman is to "continue to let her hair grow long," which is the usual way of saying, "Do not cut your hair."

## Verbs

**Komao** is a verb. Verbs describe action. God is not so much concerned about something (noun) a woman possesses. He is concerned about what women do. When women "keep on letting their hair grow," that is something they do. When God uses verbs, He is showing us that what women do is more important than what they possess (nouns). Thus, when a woman makes a confession or is baptized, if she allows her hair to "keep on growing," it does not matter how much hair (noun) she possesses. God punished Samson for allowing his hair to be cut off (Jgs. 16:19); but when he began to grow it again (Jgs. 16:22), God accepted him. God was more concerned with what Samson was doing (verb) than with what he was possessing (noun).

The English Bible may leave the impression that "long hair" is a woman's glory as though length were primary. But in the Greek, the glory is an action performed by the woman (a verb)—she must do something to receive glory from God—she must "keep on growing her hair." Her "hair is given to her for a covering" (v. 15). But she must *do* something with that hair "keep on growing it."

"...it is a glory to her; for..." "For" (*hoti*) explains why hair is a glory for the woman because it has been given to her by God. A "manmade" covering would not be a glory to a woman. Hair is a glory because it was made and is given by God Himself.

"...her hair..." Note carefully, this did not say "long hair" is the woman's covering as if length were the important factor. Thayer correctly said, "the notion of length being only secondary and suggested" (p. 354). If the Holy Spirit wanted to emphasize length as measured by a ruler, He could have used "**makra thrix**" or "**makra kome**." Both of these expressions would properly have been translated "long (adjective) hair (noun)" with emphasis on the length of the hair. But what the Spirit could have said, He did not say. He did not use wording to emphasize length per se (adjectives), but rather words emphasizing action (verbs), and He used present tense verbs to emphasize continuous action.

The question before us is, "What sort of hair is a glory?" The Scriptures tell us the answer very plainly. "The covering is hair that continues to grow

long." This leaves no room for trimming, cutting, burning off, plucking out, and/or other ways of removing the hair.

"...is given to her..." "Given" (*dedotai*) is a perfect, passive, indicative verb, meaning "it has been divinely given and remains given" by God to serve "instead of a covering" (*anti peribolaion*). Paul will use various forms of this word indicating something that is "given by God." The "traditions" which the Corinthians were to keep were "given" by Paul (11:2). The Spirit had "given" gifts to various people (12:7-8). Jesus will "give" the kingdom back to the Father (15:24). God "gives" a body to each one as He pleases (15:38). God "gives" us victory (15:57). Other expressions are used to indicate the idea of something "given" by God. Paul would "give" instructions concerning the communion (11:17). Paul would "receive" from the Lord what he "delivered" to them (11:23). When we read that "hair is given," it means that continually growing hair is "required" or "commanded" (cf. 14:37). God required long hair, but He did not command an artificial covering.

"...for..." "For" (*anti*) in this case is a preposition which means "instead of." To illustrate the idea of substitution found within this preposition, notice the following passages taken from the Septuagint. In Genesis 22:13, Abraham offers a ram "instead of" (*anti*) Isaac. He substituted the ram for his son. The ram only was actually sacrificed—not both the son and the ram. In Genesis 44:33, Judah would stay in Egypt "instead of" (*anti*) Benjamin. Judah was not suggesting that both he and Benjamin together stay in Egypt, but that he would serve as a substitute for Benjamin and serve in Benjamin's place. In Numbers 3:12, the Levites were taken "instead of" (*anti*) the firstborn. They took the place of the firstborn and served around the tabernacle of meeting. The Levites did not serve along with the firstborn, but they were substitutes for the firstborn. "These three sentences unmistakably deal with substitution" (Dana & Mantey, p. 100). The point is, continually growing hair is given to serve the purpose of a covering.

"...a covering." "Covering" (*peribolaion*) is defined as "covering, wrap, cloak, robe of an article of clothing" (Arndt & Gingrich). This refers to an artificial veil. The woman's continually growing hair has been given to her (by God) to serve as a covering when praying or prophesying. The woman does not need an artificial veil when praying or prophesying because her hair was given by God to serve "in the place of" (*anti*) an artificial veil. The chapter never required a Christian woman to wear an artificial veil. All along, it envisioned hair as being a covering. But an action (verb) must be performed upon the hair for it to qualify as a covering that "fully covers" (*kata + kalupto*) the head. The action is to "let the hair keep on growing long."

**Verse 16**

**"But if anyone seems to be contentious..."** "Contentious" (*philoneikos*) is literally "a lover of contention." There are some brethren who are fond of contention. This verse tells us what to do with brethren like this. We need to remember this verse.

**"...we have no such custom..."** "We" refers to the apostolic college. Previously Paul wrote, "For I think that God has displayed us, the apostles, last, as men condemned to death; for we have been made a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men" (1 Cor. 4:9).

Paul is not saying that all of the instructions of this passage should be "tossed to the wind" if someone is going to argue over them. The apostles never hinged their instructions on the likes and dislikes of anyone. To understand the point of verse 16, we need only to recall the custom the apostles taught and the customs they did not have. The custom taught by the apostles was women being covered with uncut hair when praying or prophesying. The custom they did not have was women with cut hair. Hence, "We have no such custom as women cutting their hair. If someone wants to be contentious, just remind them of this fact." This should remind us of 14:38, "If anyone ignores this, ignore them."

**"...nor do the churches of God."** Paul wanted unity among the churches. He wrote "to the church of God which is at Corinth, ... with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord...that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (1 Cor. 1:2, 10). Again, "For this reason I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church" (4:17). What Paul taught in chapter 11, he taught in every church he visited.

**The Expositor's Greek Testament** summarized this final verse well: "If, after all that the Apostle has advanced...any one is still minded to debate, he must be put down by authority—that of Paul himself and his colleagues, supported by universal Christendom" (Findlay, 2:876).

**Conclusion**

Men are taught to show respect for their head of authority by keeping their physical head uncovered. Christian men may not wear hair that is long enough to hang down from their head (v. 4). However, men may wear an artificial covering when praying or prophesying—for the covering under

consideration is the hair only. No artificial veil is ever considered. The Bible clearly says that hair is the covering, not an artificial veil.

Women, on the other hand, must show respect for their head of authority by having their physical heads "completely covered" with hair that "keeps on growing long." They may not cut their hair at all. However, they may wear their hair up in a bun—for the wording of the Greek points to "being covered completely." The Greek does not require something that hangs down from the head of the woman. The following seven points should be remembered:

1. Women are specifically told to "keep on growing the hair long" (present tense).
2. "Let the hair grow long" is the Bible way of saying "do not touch the hair with a razor."
3. Cut hair does not "fully cover" the woman (v. 6) (*kata + kalupto*).
4. Cut hair is a shame to the woman (v. 6).
5. Uncut hair is a sign of subjection (v. 10).
6. Uncut hair is a glory to the woman (v. 15).
7. Uncut hair has been divinely given (and remains thus) to serve the place of an artificial veil.

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# **“Because of the Angels”**

## **(1 Cor. 11:10)**

*by David Stands*

The directives of Old and New Testament Scripture are not impossible to comprehend or to obey. David said in Psalm 119:130, “The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple.” Isaiah recorded, “So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper *in the thing* whereto I sent it” (Is. 55:11).

In His mercy, God has given us His Word to understand. It is possible to comprehend and ultimately to obey. On the other hand, God has reason to send strong delusion to those who will not believe the truth, and, as a consequence, believe a lie (2 Thess. 2:10–12). Therefore, Paul admonishes, “Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is” (Eph. 5:17). It is possible to understand, as well as to obey, the truths recorded in 1 Corinthians 11 as much as any other.

### **Verses 1–5: Laying a Foundation**

Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ. Now I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances, as I delivered them to you. But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God. Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonoureth his head. But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaven.

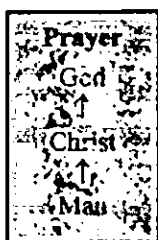
We could underscore these verses with Paul’s statement in 1 Corinthians 14:37, “If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord.” The imperatives of these words are clear.

In verse 3, Paul speaks of headship: God is the head of Christ, Christ is the head of man, and man is the head of woman. The subject of man and woman in this verse and the verses to follow in 1 Corinthians 11:3–16 should be taken in a generic sense to apply to all Christian men and women. In verse 3, Paul says, “The head of *every* man is Christ.” The headship of 1 Corinthians 11:3 is not limited to marriage. Paul’s statement in 1 Corinthians 11:3 includes marriage, but is not limited to marriage relationships. Plainly, all unmarried Christian women still have a spiritual head regardless of their marital status.

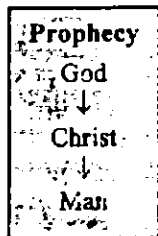
In verses 4 and 5 of our text, Paul again reinforces that the principle of headship applies to every man and every woman. He says, "every man" praying or prophesying... and "every woman" praying or prophesying... Whatever these verses mean, they are talking about two very important aspects of our spiritual lives: our prayers and our prophesying. It affects our worship.

For the sake of explanation, notice that Paul did not say, "Every man praying or prophesying with his head uncovered honors his head"; or "every woman praying or prophesying with her head covered honors her head." Instead, he made his point from a negative when he said, "We dishonor our head." He had a reason for doing this. It is the same reason gospel preachers would say, "Today, I am going to preach about fornication, and every one who commits fornication sins against (dishonors) his own body." Paul takes the same approach to this subject.

Consider the situation when men pray and prophesy. Colossians 3:17 reads, "And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him." John 14:6 reads, "Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." 1 Timothy 2:5 reads, "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." The combination of instruction from these verses is that our prayers only approach God's throne



through Jesus Christ. The chart to the left illustrates this principle. Similarly, the authority to prophesy comes to man from God through Jesus Christ. The chart to the right illustrates this principle. Just as man's prayer approaches God through Jesus Christ, his authority to prophesy (i.e., preach or teach) comes from God through Jesus Christ.



Now consider the situation when women pray. It is clear that when men pray, their prayer approaches God through man's authoritative head, Jesus Christ. But what happens with the woman? Do her prayers approach God through her authoritative head, man? Consider also the situation when women prophesy. It is clear that when men prophesy they do so by God's authority through Jesus Christ. But what happens to the woman? Does she prophesy by God's authority through Christ and man? No, it would be spiritually incorrect to say that women pray or prophesy through or by the authority of man.

This is where our topic really begins because this is where we can understand God's purpose for the covering. The goal of this study is not to define or to explain what the covering is or is not. Whatever the covering is, its purpose is seen in verse 10, which is the focus of this study.

Whatever the covering is, it is absolutely essential for women to have it in order to pray or prophesy. Without the covering, her attempt to pray or prophesy would be spiritually in vain. In the same respect, if a man were to pray or prophesy covered, his attempt to do so would also be in vain. We are talking about prayer and prophecy, two absolutely vital aspects of our spiritual lives: prayer is our communication with God, and prophecy is our God communicating with us.

Any covered man or uncovered woman who seeks to pray or prophesy dishonors his or her spiritual head, and ultimately dishonors God. It is no less imperative that we obey the truth on this subject than teaching concerning baptism, the communion, or any other New Testament subject.

### Verse 10

For this cause ought the woman to have power on her head because of the angels.

Other than the Holy Spirit, Paul has included every spiritual being—he has made declarations concerning God, Christ, man, woman, and now angels. Angels include cherubim and seraphim, as well as fallen angels.

How do angels fit into this scheme of headship? The writer of Hebrews said, "Thou madest him a little lower than the angels... But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels..." (Heb. 2:7, 9). Since man is a little lower than the angels, should our paradigm look like the chart to the right? No, because even though we are a little lower than the angels, angels are not our authoritative or spiritual head.

"How are we a little lower than the angels?" Look at 2 Peter 2:11, "Whereas angels, which are greater in power and might..." Yes, angels are stronger than human beings. We are a little lower than they are in this respect. Human beings are both physical as well as spiritual beings. Angels are completely spiritual in nature. But this fact does not mean that angels are spiritually greater than man. Consider the following passages.



Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? and if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Know ye not that we shall judge angels? (1 Cor. 6:2-3).

And again, when he bringeth in the firstbegotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him (Heb. 1:6).

And I John saw these things, and heard them. And when I had heard and seen, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which

shewed me these things. Then saith he unto me, See thou do it not: for I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book: worship God (Rev. 22:8-9).

You know what this angel was saying to John? He was saying, "I'm just like you are, worship God." This reminds us of what Peter said to Cornelius:

And as Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet, and worshipped him. But Peter took him up, saying, Stand up; I myself also am a man (Acts 10:25-26).

We will judge angels, they are our fellow servants, they are among our brethren, and they worship Christ. Therefore, angels are not our authoritative head. The incorrect chart on the previous page should, instead, look like the chart on the right.

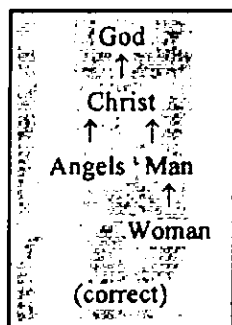
Even though man is the authoritative head of woman, women do not pray to God through man, nor do they prophesy by his authority. In fact, they pray to God and prophesy by the authority of Jesus Christ, just as man does. But how do they do that, since man is their spiritual head?

**Power.** This word is from the Greek *exousia*. W. E. Vine says of this word, "denotes freedom of action, a right to act." Thayer says, "power, power of choice, liberty of doing as one pleases, leave or permission." Strong defines this word as "privilege."

The Greek word *exousia* is used 103 times in the New Testament. Of those 103 times, it is translated: power, authority, right, jurisdiction, strength, and liberty in the King James Version. Therefore, "For this cause ought a woman to have power [authority, right, jurisdiction] on her head because of the angels."

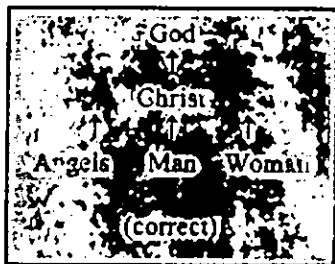
Brethren, women have power on their head. It is not that power is over them, as is suggested by many center column references. Rather, this verse teaches that Christian women actually have authority, which is symbolized by her covering her head.



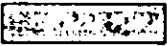

Men cannot cover their head as women do. Paul said, "Every man praying or prophesying having his head covered dishonoureth his head." Why? Because there are many physical things we do that have spiritual significance. This fact should not come as a shock to anyone. We physically are baptized in water, but spiritually we are baptized into the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (Rom. 6:3-4). We physically eat bread and drink fruit of the vine in the



Lord's Supper, but spiritually we share in the body and blood of Christ (1 Cor. 10:16).

Men, if we cover our heads, we will dishonor our spiritual head, Jesus Christ. Why? Because in doing so, we would be covering Jesus Christ, our spiritual head. Plainly, we do not have the authority to cover our heads as women do. God has given the privilege of covering the head to the woman. Women are empowered to cover their spiritual head (man) by covering their physical head. With the covering in place, they are able to pray, prophesy, and, indeed, worship God directly through Jesus Christ, just as man does. Therefore, though the chart on the previous page accurately illustrates the divine pattern of headship, the chart to the right accurately illustrates the reality of our access to God through Jesus Christ.

**"Because of the Angels"**

| Holy of Holies   | Holy Place  |  |
|--|---|--|
| <br>Ark | <br>Altar of Incense | <br>Shewbread Table<br><br>Lampstand<br> |

Consider this chart of the Israelite tabernacle. When the altar of incense was lit in the holy place, its smoke and odor did not just fill the Holy Place, but also permeated through the veil into the Most Holy Place. John wrote:

And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer *it* with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, *which came* with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel's hand (Rev. 8:3-4).

We cannot know what roll the angels play in our worship, but they are involved in some way. Consider prayer. When a brother words a prayer in the worship assembly, that prayer does not merely fill the auditorium, but goes

through the veil into the most Holy Place, before the very throne of God. Evidently, from the book of Revelation, angels have a significant roll in our worship of God.

What we are seeing in 1 Corinthians 11:10 is a little taste of eternity. Jesus said, "For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven" (Mt. 22:30). Paul wrote in Galatians 3:28, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus."

In our worship, we experience this little taste of eternity. It is true that women are in subjection to man. It is true that they are not permitted to speak but are commanded to be under obedience. But once our worship ascends into the very presence of God, there is neither male nor female; we are as the angels of God in heaven.

Thus, the purpose of the covering of a woman's physical head, as is stated in 1 Corinthians 11:10, is to empower and to enable her to cover her spiritual head, man, enabling her to pray to God and prophesy by the authority of Jesus Christ. In so doing, she receives the means to transcend to a position of equal footing with man, a position where there is neither male nor female, because of (they are as) the angels of God in heaven.

### Conclusion

We have not discussed what the covering is—it is hair that the woman lets grow without preventing the growth process in any way. Having said this, and realizing how vital the covering is in order to pray, prophesy, or worship, it behooves us to teach women a way that is right and that cannot be wrong.

In 1 Corinthians 11:16 Paul warned, "But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God." We do not have the custom of men praying or prophesying covered, or of women praying or prophesying uncovered, neither do the churches of God. Amen. 728 S. Rainier St., Kennewick, WA 99336; [stands4jc@aol.com](mailto:stands4jc@aol.com)

# **Imputed Righteousness**

## **Romans 4:1–25; Galatians 3:6–9**

*by Johnny Elmore*

The book of Romans is one of the most significant books of the New Testament. Some say that more commentaries have been written on Romans than any other New Testament book. The theme of the book is the principle of justification by faith independent of works of merit, although it is crucial to understand the nature of the faith that justifies.

Paul argued that justification by faith is necessary for both Jews and Gentiles. The Gentiles were justly condemned because they put God out of their lives, worshiping and serving the creature and not the Creator (Rom. 1:18–32). The Jews were also condemned. They were privileged to have the law, but they did not keep it (Rom. 2:1–10). Paul said that he proved “both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin; as it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one” (Rom. 3:9–10).

Paul affirmed that boasting is excluded. Man could not claim righteousness by the works of the law, since all have sinned (v. 23). “Therefore,” Paul says, “we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.” If the Jews were to suggest someone who merited justification by works, it would likely be Abraham. Therefore, Paul began his argumentation from the Old Testament with Abraham.

### **Abraham's Justification According to Romans**

#### **Abraham Justified by Faith, Not by Works**

Romans 4:1 asks the question: “What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found?” Perhaps the Jews might say, “Paul, if you are right in teaching justification by faith, what about Abraham?” What Abraham discovered concerning his justification seems to be the topic of this question. Paul answered it in the arguments that follow.

Paul argued in verse two that if Abraham discovered that he were justified by works, then he would have a ground or basis for glorying or boasting. But he could not boast before God because the law of faith excludes such boasting (Rom. 3:27).

#### **Abraham's Faith Reckoned for Righteousness**

In verse three, Paul quotes Genesis 15:6: “And he [Abraham] believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness.” Paul undoubtedly felt



the Jews would have to acknowledge the authority of the Scriptures and admit that Abraham discovered he was justified by faith and not by deeds of merit.

Later on in this chapter, Paul explained how this justifying belief worked. Abraham demonstrated the depth of his faith and trust in doing what God asked, even to the offering of his son as a sacrifice. Consequently, his faith was reckoned or counted as righteousness. The Greek word, *logizomai*, is found fourteen times in this chapter. Arndt and Gingrich say of its use in this passage: "credit someth. to someone as someth. pass." (p. 477). Thayer says of the word in this verse: "to take into account, to make account of" and "metaph. to pass to one's account, to impute" (p. 379). Thus, Abraham's faith was credited to him for (eis) righteousness. It was neither the righteousness of God, nor that of Christ, but Abraham's faith that was reckoned for righteousness.

Next, Paul states: "Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness" (Rom. 4:4-5). If a man works for an employer, what is paid is a matter of debt, not grace. In the same way, if a man could keep the law perfectly, he would be owed justification. The man would have to live so as never to commit sin. If he ever sinned once, justification could never come to him as a debt. No deed by him could merit forgiveness; thus, if remission of sins occurs, it would have to be a matter of grace, not of debt.

I would point out here that Paul speaks of one that worketh and one that worketh not. The work must be the same thing in both places. What it means in verse four is what it means in verse five. How would a man work so as to put God in his debt? By perfect work! And when he says "to him that worketh not," it does not mean that he simply does not do anything, but it means he does not work to the standard of justification necessary. Just like the other man, his work is not perfect, but he "believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly"; consequently, "his faith is accounted [reckoned] for righteousness." If the term "justification" is used rather than "righteousness," it makes the true conception clearer and less susceptible to erroneous teaching.

### **David Describes this Blessedness**

Romans 4:6-8 reads, "Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin."

Who is the blessed man? The man to whom God credits justification without works, works meaning exactly what it did in other passages. How wonderful to be blessed with justification without having this perfect obedi-

ence. And how wonderful to be blessed by having iniquities forgiven and sins covered. Can there be any doubt that the term "righteousness" in verses 5-6 means justification, having sins forgiven and covered? By the same token, how wonderful to be blessed by not having sin credited to our account.

### **Forgiveness for Jews and Gentiles Alike**

Romans 4:9: "Cometh this blessedness then upon the circumcision only, or upon the uncircumcision also? for we say that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness."

When the apostle said, "we say," he indicates that there was agreement that Abraham's faith was reckoned "for" (in order to) righteousness. Since he was counted righteous (justified) before circumcision, the Gentiles, who had never been required to be circumcised, could be justified without it.

### **Abraham Counted Righteous Before Circumcision**

Romans 4:10: "How was it then reckoned? when he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision." Since Abraham could be justified before and without circumcision, the Gentiles, who were never commanded to be circumcised, could be justified without it, also.

Romans 4:11: "And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also." Circumcision was a seal, a stamp of approval, to the righteousness of Abraham's faith. Apparently the righteousness of his faith, while still in uncircumcision, enabled him to be "the father of all them that believe, though they be in uncircumcision," meaning that God reckons believing Gentiles as justified without circumcision.

Romans 4:12: "And the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had being yet uncircumcised." Abraham is spoken of as the father, not of those who were circumcised only, but of all who believe. Arndt and Gingrich state that one who is called "father" can be "the prototype of a group or the founder of a class of persons" (p. 641). Evidently the sense is that those among the circumcision who believe as Abraham did and walk in his steps have him as their father.

### **Promise Made Before Circumcision**

Romans 4:13: "For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the right-

cousness of faith." It is thought that the promise of being "the heir of the world" was fulfilled in spiritual seed through the Messiah and the redemption of men. Thus, it was not by means or agency of law, "but through the righteousness of faith."

Romans 4:14: "For if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect." If they that are righteous by law are the heirs, then faith as a basis is made void because no one kept the law; therefore, there is no one to whom the promise applied.

Romans 4:15: "Because the law worketh wrath: for where no law is, there is no transgression." Being under law will bring about wrath or condemnation because man violates it. But if no law exists, there can be no violation. Abraham did not transgress the Law of Moses because it had not yet been given. The law was not given to Gentiles; therefore, there was no transgression.

Romans 4:16: "Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace: to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all." If perfect obedience to law had been the basis of the promise, then it would be of debt, but since no one kept the law perfectly, it had to be on the basis of grace.

### **The Greatness of Abraham's Faith**

Romans 4:17: "(As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations,) before him whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were." The quotation in parenthesis is from Genesis 17:5. It was spoken when God changed Abram's name to Abraham, but the covenant that was proposed on this occasion was the land covenant involving circumcision as a sign. But God had already made a covenant with him to be the father of many nations, for he said in Genesis 17:4, "Behold, my covenant is with thee." In the next verse, he said, "For a father of many nations have I made thee." The point is simply that Abraham was in covenant relationship with God long before the land and circumcision covenant that the Jews were seeking to bind upon Gentiles. The promise in Genesis 12:1-3, that in his seed all families of the earth should be blessed, was called a covenant by Peter in Acts 3:25. When God spoke of Abram as "the father of many nations," Isaac was not yet born. Here is an instance of calling "those things which be not as though they were."

Romans 4:18: "Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be." Abraham believed that it would be as God said and that he would be a father in spite of Sarah's barrenness. He expressed the thought: "O that Ish-

mael might live before thee!" But when God said, "For in Isaac shall thy seed be called," Abraham believed God.

Romans 4:19-22: "And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb: He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God: And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform. And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness." Two factors militated against God's promise from a natural standpoint: Abraham's impotency due to old age and the deadness or barrenness of Sarah's womb. But in spite of these seemingly insurmountable obstacles, Abraham wavered not in faith. There was no doubt or hesitancy on Abraham's part that God could do what He said He would do. Therefore, Abraham's full conviction or belief is accounted to him for righteousness.

R. L. Whiteside, in his **Commentary On Romans**, shows that Abraham's righteousness by faith "is affirmed of him on four separate occasions, covering a period of perhaps fifty years." He continues: "To me it seems inexcusable that any Bible student should take Genesis 15:6 as an example of the justification of an alien sinner. And it seems doubly inexcusable for the same writer to so mix events as to make Genesis 15:6 and Romans 4:22 refer to the same event, and then, though the statements refer to events fifteen years apart, use both as examples of the justification of an alien! These things were not written to show how alien sinners were justified. Paul was meeting the demands of the Judaizers, who claimed that Gentile Christians had to keep the law. The justification of an alien sinner was not the point at issue, but whether a Gentile Christian had to keep the law to be justified as a Christian" (p. 110).

### **Righteousness to All Who Have Abraham's Faith**

Romans 4:23-25: "Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; but for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; Who was delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification." There is an analogy here. Just as Isaac was born of parents who were virtually dead, even so Christ was raised from the dead. Just as Abraham believed God who quickened him and Sarah, even so we must believe on Him who quickened the dead Christ. And we must have the faith of Abraham, and we must believe on Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead.

**Abraham's Justification According to Galatians**

Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed. So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham (Gal. 3:6-9).

Judaizers had argued that approval from God came only by being circumcised and keeping the Law of Moses. Paul argued that the Galatians' reception of the Holy Spirit and witnessing spiritual gifts were effected by the hearing of faith and not through the works of the Law.

Paul's statement regarding Abraham's justification is from Genesis 15:6. Advocates of the doctrine of faith only argue from this and other verses that salvation occurs the moment a sinner believes. It may be well to look briefly at Abraham's life in a study of his justification. Note the following:

1. We are introduced to Abraham's family in Genesis 11:27-32 when the family moved from Ur of the Chaldees to Haran. We learn in Genesis 12:1 that this was in obedience to God's command: "Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee."

2. Hebrews 11:8 states: "By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went." Whiteside remarks: "Strange conduct for an unforgiven, condemned sinner!"

3. After his father's death, he went to Sichem (Shechem) in Canaan. Genesis 12:7 states: "And the LORD appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto the LORD, who appeared unto him." Was this promise to an unforgiven sinner who worshiped God?

4. He built another altar near Bethel and "called upon the name of the Lord" (Gen. 12:8).

5. He returned to that altar after his trip to Egypt and "called upon the name of the Lord" (Gen. 13:3-4).

6. Abram returned from the slaughter of the kings and was blessed by Melchizedek, priest of the most high God, with the words, "Blessed be Abram of the most high God" (Gen. 14:19).

7. Before the promise of a son, the Lord said, "Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward" (Gen. 15:1).

8. God told him that Eliezer would not be his heir, but that one would be born in his own house. Genesis 15:5-6 records, "And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be. And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness."

It must be obvious that Abraham's faith was an obedient faith, the kind that trusts in God and does what He commands. That is the kind of faith that Paul was discussing (Rom. 1:5; 16:26). An obedient faith is counted for righteousness.

The word (*logizomai*) for "accounted," is defined as "to reckon, calculate, count, take into account." It is translated "impute" eight times, and has been used as the basis for the Calvinist doctrine of imputed righteousness. But, there is no transfer of sins or righteousness. As previously stated, righteousness is simply justification. Man stands before God justified or righteous because he has been forgiven. His faith is counted for (*eis*—unto) righteousness. There is nothing here about transferring the personal, perfect obedience of Christ to the sinner's account and nothing about a robe of perfection being given to the sinner to cover all his future sins.

"They which are of faith" are contrasted with those who sought to be justified "by the works of the law," i.e., "by perfect obedience to the works of the law." They were the children of Abraham because they had the same kind of faith and were justified on that basis.

"And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith," Paul says, "preached before the gospel unto Abraham" (v. 8). He appeals to Genesis 12:3 to show that man is justified by faith rather than by perfect obedience to the Law, that is, all families of the earth, whether Gentile or Jew, would be blessed through Abraham's seed. Jesus, as the culmination of that promise, died on the cross for our sins as the basis for our justification, and man received the benefits on the condition of faith.

Note verse 9, "So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham." "They which be of faith" are those who seek to be justified by faith rather than seeking to be justified by perfect obedience to the works of the Law. Abraham was justified by faith before circumcision and before the Law was revealed and "they which be of faith" are justified with Abraham.

As I have said before in a similar study (see "Imputed Righteousness," 1990 Preachers' Study Notes), if we understand the word "righteousness" to mean "justification" and the word "impute" to mean "account," then the doc-

trine of imputed righteousness is simply that those who have sinned are reckoned or accounted justified through faith. I have not found any lexicographer who defined the word for "impute" to mean, "transfer."

## **The Three Imputations of Calvinism**

A summary of the three imputations shows that Calvinism teaches: (1) the imputation of the sins of Adam to mankind, (2) the imputation of the sins of mankind to Christ, and (3) the imputation of the personal righteousness of Christ to believers. Let us look at these briefly.

### **The Imputation of the Sins of Adam to Mankind**

The taproot of the whole system of Calvinism is the fallacy that one person's sin can be imputed (transferred) to another. As previously noted, "to impute" does not mean "to transfer." God does impute sin (Rom. 4:8) to the person who commits it, but He never transfers it to another person. Evidently that idea developed early in the land of Judea, because we hear Ezekiel asking: "What mean ye, that ye use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying, The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge?" (Ezek. 18:2). Ezekiel proceeded to set the matter straight. He said, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him." How could it be any plainer?

Albert Barnes gives a long list of scriptures from the Old Testament sometimes translated "to impute" and makes this comment: "I have examined all the passages, and, as the result of my examination, have come to the conclusion, that there is not one in which the word is used in the sense of reckoning or imputing to a man that which does not strictly belong to him; or of charging on him that which ought not to be charged on him as a matter of personal right. The word is never used to denote imputing in the sense of transferring, or of charging that on one which does not properly belong to him. The same is the case in the New Testament. The word occurs about forty times (see Schmidius' Concord) and in a similar signification. No doctrine of transferring, or of setting over to a man what does not properly belong to him, be it sin or holiness, can be derived, therefore, from this word. Whatever is meant by it here, it evidently is declared that the act of believing is that which is intended, both by Moses and by Paul" (*Romans*, p. 102).

Calvinist editors later added footnotes in small print trying to uphold the doctrine of transference, saying that Barnes "may be accused of using inaccurate or unguarded language" (*Romans*, p. 102).

The truth of the matter is that Adam's sins were imputed to no one but him, and our sins are imputed to us. To teach that Adam's sins were imputed to anyone else is denominational error.

### **The Imputation of the Sins of Mankind to Christ**

I have read articles and sermons from some in the church of Christ that teach that our sins are transferred or imputed to Christ, even though those terms may not be used. The Bible does not teach that the sins of mankind are transferred to Christ in any sense. The Bible passages that refer to Christ bearing our offenses, our iniquity being laid on him, etc., such as Isaiah 53:8, simply teach that Christ died for our sins. The apostle Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:21, "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." Macknight paraphrases this quite well when he rendered it, "For him who knew no sin, he hath made a sin-offering for us, that we might become the righteousness of God through him." He also comments that "'the righteousness of God' may signify righteous persons in the sight of God; namely, by having our faith counted to us for righteousness through Christ" (Macknight, p. 227).

### **The Imputation of Christ's Personal Righteousness to Believers**

The Bible clearly teaches that the perfect life and death of Christ paid the penalty for sins, but the Bible does not teach that the moral excellence of Christ is imputed to us or that we wear a robe of Christ's righteousness which covers our sins. When we believe on Christ, becoming obedient to His will, God forgives those sins that had been put to our account. Sins forgiven are no longer imputed. As David and Paul say, "Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin" (Rom. 4:8). God pronounces man righteous on the basis of forgiveness. Remember that Ezekiel said in Ezekiel 18:20 that neither sin nor righteousness can be transferred.

It is interesting to see what some of the greatest Protestant commentators have said on the subject:

The doctrine of the imputed righteousness of Christ, as held by many, will not be readily found in this chapter, where it has been supposed to exist in all its proofs. It is repeatedly said that *faith* is imputed for righteousness; but in no place here, that Christ's obedience to the moral law is imputed to any man (Adam Clarke, **Romans**, p. 34).

Farther, as it is nowhere said in scripture, that Christ's righteousness was imputed to Abraham, so neither is it said anywhere, that Christ's righteousness is imputed to believers (James Macknight, **Romans**, p. 75).



Observe that the *believer's own faith* is reckoned as righteousness. In no passage in Paul's writings or in other parts of the New Testament, where the phrase *to reckon for* or the verb *to reckon* alone is used, is there a declaration that anything belonging to one person is imputed accounted, or reckoned to another, or a formal statement that Christ's righteousness is imputed to believers (President Dwight, "Notes on Meyer") (Vincent, Vol. III, p. 53).

The Psalm, strictly speaking, says nothing of the imputation of *righteousness*, but it is implied by Paul, that the *remission of sin* is equivalent to the *imputation of righteousness*... (Henry Alford on Romans 4:6-8).

## The Faith that Justifies

The word in the original Greek language most often translated faith or belief in the New Testament is *pistis*. Thayer says of this word: "In reference to Christ, it denotes *a strong and welcome conviction or belief that Jesus is the Messiah, through whom we obtain eternal salvation in the kingdom of God* (on this see more at length in *pisteuo*, 1 b. y)." (Thayer, p. 513). Turning to that reference, we find him defining the verb *pisteuo*. He says it is "used especially of the faith by which a man embraces Jesus, i.e., "a conviction, full of joyful trust, that Jesus is the Messiah— the divinely appointed author of eternal salvation in the kingdom of God, conjoined with obedience to Christ" (Thayer, p. 511).

Thus, the faith that justifies is a faith, a conviction that is "conjoined with obedience to Christ." It is not mere acknowledgment that God exists, for James says, "the devils also believe, and tremble" (Jas. 2:19). Demons believe, but will not obey and those who have faith without works possess the same kind of profitless faith as the demons.

Note that both Paul and James refer to Abraham to illustrate their points. Paul said, "But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness" (Rom. 4:5). James said, "Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only" (Jas. 2:24). Paul said, "For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God" (Rom. 4:2). James said, "Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?" (Jas. 2:21).

Whiteside says, "Paul was arguing that works without faith would not justify, and James was arguing that faith without works would not justify. To exclude either is to fail of justification. Both referred to Abraham to illustrate

their points. Abraham was justified without works of law, but he was justified by works of faith" (**Romans**, p. 95).

James said, "What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?" (Jas. 2:14). It is a rhetorical question and a negative answer is expected. The answer would be, "That faith cannot save him." Under consideration is a particular kind of faith—*that faith!*

What kind of faith is that? The kind without works. What about it? It cannot save. Thus, faith, apart from, and without works, is profitless, barren, and vain. (This line of thought is from Guy N. Woods).

We are told in Acts 6:7 that "a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith." In this instance, "the faith" refers to the body of divine truth that produces faith. The faith that justifies, in the comprehensive sense, is "conjoined with obedience," as Thayer says. Paul says of his brethren, "But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah saith, Lord, who hath believed our report?" (Rom. 10:16). These were not justified by faith because it was a dead faith.

### Conclusion

When man was unable to save himself by his own works or by perfect obedience to the law, God intervened through His mercy and sent His Son. The Son of God lived in perfect obedience to God and became the perfect sacrifice to pay the penalty for man's sins. The Bible teaches that man was made upright (morally flawless), but he fell away (Eccl. 7:29). Since the penalty for man's sins is death, all were subject to death (an eternal casting away from God), because all have sinned (Rom. 3:23; 6:23). Both Gentile and Jew were unable to save themselves by human works or by perfection in keeping the law. The gospel was preached through Abraham, requiring faith before the Law of Moses was given. The faith of Abraham is a type of the faith that we must have in Christ. Thus, the basis for man's salvation is God's mercy, love, grace, and the sacrificial death of Christ. The condition for man's salvation is the obedience of faith. When a sinner has an obedient faith in Christ, God forgives his sins on the basis of Christ's sacrifice, and imputes, or puts to his account, that he is righteous. Righteousness is made possible because of forgiveness. This is the action of imputation. 419 K SW Ardmore, OK 73401

# Is It Ever Right to Do Wrong?

*by Richard Bunner*

## **Part 1: Did Jesus approve of David's eating the shewbread?**

David went to Nob, to Ahimelech the priest. Ahimelech trembled when he met him, and asked, "Why are you alone? Why is no one with you?" David answered Ahimelech the priest, "The king charged me with a certain matter and said to me, 'No one is to know anything about your mission and your instructions.' As for my men, I have told them to meet me at a certain place. Now then, what do you have on hand? Give me five loaves of bread, or whatever you can find." But the priest answered David, "I don't have any ordinary bread on hand; however, there is some consecrated bread here—provided the men have kept themselves from women." David replied, "Indeed women have been kept from us, as usual whenever I set out. The men's things are holy even on missions that are not holy. How much more so today!" So the priest gave him the consecrated bread, since there was no bread there except the bread of the Presence that had been removed from before the LORD and replaced by hot bread on the day it was taken away. Now one of Saul's servants was there that day, detained before the LORD; he was Doeg the Edomite, Saul's head shepherd. David asked Ahimelech, "Don't you have a spear or a sword here? I haven't brought my sword or any other weapon, because the king's business was urgent." The priest replied, "The sword of Goliath the Philistine, whom you killed in the Valley of Elah, is here; it is wrapped in a cloth behind the ephod. If you want it, take it; there is no sword here but that one." David said, "There is none like it; give it to me" (1 Sam. 21:1-9, NIV).

The apostle Paul wrote, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). While we understand this intellectually, it becomes very difficult for us emotionally to accept when a hero of old purposefully sins. Yet he who was called the "friend of God" lied about his relationship to his wife, not just once, but twice (Gen. 12:10-20; 20:1-18); he who was the "son by promise" told the same lie as his father (Gen. 26:6-16); he who became the father of the twelve patriarchs bowed down on his knees and lied to his aged father about his identity in order to receive the blessing of God (Gen. 27:18-29). And now we have the "man after God's own heart" standing before the High Priest of God fabricating a story that was far from the truth. If there was any one weakness that the ancients had, it was that they had difficulty telling the truth when they were afraid. Abraham and Isaac both admitted that it was out of fear that they lied. David was fleeing for his life from the presence of

King Saul. He obviously did not yet have a plan, had no provisions, and did not even have a sword to protect himself. As he approached the Tabernacle and the High Priest of the Lord, his eye could not miss seeing Doeg, the king's chief herdsman. His whereabouts would soon be made known to Saul. David lied about his reason for being there. The events that follow deserve some close scrutiny.

David makes three requests of the High Priest Ahimelech—to inquire of the Lord for him, to provide him with five loaves of bread, and to give him a sword—all of which Ahimelech obliged him since he was the King's son-in-law. The only bread that was available was the "bread of the Presence" or the shewbread as we are accustomed to calling it. It took six and one-fourth pounds of flour to make a loaf of shewbread. Twelve such loaves were placed in the Tabernacle on a gold-covered table each Sabbath. The descendants of Aaron were given permission to eat the bread that was removed each week to make room for the new loaves, provided it was eaten in a holy place. The Law made no provision for anyone else to eat of this bread. Thus, Jesus says, "Have ye not read what David did, when he was an hungred, and they that were with him; How he entered into the house of God, and did eat the shewbread, which was not lawful for him to eat, neither for them which were with him, but only for the priests?" (Mt. 12:3-4). There is no question about whether David was allowed to eat the shewbread according to the Law. He was not! The question we have before us is this: Does Jesus justify David taking the shewbread to eat? From the context of Matthew 12:1-7 it would seem so. The fact of the matter is Jesus used this example to defend the actions of the disciples. Obviously, the Pharisees thought David was justified in what he had done or else Jesus would not have cited the incident. (Interestingly, Jesus and the Pharisees approved of David's eating the shewbread for different reasons.)

There was a divine positive law that stated that the shewbread was to be eaten by the priests. By what authority or under what circumstances could this law be set aside so that someone who was not a descendent of Aaron might eat the consecrated bread? Jesus told the Pharisees, "But if ye had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless" (Mt. 12:7). (Compare also the incident in Mt. 9:10-12.) This principle is found in Hosea 6:6. It was not the first time in the Old Testament that God's people had been told that there were some things more important than sacrifice. Sacrifice was commanded by God, but not at the expense of obedience (1 Sam. 15:22). Offerings were a delight to the Lord, but only if the intentions were proper (1 Sam. 13:8-14). It is the thought that counts as well as the gift. In Hosea, mercy, or love for your fellowman, takes

precedence over sacrifice. The shewbread was only to be eaten by the priests, but under dire circumstances this injunction could be set aside. God obviously approved of this set of circumstances.

This principle is still used today. For example, Hebrews 10:25 reads: "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." From this we conclude that it is wrong for Christians to neglect worship services. If one fails to assemble together with the saints, he has sinned. It is a violation of the Law of Christ. However, if a family has a child who is sick with a fever and chills, the mother elects to stay home and take care of her baby. To do otherwise would be unthinkable. She has failed to assemble but she has not sinned. She violated a divine positive law, but God set it aside. Why? Because He will have mercy and not sacrifice. The care of an ailing child becomes more important on that day than assembling with the saints.

Returning to the situation with David: Jesus does not condone the lie that David told, but he does approve of David's eating the shewbread. David's lie, like the adultery he committed later in life, was wrong. Men are not excused for immoral actions. In our own minds, we may sometimes try to justify lying, stealing, cheating, murder, etc., but the Word of God does not.

## **Part 2: Do James and the writer of Hebrews justify the actions of Rahab when she lied to protect the spies in Jericho?**

The incident under question is found in Joshua 2:1-21:

And Joshua the son of Nun sent out of Shittim two men to spy secretly, saying, Go view the land, even Jericho. And they went, and came into an harlot's house, named Rahab, and lodged there. And it was told the king of Jericho, saying, Behold, there came men in hither to night of the children of Israel to search out the country. And the king of Jericho sent unto Rahab, saying, Bring forth the men that are come to thee, which are entered into thine house: for they be come to search out all the country. And the woman took the two men, and hid them, and said thus, There came men unto me, but I wist not whence they were: And it came to pass *about the time* of shutting of the gate, when it was dark, that the men went out: whither the men went I wot not: pursue after them quickly; for ye shall overtake them. But she had brought them up to the roof of the house, and hid them with the stalks of flax, which she had laid in order upon the roof. And the men pursued after them the way to Jordan unto the fords: and as soon as they which pursued after them were gone out, they shut the gate. And before they were laid down, she came up unto them upon the roof; And she said unto the men, I know that the LORD hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants

of the land faint because of you. For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt; and what ye did unto the two kings of the Amorites, that *were* on the other side Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom ye utterly destroyed. And as soon as we had heard *these things*, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you: for the LORD your God, he *is* God in heaven above, and in earth beneath. Now therefore, I pray you, swear unto me by the LORD, since I have shewed you kindness, that ye will also shew kindness unto my father's house, and give me a true token: And *that* ye will save alive my father, and my mother, and my brethren, and my sisters, and all that they have, and deliver our lives from death. And the men answered her, Our life for yours, if ye utter not this our business. And it shall be, when the LORD hath given us the land, that we will deal kindly and truly with thee. Then she let them down by a cord through the window: for her house *was* upon the town wall, and she dwelt upon the wall. And she said unto them, Get you to the mountain, lest the pursuers meet you; and hide yourselves there three days, until the pursuers be returned: and afterward may ye go your way. And the men said unto her, We *will be* blameless of this thine oath which thou hast made us swear. Behold, *when* we come into the land, thou shalt bind this line of scarlet thread in the window which thou didst let us down by: and thou shalt bring thy father, and thy mother, and thy brethren, and all thy father's household, home unto thee. And it shall be, *that* whosoever shall go out of the doors of thy house into the street, his blood *shall be* upon his head, and we *will be* guiltless: and whosoever shall be with thee in the house, his blood *shall be* on our head, if *any* hand be upon him. And if thou utter this our business, then we will be quit of thine oath which thou hast made us to swear. And she said, According unto your words, so *be* it. And she sent them away, and they departed: and she bound the scarlet line in the window.

From the above account we are able to conclude a number of facts. The spies had entered into the city about sundown and had been recognized almost immediately. They no doubt were aware of this and were seeking a place to hide. A woman not unlike the one described in Proverbs 7:10 met them in the street and invited them in. They were aware that she was a prostitute; she was aware that they were Israeli spies. Immorality was not on the minds of any of the parties involved. Rahab quickly hid the spies knowing that soldiers would come knocking at her door soon. When the soldiers arrived, she informed them that, yes, indeed, two foreigners had been there but had already left. She saw them leave the city just before the gates were closed. This was a lie, but a plausible one. Why should the soldiers not believe her? She had men coming

and going all the time. The soldiers left immediately to pursue the spies, closing the city gates behind them just in case the men had remained in Jericho.

What do we know about Rahab? Not much. She appears to be a young woman who does not have a husband. Her parents are still living, and she has brothers and sisters. Sometime as she was growing up, she was told the story of how the Red Sea had been divided, all the slaves of Egypt had escaped, and the Egyptian army had been destroyed. This story had a profound effect on her young mind. Neither the moon god nor any of the other gods that were worshiped in Jericho had that kind of power. Then she heard recently (maybe through CNN—the Canaanite News Network) that Sihon and Og, powerful Amorite kings, had waged war against these wandering slaves, known as the Israelites, only to be completely destroyed. Rahab had faith in the God of Israel. In fact, He was more than just the God of Israel to her—He was “the God of Heaven above and the earth below.” As the soldiers of Jericho left the city, Rahab closed the door and looked to her rooftop. She knew what needed to be done.

This heroic woman and her family are saved from the destruction of Jericho. She embraces the religion of Israel and is accepted into the community, even marrying into one of the prominent families of Judah. In the New Testament, she is mentioned in the genealogy of Jesus by Matthew (1:5); the writer of Hebrews tells us that by faith she welcomed the spies and perished not (Heb. 11:31); and James says, “Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent *them* out another way?”

Here is the question: Was Rahab justified or commended for lying to the authorities in Jericho? The Bible does not commend or justify this woman for telling a lie any more than it commends her for prostitution. She is commended for her faith. She lived in a city, in an entire country, in which nobody believed in God. The demonstration of God's being and His power had been given forty years earlier, probably before this woman had even been born. Everyone living in Canaan had heard of the dividing of the Red Sea. Only Rahab was willing to confess her faith and seek salvation for herself and her family. Certainly she was a sinner. Her moral compass was askew, but she had faith. No doubt, later, just as she would repent of her prostitution, she would repent of her lying and all other sins. James simply says that she was justified because she had received the spies and sent them out a different way. He never indicates that Divine approval was given to the falsehoods she had uttered. If someone asks, “What would have happened if she had told the truth?”, all I can say is that He who blinded the eyes of the Sodomites or sent fire down to

consume the king's armies (2 Kgs. 1) would have had no problem delivering his servants from harm.

## Part 3: How can Peter refer to Lot as a righteous man when we consider the things of which Lot was guilty?

And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes condemned *them* with an overthrow, making *them* an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly; And delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked: (For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed *his* righteous soul from day to day with *their* unlawful deeds;) The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished (2 Pet. 2:6-9).

Lot was the son of Haran, the brother of Abraham. Haran died in Ur of Chaldea, his homeland. When God spoke to Abraham, "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 12:1-3), he departed, "as the LORD had spoken unto him; and Lot went with him" (v. 4). God blessed both Abraham and Lot. They both became wealthy. From all indications they were both walking by faith.

And truly, if they had been mindful of that *country* from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better *country*, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city (Heb. 11:15-16).

When Abraham and Lot separated, it was on friendly terms and out of necessity. The land could not support all of their livestock. Lot moved toward Sodom. It is then that the Word reveals, "But the men of Sodom *were* wicked and sinners before the LORD exceedingly" (Gen. 13:13). Someone might ask, "What were the sins of Sodom?" Writing centuries later, Ezekiel warns Jerusalem of the sins of Sodom, "Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy. They were haughty and did detestable things before me. Therefore I did away with them as you have seen" (16:49-50, NIV). The detestable things mentioned here obviously included their sexual perversions. Lot was vexed or grieved with all of this wickedness that surrounded him.

Peter refers to Lot as a "righteous man." Thus far, we have shown that Lot was a man of faith who was greatly influenced by his uncle. No doubt he, too,



"looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." The question is, "Did Lot remain a righteous man after he moved to Sodom?" The answer is found in Genesis 18. In this chapter God revealed to Abraham that He was going to destroy the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah because of their wickedness. Abraham pleaded for the cities on the basis that there may be righteous people living in them. Here is the account:

And the LORD said, Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous; I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto me; and if not, I will know. And the men turned their faces from thence, and went toward Sodom: but Abraham stood yet before the LORD. And Abraham drew near, and said, Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked? Peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city: wilt thou also destroy and not spare the place for the fifty righteous that are therein? That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked: and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee: Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? And the LORD said, If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes. And Abraham answered and said, Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes: Peradventure there shall lack five of the fifty righteous: wilt thou destroy all the city for lack of five? And he said, If I find there forty and five, I will not destroy it. And he spake unto him yet again, and said, Peradventure there shall be forty found there. And he said, I will not do it for forty's sake. And he said unto him, Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak: Peradventure there shall thirty be found there. And he said, I will not do it, if I find thirty there. And he said, Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord: Peradventure there shall be twenty found there. And he said, I will not destroy it for twenty's sake. And he said, Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak yet but this once: Peradventure ten shall be found there. And he said, I will not destroy it for ten's sake. And the LORD went his way, as soon as he had left communing with Abraham: and Abraham returned unto his place (Gen. 18:20-33).

The two angels departed towards the cities of the plain to confirm the wickedness that was there and to find the righteous. Who did they first meet when they entered Sodom but Lot.

And there came two angels to Sodom at even; and Lot sat in the gate of Sodom: and Lot seeing them rose up to meet them; and he bowed himself with his face toward the ground; And he said, Behold now, my lords, turn in, I pray you, into your servant's house, and tarry all night, and wash your feet, and ye shall rise up early, and go on your

ways. And they said, Nay; but we will abide in the street all night. And he pressed upon them greatly; and they turned in unto him, and entered into his house; and he made them a feast, and did bake unleavened bread, and they did eat (Gen. 19:1-3).

Lot, like his uncle, was given to hospitality. Later the writer of Hebrews would say, "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares" (Heb. 13:2). But treachery was afoot that night in Sodom. "But before they lay down, the men of the city, *even* the men of Sodom, compassed the house round, both old and young, all the people from every quarter: And they called unto Lot, and said unto him, Where *are* the men which came in to thee this night? bring them out unto us, that we may know them" (Gen. 19:4-5). Notice the depravity of the people "both old and young." The cup of their iniquity now overflows. Their wickedness cannot be suppressed. "From all quarters" the people were vile and evil.

And Lot went out at the door unto them, and shut the door after him, And said, I pray you, brethren, do not so wickedly. Behold now, I have two daughters which have not known man; let me, I pray you, bring them out unto you, and do ye to them as is good in your eyes: only unto these men do nothing; for therefore came they under the shadow of my roof. And they said, Stand back. And they said again, This one fellow came in to sojourn, and he will needs be a judge: now will we deal worse with thee, than with them. And they pressed sore upon the man, even Lot, and came near to break the door. But the men put forth their hand, and pulled Lot into the house to them, and shut to the door. And they smote the men that were at the door of the house with blindness, both small and great: so that they wearied themselves to find the door (Gen. 19:6-11).

Lot went out to them, shut the door behind him to protect his guests, and offered his virgin daughters to the mob. "In his anxiety, Lot was willing to sacrifice to the sanctity of hospitality his duty as a father, which ought to have been still more sacred, and committed the sin of seeking to avert sin by sin" (Keil & Delitzsch).

"And the men said unto Lot, Hast thou here any besides? son in law, and thy sons, and thy daughters, and whatsoever thou hast in the city, bring *them* out of this place: For we will destroy this place, because the cry of them is waxen great before the face of the LORD; and the LORD hath sent us to destroy it" (Gen. 19:12-13). Lot was counted a righteous man despite his personal sin. The angels warned him of the impending destruction and urged him to flee. There were not ten righteous in the city, but as in the days of Noah, the righteous would not suffer the destruction with the wicked.

Someone may come back and ask, "How can Lot be counted as a righteous man after committing such a terrible sin?" To put this into perspective, we need to ask some other questions: "Do righteous men ever sin?" and "When a righteous man sins, does he then become an unrighteous man?"

The apostle Paul wrote, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). John adds, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us" (1 Jn. 1:8-10). If all have sinned, then the righteous are guilty of sin, also. John's words are written to righteous people. He continues, "My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 Jn. 2:1). Again he says, "Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him. Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous. He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil. Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother" (1 Jn. 3:6-10). Righteousness then is a state or condition that we are in. It is God that calls us righteous. We do righteous deeds. When we sin, we ask for forgiveness. If we leave the way of righteousness and pursue the way of sin, then we become unrighteous.

It has been pointed out that Lot's story does not end with the escape from Sodom. The sorrow and grief that he endured in his later years had to be just as agonizing as when he lived in the city. As they were fleeing the conflagration that rained down from heaven on the cities of the plain, Lot's wife looked back and died because of unbelief. Lot was left as a widower with his two daughters, the same two daughters he had offered to the men of Sodom. I mention this sin to help us understand why these young women did not respect their father as they should have. Certainly they did not have the faith and righteousness that had been instilled in their father by their great-uncle Abraham. Here is their story:

And Lot went up out of Zoar, and dwelt in the mountain, and his two daughters with him; for he feared to dwell in Zoar: and he dwelt in a cave, he and his two daughters. And the firstborn said unto the younger, Our father *is* old, and *there is* not a man in the earth to come in unto us after the manner of all the earth: Come, let us make our father drink wine, and we will lie with him, that we may preserve seed

of our father. And they made their father drink wine that night: and the firstborn went in, and lay with her father; and he perceived not when she lay down, nor when she arose. And it came to pass on the morrow, that the firstborn said unto the younger, Behold, I lay yesternight with my father: let us make him drink wine this night also; and go thou in, and lie with him, that we may preserve seed of our father. And they made their father drink wine that night also: and the younger arose, and lay with him; and he perceived not when she lay down, nor when she arose. Thus were both the daughters of Lot with child by their father. And the firstborn bare a son, and called his name Moab: the same is the father of the Moabites unto this day. And the younger, she also bare a son, and called his name Benammi: the same is the father of the children of Ammon unto this day (Gen. 19:30-38).

When we carefully read this sad event we conclude that Lot was innocent of any wrongdoing. His daughters were fully responsible for the evil that was done. Lot was drugged with wine, and he perceived not when his daughters lay with him, nor when they arose. We would say that he was raped by his own daughters. Oh, yes, there is a certain degree of responsibility. Lot failed to be a good father; he failed to instill the faith that he had in God in his daughters. The fact that the women got their father drunk shows that they knew that he would never agree to such an immoral act. The final epitaph is that which is given by Peter:

And delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked: (For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds;) The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished (2 Pet. 2:7-9).

## Part 4: How does one reconcile Genesis 22:1 with James 1:13?

Genesis 22:1 reads, "And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, *here I am*"; while James 1:13 states, "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man." The apparent theological difficulty or contradiction here is not found within the text but rather within the translation. The word "tempt" in Genesis 22:1 is from the Hebrew word נָסָא (pronounced "naw-saw"). This word is found thirty-six times in the Old Testament. In the KJV it is translated "prove" twenty times; twelve times it is translated "tempt"; two times "assay"; one time "adventure"; and one time "try." Only a third of the time is the word

translated "tempt," and one of those times incorrectly by the King James scholars.

Other translations render Genesis 22:1:

And it came to pass after these things, that God did prove Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham. And he said, Here am I (1901 American Standard Version).

Now it came about after these things, that God tested Abraham, and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am" (New American Standard Bible).

Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied (New International Version).

Now it came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham, and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am" (New King James Version).

After these things God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am" (New Revised Standard Version).

It becomes clear that other translators saw the mistake that was made in 1611 and have sought to correct it. Someone might ask, "What is the difference between one being "tested" and one being "tempted"? God tests; Satan tempts. Testing is for the purpose of making the purer qualities shine forth; tempting is for the purpose of causing one to fall from grace. Consider the athlete who is preparing to run in an Olympic event. His trainer may tell him that he wants him to run the course with the hurdles three inches higher and the course a few meters longer. The trainer is testing him because he has confidence that the athlete can do what he is asking. He wants to instill this confidence and growth into the athlete. But then suppose there are vandals who throw debris onto the course. The runner may step on a can or bottle and twist an ankle. The debris does nothing to improve the athlete's ability. It only serves to distract or harm him. Likewise, temptation serves to distract the Christian from his heavenly goal and to harm him eternally.

Except for this last part, we have been dealing with the thought, "Is it ever right to do wrong?" Our conclusion is, "No." Another thought that may present itself to you is, "If you want to do what is right, you have to know what is right." Let us be like those of Berea and search the Scriptures daily. 245 *St Margaret Drive, P.O. Box 22774, Lexington, KY 40522*

# Warnings Against Immaturity and Apostasy

## An Exposition of Hebrews 5:11–6:12

*by Jim Crouch*

We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil. Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. And God permitting, we will do so. It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace.

Land that drinks in the rain often falling on it and that produces a crop useful to those for whom it is farmed receives the blessing of God. But land that produces thorns and thistles is worthless and is in danger of being cursed. In the end it will be burned. Even though we speak like this, dear friends, we are confident of better things in your case—things that accompany salvation. God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them. We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure. We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised (NIV).

This passage forms a digression in the argumentation of the writer. In 4:14, the writer begins his presentation of Jesus as the Great High Priest, the one who is greater than Aaron, the one whose office is based in the order of Melchizedek (5:6–10). As the writer introduces his argument regarding Melchizedek, he seems to come to the realization that his readers likely will not be able to understand his line of reasoning—many are spiritually immature and

some have fallen away.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, he decides to address these personal issues before returning once more to his line of reasoning regarding Jesus' priesthood (6:13–7:28). When he does return to his line of reasoning concerning Jesus' priesthood and its relationship to Melchizedek, he goes to great pains to explain who Melchizedek was and how the authority for Jesus' priesthood descended from this fleeting Old Testament character.

### Warnings Against Immaturity (5:11–14)

We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.

In 5:1–10, the writer discusses Jesus' qualifications to serve as High Priest, His authority descending not from the Aaronic line but from the order of Melchizedek. The writer had much to say about "this," the antecedent of which was the discussion of Melchizedek and his relationship to Jesus in respect to priesthood. However, realizing the general lack of spiritual maturity of his target audience, the writer digresses to lament their spiritual condition.

The sweeping nature of the writer's accusation would lead us to believe that the majority, or at least a significant minority, of the readers fell into this sorry category (else the writer's accusation would be irrelevant).<sup>2</sup> The accusation levied is a serious charge, not merely of immaturity, but of spiritual regression and slothfulness. The readers had not always occupied spiritual cradles. The writer accuses the readers of having "become sluggish [dull] in respect to their sense of hearing" (*νωθροὶ γεγόνατε ταῖς ἀκοαῖς*)—their once sharp spiritual senses had become dull due to lack of diligent honing and practical use.

<sup>1</sup> Most evangelists have experienced similar situations—in the midst of a sermon or study presentation it suddenly hits you that the message you attempting to present is going right over the heads of the target audience. They are not equipped to understand what you are trying to present. They need more knowledge, background, maturity, etc. We can either plod onward realizing that we are wasting our time, or we change gears a bit in an effort to teach on the level of the audience.

<sup>2</sup> One of the arguments against the belief that this letter was addressed to congregations in and around Jerusalem is the harsh accusation of immaturity given to the readers. How could congregations established and nourished by the apostles themselves be regarded as immature? While this may be a reasonable objection, it is also possible that, after the apostles had left Jerusalem to evangelize other parts of the world, these congregations grew spiritually lazy and regressed to a state of spiritual childhood.

The perfect verb (γεγόνατε) emphasizes the deterioration that had occurred in their level of spiritual maturity.

### The Milk and Meat Metaphor (5:12–14)

In order to illustrate and emphasize the spiritual immaturity of his readers, the writer employs a metaphor contrasting an infant diet of milk with an adult diet of solid food. Paul employed the same metaphor when he accused the Corinthians of being worldly in their thinking:

Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly—mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men? (1 Cor. 3:1–3; cf. 1 Pet. 2:2).

In our text, the writer does not lament the worldly values of his readers, but their lack of spiritual maturity in general and specifically their slothfulness in respect to spiritual growth. Evidence of their spiritual immaturity lay in the fact that, while sufficient time had elapsed (διὰ τὸν χρόνον) that they should have been skilled teachers of the truth, they were still dependent upon others to teach them the foundational principles of Christianity. They were without excuse.

- They had been milk-fed and trained to feed themselves;
- They showed spiritual initiative indicating their ability and willingness to grow;
- Enough time had passed that they should have demonstrated signs of maturity, such as having a working knowledge of the Scriptures that would allow them to teach and train others effectively.

Yet, despite these facts, they had failed to thrive and now had regressed to the point that they were again dependent upon others to teach them even the foundational principles of God's Word.

By employing this metaphor, the writer says two things about the readers regarding immaturity that help us understand signs of spiritual immaturity in general. First, the readers were limited in their understanding of Scripture and their ability to digest any but the simplest and most obvious of truths. This thought is evident in our text—the writer laments the fact that, although he had much more to say regarding Jesus' priesthood and its relationship to Melchizedek, he was unable to do so because of his audience's inability to digest such heavy instruction. The reason for a lack of ability to digest weightier truths can be either (1) a lack of proper instruction and nourishment or (2) a lack of desire and initiative to progress. The latter was the case with the read-



ers in our text-- they had already received adequate instruction and at one time had shown the promise of growth, but slothfulness had ensued; and as time passed, their perpetual immaturity became evident. The writer says, "Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness" (v. 13). Second, the readers were unable to feed themselves. While they should have been able to feed both themselves and others, they were still dependent upon others to provide spiritual nourishment. "You need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again" (v. 12).

In contrast, those who are mature possess the ability and initiative to acquire spiritual nourishment for themselves.<sup>3</sup> The writer says, "But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil" (v. 14). Those who are mature are able to receive and digest solid food (i.e., to understand more complex and obscure teaching) and are able to feed themselves (i.e., to discover and apply truth without the aid of others). They are not dependent upon others to spoon feed them spiritual truth. Once a person has acquired the ability to feed himself and has the desire to do so, growth and health are natural and ongoing, independent of circumstances.<sup>4</sup>

Those who are mature are described as having arrived at this state through consistent, diligent effort—they have trained themselves "by constant use" (διὰ τὴν ἔξιν). Spiritual maturity does not come through ethereal experiences or a brief burst of spiritual devotion. The phrase, used only here, suggests consistent, habitual training. Those who have been properly nurtured are expected to apply due initiative and discipline to continue their growth process and thus bring themselves to maturity.<sup>5</sup>

In sum, we glean two fundamental truths of Christianity from these verses: (1) newborn Christians cannot be expected to provide for themselves; mature Christians have the responsibility to feed and nurture new converts to a point where they can feed and nourish themselves; (2) having been properly nurtured and trained, Christians have the responsibility to provide for their

<sup>3</sup> As an editorial comment, from this passage we see the importance of training Christians to nourish themselves and confirm their initiative to do so before leaving them to themselves. This is also implied in the Great Commission, "teaching them to observe all those things I have commanded you."

<sup>4</sup> Nurturing requires more than merely teaching new converts the first principles of Christianity. They must be taught how to feed themselves and be instilled with a desire to do so.

<sup>5</sup> Of course, the writer does not intend to imply that those on the road to maturity, or even those who have reached maturity, no longer receive nurture and guidance from other Christians. He merely emphasizes that there is a point at which, having received proper nourishment, the responsibility for continued growth falls to the individual himself.

own continued spiritual growth and, ultimately, be able to assist and nurture others. Christianity is a natural growth process in which one begins as a spiritual babe dependent upon others but grows to spiritual maturity (τέλειος) and personal responsibility. Many New Testament passages convey this same principle.

Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ (Eph. 4:14–15; cf. 1 Pet. 2:2; 1 Cor. 3:1–3; 13:10; 14:20; 2 Cor. 3:18; Phil. 3:15; Col. 1:28).

### The Elementary Truths of God's Word (5:12)

The writer's audience needed to receive again the milk of the Word, which he identifies as the "elementary truths of God's Word." The Greek word στοιχεῖα is used six times in the New Testament (Gal. 4:3, 9; Col. 2:8; Heb. 5:12; 2 Pet. 3:10, 12) and means, "elements (of learning), fundamental principles or even letters of the alphabet; elemental elements, the basic elements" (Arndt, Bauer, Gingrich). The analogy perhaps is of school-aged children who have learned the alphabet, began to learn to read, and then dropped out of school and left off their studies. With their lack of practice, they now need to go back to relearn the alphabet all over again. The readers, because of their slothfulness, had regressed to the point that they were not able to feed themselves because they did not have a proper grasp even of the very basic elements, the foundational building-blocks upon which all else is built.

What the readers had been taught, but had forgotten and needed to be re-taught, were the basic elements of God's Word (τὰ στοιχεῖα τῆς ἀρχῆς τῶν λόγιων τοῦ θεοῦ), literally "the basic elements of the beginning of the words [oracles] of God."<sup>6</sup> The "beginning of the oracles of God" sounds like a possible reference to the Old Testament Scriptures, for this was certainly the beginning of God's revelatory oracles. If this is the case, then the writer is lamenting the fact that His readers had but a shallow understanding of the Old Testament Scriptures that would not allow them to understand the prophecies concerning the Messiah and the nature of His kingdom. This lack of understanding would cause them to fail to appreciate the purpose of the Old Covenant and the superiority of the New Covenant.

<sup>6</sup> The phrase "oracles of God" is used two other times in the New Testament, once in reference to the Old Testament Scriptures (Rom. 3:2) and once in a neutral reference that would certainly include the New Testament Scriptures (1 Pet. 4:11).

Others would argue that, since the readers are Christians and the context involves their immaturity in Christ, the basic elements mentioned here must be the first principles of the New Covenant, specifically of the Messiah and the nature of His kingdom as revealed in the New Testament Scriptures. The readers were Jews who understood the Old Testament well and were considering a reversion to its authority--the problem was not their lack of understanding of the Old Covenant, but their lack of understanding of the New Covenant.

Either interpretation is viable and contextually sound, fitting both the immediate context and the broader context of the book of Hebrews in general. Further, whether these first principles are Old Covenant principles relative to the Messiah or New Covenant principles relative to the Messiah may be rather inconsequential when compared to the overall import of the passage. A person's final conclusion on the meaning of this phrase will depend upon one's interpretation and application of 6:1–2, as the two seem to be intrinsically tied.

### **Exhortation to Maturity (6:1–3)**

Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. And God permitting, we will do so.

#### **Let Us Leave the Elementary Teachings... (6:1a)**

In 5:12, the writer accuses his readers of needing to be retaught "the basic elements of the beginning of the oracles [logos] of God." In 6:1, the writer encourages his readers to leave "the message [logos] of the beginning of Christ." The Greek construction of these clauses is similar, and most writers conclude that the author's reference is the same in each:

τὰ στοιχεῖα τῆς ἀρχῆς τῶν λογίων τοῦ θεοῦ (5:12);  
τὸν τῆς ἀρχῆς τοῦ Χριστοῦ λόγον (6:1).

Wuest argues that the phrase in 6:1 cannot mean "the message concerning the beginning of Christ," for Christ has no beginning. He maintains that the phrase τῆς ἀρχῆς probably modifies τὸν λόγον...i.e., "the beginning message concerning [objective genitive] the Christ."

The writer enjoins his readers to pursue a course that would lead them to maturity (τελειότης) requiring them to leave behind the beginning oracles of the Christ - they are to leave behind certain things in order to pursue other things.

"Leaving" (ἀφέντες)<sup>7</sup> in the aorist tense suggests the act of "leaving" must occur before one can "go on toward maturity." However, the word does not necessarily suggest that one leaves these foundational principles never to use them again. Indeed, the context would argue against such an idea. The writer speaks of "basic elements," or "ABCs," of God's Word (5:12), calling to mind an educational process. However, when one leaves behind the principles learned in the first grade in order to advance to a higher level of education, he does not throw away the principles learned in the first grade—he uses them as building blocks for further learning. Nevertheless, he must leave behind the continuous relearning of first grade principles before he can advance. The writer also encourages his readers to move forward, not laying again the foundation (θεμέλιος, 6:1), calling to mind a building process. However, when one leaves behind the building of the foundation in order to erect a superstructure, he does not tear up the foundation and throw it away—the foundation becomes the necessary support for the entire structure. Nevertheless, he must leave the continuous building of the foundation before he can erect the superstructure.

Therefore, the writer's encouragement to "leave behind" certain principles does not mean that the principles were to be discarded or go unused; rather, they were to leave behind the constant relearning and revisiting of these basic and foundational principles—having learned thoroughly these basic principles, they were to advance to other areas of learning and growth (e.g., the university English major uses his knowledge of the alphabet, but does not spend time periodically restudying the letters of the alphabet—he has progressed beyond this first grade exercise). In a sense, the readers were to leave behind their state of immaturity so they could progress to maturity.

Note that the writer does not suggest that these basic principles would not need to be taught to new converts. He is not telling them to completely abandon these principles to the extent that they stop teaching them to others; evangelism is not the context. The writer addresses only the needs of his readers—they had already learned these first principles several times, and so for them the time had long since come to advance in their growth.

Finally, note that the foregoing interpretation applies even one concludes that the basic elements are Old Testament principles concerning the Messiah and His kingdom. In this case, the writer is not encouraging his readers to

<sup>7</sup> Aorist active participle of ἀφίημι. The aorist participle does not suggest that the readers had already left behind these foundational principles, but that the "leaving" would occur before the "going onward." The word means, "to leave behind, to go away, to set aside, to forgive (in connection with sin)." "

abandon the Old Testament teachings concerning Jesus. These great Old Testament truths would continue to be plumbed and taught, especially for the benefit of Jewish converts and prospective converts. The basic elements, whether Old Testament or New Testament, formed the foundation upon which the faith of these Jewish Christians was built. But having built (and rebuilt) the foundation, the readers now needed to go forward toward maturity.

### [Let Us Go On], Not Laying Again the Foundation of... (6:1b–3)

Employing another metaphor, the writer encourages his readers to leave off (ἀφίημι) laying the foundation (θεμέλιος)<sup>8</sup> and, by implication, to begin erecting the superstructure. Contextually, the “foundation” is equivalent to “the basic elements of the beginning of the oracles [logos] of God” (5:12) and “the message [logos] of the beginning of Christ” (6:1).

In describing the foundation his readers are to “leave off” laying, the writer employs three pairs of qualitative genitives: repentance from dead works and faith toward God (6:1), instruction about washings and the laying on of hands (6:2a), and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment (6:2b).<sup>9</sup> By calling these doctrines “foundational,” the writer indicates that these teachings formed a basis for his readers’ faith.

**Repentance from acts that lead to death [dead works].** This expression is unique in the Scriptures—nowhere else do the Scriptures speak of repenting “from” something. The nearest expression also occurs in Hebrews: “How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death [dead works]” (9:14).

“Dead works” (ἀπὸ νεκρῶν ἔργων) could either be a reference to works that are ineffectual in leading one to spiritual life (i.e., a system of salvation by works such as the Law of Moses, Rom. 9:32; Gal. 2:16) or to works of unrighteousness that lead the soul to eternal death (cf. Gal. 5:19–21; Rev. 21:8).

<sup>8</sup> This Greek word is used sixteen times in the New Testament, usually in reference to a spiritual foundation—a foundation giving stability to a Christian and upon which to build (Lk. 6:48–49, Heb. 6:1), the foundation of the church consisting of Jesus, His apostles, and the prophets (1 Cor. 3:10–12, Eph. 2:20), the foundation of the heavenly abode (Heb. 11:10, Rev. 21:14, 19), and the foundation of surety of the promised reward for the faithful (1 Tim. 6:19, 2 Tim. 2:19).

<sup>9</sup> Robertson (*Word Pictures*) maintains that, technically, perhaps only the first two genitives modify θεμέλιος, and the other four modify διδασκῆν (in apposition to θεμέλιον). He bases this argument on the Codex Vaticanus (B) Metzger, Aland, et al. (*A Textual Commentary*) prefer διδασκῆς as a genitive modifying θεμέλιον, the accepted reading in the USB and Nestle texts.

By the former interpretation, the writer declares that one of the foundational doctrines of Christianity, at least for Jewish Christians, was that justification could not come by the Law of Moses-- thus the need for Jesus' sacrifice. By the latter interpretation, the writer declares that one of the foundational doctrines of Christianity is repentance of acts of immorality.

**Faith in [toward] God.** This Greek construction also is unique in the Scriptures (πίστεως ἐπὶ Θεόν).<sup>10</sup> If the writer is referring to foundational principles of the Old Covenant that led Jewish Christians to have faith in Jesus, then "faith toward God" probably refers to faith in God's promises and prophecies regarding the Messiah and His kingdom. If the writer is referring to the foundational principles of the New Covenant, then "faith toward God" refers to the basic principle that becoming a follower of Christ requires an unwavering trust that God, through Jesus' sacrifice, is able and willing to do all that He has promised to do for the Christian. The writer would later say, "And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him" (11:6).

**Instructions about baptisms.** The word "baptisms" appears in the plural only two other times in the New Testament: once where it refers to the washings of cups and pitchers (Mk. 7:4), and once where it refers to the ceremonial washings under the Old Covenant (Heb. 9:10). The word can be translated either "baptisms" (NIV, KJV) or "washings" (NASB). If the writer is referring to the foundational principles of the Old Covenant, then "washings" would be the appropriate translation-- these washings looked forward to the spiritual cleansing that would be available only through the blood sacrifice of the Christ. If the writer is referring to the foundational principles of the New Covenant, then "baptisms" would be the appropriate translation.

Those who would argue that the term "baptisms" refers to Old Testament washings would point out that the Greek word used is βαπτισμός; the word normally used for New Testament baptism is βάπτισμα. The latter term is used in reference to the baptism of John and Christian baptism. The former term is used only four times in the New Testament—Mark 7:4, Colossians 2:12, Hebrews 6:2, Hebrews 9:10. In two of these passages, Mark 7:4 and Hebrews 9:10, the term refers to Old Testament washings. The textual evidence for Colossians 2:12 is questionable with as much evidence for βάπτισμα as for βαπτισμός. Therefore, some argue that the term βαπτισμός, though occurring legitimately only three times in the New Testament, always refers to Old Testament washings.

<sup>10</sup> The preposition ἐπὶ is only used two other times with Θεός as the object (Acts 14:15, to turn toward God; 1 Tim. 5:5, to have hope toward God).

However, the use of **βαπτισμός** can be explained if the writer is referring to multiple baptisms. Although Paul emphatically states there is only one baptism (Eph. 4:5), the Jewish readers receiving this letter would have been familiar with several baptisms—various washings under the Old Covenant, proselyte baptism, John's baptism, the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and Christian baptism. Understanding the nature and purpose of each of these baptisms would be a foundational principle for Jewish Christians of the first century.

**Laying on of hands.** This phrase in its various grammatical constructions occurs roughly thirty-five times in the Old Testament usually in reference to priests' laying their hands on the heads of animals as a sign that they were being set apart as a sacrifice to the Lord (cf. Ex. 29:10–24; Lev. 1:4; 3:1–14; 4:1–35; 14:12–32) or to the appointment of an individual to a position of responsibility (Num. 8:10–12; 17:18). The phrase occurs roughly twenty-five times in the New Testament in connection with the working of miracles (Mt. 9:18; Mk. 6:5; 7:32; 8:23; Acts 9:12; 28:8), the conveyance of a miraculous spiritual gift (Acts 8:18–19; 9:17; 19:6; 1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6), or the appointing of men to offices of responsibility (Acts 6:6; 13:3; 1 Tim. 5:22). If the writer is referring to the foundational principles of the Old Covenant, then the "laying on of hands" refers to the action of priests in setting apart animals for sacrifice, these pointing forward to Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. If the writer is referring to the foundational principles of the New Covenant, then the "laying on of hands" refers to the means by which miraculous gifts were conveyed by the apostles' hands and perhaps to the ordination of men to specific offices and responsibilities.

**Resurrection of the dead.** The Old Testament never uses this particular word to speak explicitly of the resurrection of the dead, although the resurrection and judgment are presented in one of Daniel's prophecies (12:1–4) and implied in statements made by David and Job (2 Sam. 12:23; Job 14:1–4).<sup>11</sup> In contrast, the New Testament speaks often concerning the resurrection of the dead, explicitly more than fifty times, implicitly more than one hundred times. If the writer is referring to the foundational principles of the Old Covenant, the reference could be to Daniel's prophecy; however, writers of this leaning sometimes take the position that the resurrection here is not a reference to dead people, but to the Mosaic system in general which was ineffectual in redeeming man and led to spiritual death. If the writer is referring to the foundational principles of the New Covenant, the "resurrection of the dead"

<sup>11</sup> Though life beyond the grave is implied in several passages, a bodily resurrection is only mentioned in Dan. 12:1–4. In the first century, many Jews questioned these issues, including the Sadducees.

refers to the general resurrection when all will arise from the grave bodily and God's people will be identified and rewarded.

**Eternal judgment.** This is the only time the phrase "eternal judgment" (*κρίματος αἰωνίου*) occurs in Scripture; however, the principle is taught in the Old Testament (Dan. 12:1–4) and throughout the New Testament (Mt. 25:31–46; Rev. 20:11–15; 2 Thess. 1:9, et al.). If the writer is referring to the foundational principles of the Old Covenant, the reference could be to Daniel's prophecy; however, writers of this leaning sometimes take the position that the eternal judgment here is a reference to the fact that the sacrifices of bulls and goats could not bring true forgiveness of sins, leaving those who depended upon such sacrifices in danger of eternal judgment. If the writer is referring to the foundational principles of the New Covenant, "eternal judgment" refers to the time when all will stand before the judgment seat of Christ to be judged and assigned to an eternal abode.

### Summary of 6:1–3

One interpretation of these verses, and specifically these foundational truths, is that the reference is to the Old Covenant. However, we should note that the readers were not immature in their understanding of the foundational principles of the Old Covenant—they knew the Old Covenant well and were desirous to return to it. Therefore, if one takes the position that these are foundational principles of the Old Covenant, they are those foundational principles that spoke to or prefigured the coming of the Messiah. One could, perhaps, argue that the reason these Jews were in danger of falling away from Christ was because of their failure to understand the basic principles of the Old Covenant that pointed forward to the coming of a Messiah and a new kingdom. If they had understood these principles, and the fact that Jesus was the Messiah, then they surely would not have desired to return to that old, ineffectual system.

The weakness of this position lies especially in explaining the last two principles, viz., the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment. The Old Covenant proper contains nothing regarding these principles; and the prophets, though alluding to them, certainly do not elucidate these concepts or speak to them within the clear context of the coming Messiah. Further, it seems to be an imaginative stretch to understand the "resurrection of the dead" as the resurrection of the Mosaic system of sacrifice and "eternal judgment" as the judgment that would come upon those who depended upon the sacrifices of the Old Covenant for justification. Therefore, it is difficult to understand how these were "basic" or "foundational" elements of the Old Covenant, especially in relation to the Messiah and His kingdom.



The second possible interpretation is that the writer is encouraging his readers to progress from their basic and foundational understanding of the New Covenant, including its relationship to the Old Covenant, to a greater understanding of spiritual truth. This greater understanding would help protect them from temptations to return to Judaism. The six principles listed in 6:1b–2, whether Old Testament or New Testament, were foundational to first-century Jewish Christians.<sup>12</sup>

Maturity and growth involve human responsibility and God's sovereignty. "This we shall do, if God permits" (6:3). With God providing the time and opportunity, the writer expresses his confidence that his readers will be able to move forward from immaturity to maturity. However, if the readers were to refuse to move forward, they would be in danger of falling away, at which point it would be impossible for them to be renewed to repentance (6:4–6).

### **The Fate of those Who Would Fall Away (6:4–8)**

It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace. Land that drinks in the rain often falling on it and that produces a crop useful to those for whom it is farmed receives the blessing of God. But land that produces thorns and thistles is worthless and is in danger of being cursed. In the end it will be burned.

In these five verses, among the most disputed of the New Testament, the writer outlines the fate of those who failed to mature in the faith and who, ultimately, would fall away—it would be impossible to renew to repentance these apostates. The passage may be a warning of what would become a reality if these readers never matured and eventually fell away from the faith, or it may be reminding the readers of the fate of those who had already fallen away from the faith.

Over the years, there have been four basic theories that have governed the interpretation of these verses.

<sup>12</sup> Some of these principles are perhaps not quite as foundational for modern Christians as for Christians of the first century. For example, the doctrine of baptisms (pl.) and the laying on of hands would have been basic elements to the first-century Jewish Christian, while they are important topics for Christians to understand today, they might not be regarded as elementary teachings for every new convert.

- **Professors, But Not Possessors Theory**—These individuals were not really saved Christians, but were individuals on the road to salvation and who had merely professed a faith in Jesus, but did not yet possess a saving faith. They could not lose their salvation, for they never possessed salvation.
- **Hypothetical Apostasy Theory**—These individuals were saved Christians and the writer warns them what could happen IF they were to fall away (which was impossible, since they had already been saved and therefore could not do anything so as to lose their salvation).
- **Disqualification of Rewards Theory**—These individuals were Christians who were in danger of falling away from the faith. In doing so, they would be forfeiting certain blessings and rewards that go to those who finish the race and remain faithful, but they would not be forfeiting their salvation.
- **Loss of Salvation Theory**—Individuals who become Christians and later turn their backs on Christianity can, and do, lose their salvation.

The first three of these theories have been crafted and proposed by Calvinists who do not believe it is possible for a Christian to lose his salvation—"once saved, always saved." When one begins with the presupposition that a Christian cannot lose his salvation, naturally it affects one's interpretation of many passages of Scripture, especially those passages that clearly teach that one can indeed sin so as to be lost (cf. Acts 8:20–23; 1 Cor. 10:6–12; 2 Cor. 5:10; Gal. 5:4; Heb. 6:1–6; 10:26–31; 2 Pet. 2:20–22; Rev. 2:4–5, et al.). For the purposes of this study, we will not discuss these theories that seek to deny the clear language of the text.

The passage clearly teaches that one, having once been saved, can turn his back on Christ and thus lose his salvation. The larger concern of this study is the writer's statement that, concerning these individuals, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance. What does this mean? How can one make a decision that would yield the impossibility of repentance? Does this passage teach a theory of "once lost, always lost"? We will consider an exposition of these verses and in so doing attempt to answer these questions.

### The Grammatical Construction of 6:4–6

The causal conjunction γάρ ("for") in 6:4 connects the previous section on moving toward maturity with the following warning about the alternative to progress.

The sentence begins with the impersonal verb ἀδύνατον, which necessitates an accusative-infinitive construction. The accusative is τοὺς ("them") and the infinitive is ἀνακαλνίξαι ("to renew"). The individuals are described by five aorist participles in the accusative case modifying τοὺς. The

use of the single article indicates that only one group of individuals is in view. The individuals are described as follows:

- **ἀπαξ φωτισθέντας** ("having once been enlightened," 6:4a)
- **γευσάμενους τε τῆς δωρεᾶς τῆς ἐπουρανίου** ("having tasted for themselves of the heavenly gift," 6:4b)
- **μετόχους γεννηθέντας πνεύματος ἁγίου** ("having been made partakers of the Holy Spirit," 6:4c)
- **καλὸν γευσάμενους θεοῦ ῥῆμα δυνάμεις τε μέλλοντος αἰῶνος** ("having tasted for themselves the good word of God and the power of the age to come," 6:5)
- **καὶ παραπεσόντας** ("and having fallen away," 6:6a).

The fact that the final participle (**παραπεσόντας**) is in the aorist tense, the same tense as the other four participles, shows that the falling away takes place while the individuals are still in the state of enlightenment and enjoying the many wonderful blessings and proofs of God's goodness.

### **They Have Enjoyed God's Spiritual Blessings (6:4–5)**

In an effort to emphasize that joy of salvation found in Christ, the writer describes that salvation and its accompanying blessings in four participial phrases.

**Enlightenment** refers to the mind or conscience being illuminated as a result of instruction. It is thus used in Hebrews 5:12 and 10:32 (cf. 13:7). Therefore, the readers had been instructed sufficiently so as to have their minds and lives changed by the truth. Significant here is the word **ἀπαξ** ("once"). This word suggests that something has happened once and for all, not needing to be repeated. The word certainly prohibits someone from saying their enlightenment was incomplete or insufficient so as to result in conversion. Their enlightenment came when they first became Christians. At that time they were translated from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of God's dear Son (Col. 1:13). The concept of enlightenment is common in the Scriptures and describes a state of salvation.

But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God (Jn. 3:21).

I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life (Jn. 8:12).

I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness (Jn. 12:46).

Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen of me and what I will show you. I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me (Acts 26:16–18).

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (Eph. 5:8).

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light (1 Pet. 2:9).

**Tasted the heavenly gift.** This does not suggest a light nibble, as some have suggested.<sup>13</sup> However, the same word is used in Hebrews 2:9, where the writer says that Jesus “tasted death for every man.” The word is used figuratively seven times in the New Testament (Mt. 16:28; Mk. 9:1, 27; Jn. 8:52; Heb. 2:9; 6:4, 5) and always means, “to partake of, to experience fully.” The individuals described had tasted the heavenly gift, i.e., the gift that has come from heaven. The gift could be a reference to Jesus Himself as the gift of God (Jn. 3:16; 4:10; Rom. 8:32) or to the salvation that comes through Him (Rom. 6:23; Tit. 2:11; 1 Pet. 1:3–4).

**Shared in the Holy Spirit.** The word for “shared” (μέτοχος) is used in the New Testament to convey the idea of fellowship, partnership, and sharing (Lk. 5:7; 2 Cor. 6:14; Heb. 1:9; 3:1, 14; 6:4, 12:8). In our text, the individuals are said to have shared in the Holy Spirit. The reference is probably to the unique work of the Spirit during the first century—it could suggest that the individuals had personally received miraculous gifts through the apostles or merely that they had witnessed the power of the Spirit and had participated in the Christian ministry. Some would argue that the reference is to a personal but non-miraculous measure of the Spirit given to all believers. Regardless of the exact reference, the meaning is clear—the individuals had enjoyed the blessings of salvation relative to the work of the Holy Spirit.

**Tasted the Powers of the Age to Come.** This phrase probably refers to the signs, wonders, various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit (cf. 2:4) that were unique to the apostolic age. Miracles were powerful proof of the Messiah and His kingdom and pointed forward to the time when, by His power, God would award His people a heavenly home. These individuals had experienced

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<sup>13</sup> A Calvinist argument suggesting the individuals depicted were never really saved and, therefore, could not lose their salvation.

the divine powers that were but a deposit guaranteeing the wonders of the coming age, i.e., the eternal age (cf. Mt. 12:32; Eph. 1:21).

**If [And] They Fall Away.** The conjunctive καί, which introduces the participle and usually means “and,” has an adversative force here, meaning “and yet” (Robertson, *Grammar*, pp. 1182–1183). In other words, the writer says, “These individuals are in the midst of enjoying all these divine blessings; and yet, in spite of all this, they have still fallen away.”

In the Septuagint, the verb παραπίπτω generally had a moral sense of “to sin against God”; it is also used in reference to fail or omit (cf. Est. 6:10). Ezekiel uses the word to depict Israel’s unfaithfulness to Yahweh (14:13; 15:8; 18:24; 20:27). It seems to have a similar meaning in Hebrews 6:6—the individuals depicted, having experienced God’s blessings, turn away from the Lord and the covenant they had made with Him.

The sin described is real and capable of being committed (perhaps had been committed), or else the passage is meaningless. It would be impossible for believers to fall away from a faith they never had just as it would have been impossible for Esau to trade away a birthright he never possessed (Heb. 12:16–17). However, it should be noted that the writer does not accuse his readers of having fallen away; rather, he warns them that those who experience God’s goodness, only later to spurn it, will find themselves in a state of spiritual disaster. Indeed, he is confident that his readers will respond positively to his letter and thus avoid spiritual disaster. He says:

Even though we speak like this, dear friends, *we are confident of better things in your case—things that accompany salvation.* God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them. We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure. We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised (6:9–12).

### It Is Impossible...to Renew Them Again to Repentance (6:6)

This phrase leads many Calvinists (who maintain a doctrine of “once saved, always saved”) to argue that the individuals under consideration were never really saved. In response, they state that the alternative is to adopt a position of “once lost, always lost,” for the writer declares that those who fall away can never achieve repentance.<sup>14</sup> Among those who maintain the scrip-

<sup>14</sup> This is a serious charge and one that must be addressed. However, it should be noted that Calvinists *do* maintain a doctrine of “once lost, always lost,” for they believe that all those

tural belief that one's salvation is dependent upon his ongoing willingness to submit to God's will, several views have arisen in an attempt to interpret the writer's meaning in this difficult statement. Following are the four most common views.

- The word "impossible" (**ἀδύνατος**), in this context, means "very difficult" or "virtually impossible." Although Bible writers use hyperbole on occasion, there is no evidence of it here. The other occurrences of the word "impossible" in Hebrews and in the New Testament do not leave room for a meaning of "very difficult" (cf. 6:8; 10:14; 11:6).
- It is impossible only as long as the individuals remain in a state of falling away. The present, active participles **ἀνασταυρῶντας** and **παρδειγματίζοντας** show that the "crucifying" and "disgracing" occur while, and as long as, renewal is impossible; therefore, should the individuals cease "crucifying" and "disgracing," renewal would no longer be impossible. However, this interpretation requires one to read into the text more than is clearly evident or necessarily implied—there is no clear evidence to suggest the writer intended this meaning. Without further clarification, the natural understanding of the text is that it is impossible to renew to repentance those who have fallen away since, or because, in falling away they are, in fact, crucifying Jesus afresh and putting Him to public disgrace. Bruce points out that the participles are either concessive ("since...") or causal ("because...") rather than temporal ("while...").
- It is impossible because these individuals have committed the sin of blasphemy against the Spirit, a sin that cannot be forgiven (Mk. 3:28–29). They had received (or at least witnessed) the miraculous powers of the Holy Spirit and now had turned away, thereby denying the power of the Spirit.
- It is impossible because God has given up on them. The Scriptures certainly teach that individuals can reject the truth for so long and harden their hearts against the truth to the extent that God gives them over to their own folly (cf. Acts 14:16; Rom. 1:24–28; Eph. 4:17–19; 2 Thess. 2:10–12). God wants everyone to be saved (Tit. 2:11; 2 Pet. 3:9); however, when people insist on giving up on God, God will accommodate their desire by giving up on them. This would be a viable interpretation of the phrase.

However, there is another view that seems to fit the text and the context better. Commentators generally interpret this passage to mean that those who fall away cannot be renewed to repentance, i.e., that the opportunity for repentance is no longer available to them. However, this is not what the text says. The present infinitive **ἀνακαλῖζειν** is active, not passive; i.e., the text says

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who are predestined by God to salvation will be saved and all those predestined by God to be lost will be lost

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that it is impossible for *someone else* [unnamed, but implied in the text] to renew them to repentance, not that it is impossible for them to be renewed to repentance.

This interpretation not only fits the text, but also the context. The writer emphasizes the fact that these would-be backsliders have experienced and enjoyed all the blessings of Christianity: they have received the Word of God and have been enlightened; they have witnessed (and perhaps even possessed) the miraculous signs of the Holy Spirit; they have been taught how Christ was the fulfillment of the Old Covenant law and prophecies; they understand that there will be a resurrection and a judgment with eternal consequences; they understand the concepts of faith, repentance, and baptism for the remission of sins. When an individual with this understanding and these experiences falls away from Christ, how can someone renew him to repentance? What can they say that the fallen one does not already know and has not already experienced firsthand? The one who has grown to this point and has experienced the joys of salvation, and then forsakes Christ, does so with mind and eyes wide-open. If such an individual repents, it will not be because someone has said anything to stir repentance within him; it will be because he has come to his senses and rationally accepts once again the things he already knows to be true.

We should note that the individuals described in Hebrews 6 were not merely rejecting a portion of God's Word or twisting a passage. They were not merely digressive in their worship or immoral in their behavior. They were not merely leaving the church in favor of a religious sect that taught or practiced something slightly different in respect to Christianity. Rather, these individuals were leaving Christ and everything relative to Christianity.

Therefore, we should not compare these individuals to those who have digressed or apostatized to various sects of Christianity—there may still be ways to influence and renew repentance in these individuals, for they still maintain a faith in Christ and God's Word. Nor should we compare these individuals to those who are weak in the faith or who have been overtaken in a fault (cf. Gal. 6:1)—there may still be ways to influence and renew repentance in these individuals, for they still maintain a faith in Christ and God's Word (or at least have not totally rejected Christ). But when an individual who knows the truth and truly has experienced the joys of salvation totally and completely rejects Christ as the Messiah and everything said about Him in the Scriptures, it is impossible to say or do anything so as to renew repentance in him. This is especially so if he has moved on to a different religion, as would be the case with the individuals in our text. We might compare the individuals of our text with those who would leave Christ in favor of Judaism, Buddhism, Taoism,

Muslimism, or some other religion that denies the deity and Messiahship of Jesus and adopts a standard in religion separate from the New Covenant.

### **The Parable (6:7–8)**

The main idea is fruitfulness or fruitlessness in response to blessing. The point seems to be that just as God expects fruit from the land that has received rain. He also expects spiritual fruit and growth from those who have received His spiritual blessings. Contextually, the readers had experienced and absorbed all of the wonderful blessings available to Christians of the first century (6:4–5); yet, to this point, they had not responded by growing into fruitful, spiritual adults. If they did not alter their course, they were destined to suffer eternal loss under the judgment of God.

### **The Author's Confidence in His Readers (6:9–12)**

Even though we speak like this, dear friends, we are confident of better things in your case—things that accompany salvation. God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them. We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure. We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.

This passage shows that the readers had not yet rejected Jesus in favor of the Old Covenant system. The writer was convinced that, with God's blessing, his readers would be able to progress to spiritual maturity and thus avoid the spiritual disaster described in 6:4–6. In order for this to happen, the readers would have to exercise due diligence and eschew spiritual slothfulness. This passage also shows that the readers had it within their power to avoid apostasy and to insure their own spiritual maturity within the scope of God's sovereign will. 5703 Melstone Dr., Arlington, TX 76016; [jimcrouch@email.com](mailto:jimcrouch@email.com)



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# Congregational Autonomy

*by Bennie Cryer*

Most of us have always believed in congregational autonomy. Some of us may not know why, except in a general sense, but we have believed in it and generally have practiced it over the years. In my research, I have found that some have misunderstood the subject of autonomy and others have abused it.

**Question #1.** Does it violate church autonomy when a congregation supports an evangelist who is working at a different congregation and he answers to the supporting congregation instead of the one where he is working?

I believe the Scriptures teach that when a congregation sends an evangelist and supports him in another area to start a congregation or to set in order an existing congregation, the evangelist should answer to the sending and supporting congregation. He also has a responsibility to the congregation where he is working to keep their autonomy intact and separate from the autonomy of the sending and supporting congregation. If the sending congregation, the receiving congregation, and the evangelist all keep their work in a proper and scriptural atmosphere, the autonomy of the second congregation is not violated. In Acts 11:22-26, the church in Jerusalem sent Barnabas to Antioch to work with them. There is no indication that the autonomy of Antioch was violated in any way. If Barnabas had preached doctrine contrary to the laws of Christ or was guilty of misconduct, the church at Antioch could have tried to convince him of his errors. If that had failed, they then could have notified the church in Jerusalem that the man they had sent was in error. Then the Jerusalem church could deal with him, not because Jerusalem was "the mother church," but because Barnabas had come from this church, his home church. We know this from what happened in Acts 15.

And certain men which came down from Judea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved. When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question (Acts 15:1-2).

These teachers from Judea (of which Jerusalem was a part) had come to Antioch and had taught doctrine contrary to the doctrine Barnabas and Paul had been teaching. Paul knew he had been teaching the truth on the subject of circumcision. It was like his statement in Galatians 1:16 when he said, "...immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood..." Back at his conver-

sion, he began to preach Jesus, not because some man told him what to believe and preach, but because he had received his message by revelation. He wrote in Galatians 1:12, "For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ." In fact, this was so true that he could write in Galatians 2:6, "...for they who seemed to be somewhat in conference added nothing to me." Therefore, Paul did not need to go up to Jerusalem to learn whether he was right or wrong in disputing the doctrine the false teachers from Jerusalem brought. He knew he was right. He did not go to Jerusalem thinking that they comprised "the mother church." If they had not handled it in a scriptural way, he would have disputed with them, as he did with the false teachers who came from there. He did not go there to learn additional truths. If he did, he went away disappointed because they added nothing to him. The Holy Spirit was guiding Paul into all truth just as He was guiding the other apostles (Jn. 16:13). Why did the church in Antioch send Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem to see about this question? In effect, Paul was saying to the apostles and elders of the church in Jerusalem, "These men came to Antioch and taught false doctrine. We withstood them to their face. They would not listen to the truths we taught them. They came from you. They are members here in Jerusalem. What are you going to do about your members teaching these things?" We know these statements are at least a part of what they said because when Jerusalem wrote a letter to straighten out the matter, they began it by saying, "Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no such commandment" (Acts 15:24). In this way, they corrected the errors that some of their members were teaching in other places. Paul already had the truth before he went to Jerusalem.

From this example in Acts 15, we only can begin to establish a principle in this context, for it is not exactly parallel to the question asked. It is not exactly parallel because Jerusalem did not send the false teachers to Antioch. They evidently had gone out on their own. However, it is not unlike the situation in the question because we do have teachers or preachers going from one congregation (Jerusalem) to another congregation (Antioch) where they taught false doctrine.

The first step Antioch took was to have Paul and Barnabas initiate "no small dissension and disputation" with them. Dissension meant they took a stand for the truth and entered into discussions with the false teachers. Disputation meant they questioned these men evidently to the point they debated with them. In other words, they were not going to let these false teachers bring their false doctrine to Antioch and get by with it. This was their first step in preserving the autonomy of the church in Antioch.

The second step was to send men to the home congregation of these false teachers and report to them about their false teaching. In other words, they turned the problem over to the church from which these false teachers had come because it was their responsibility to stop their mouths (Tit. 1:11).

Based on the actions of the church in Antioch, we can answer the part of the question that asks, "Does it violate church autonomy if an evangelist answers to the supporting congregation instead of the one where he is working?" The answer has to be "perhaps," along with an explanation. It does not have to violate church autonomy, and will not, if the sending congregation, the receiving congregation, and the evangelist all do their respective work scripturally. It is wise and scriptural for the evangelist to report to the sending congregation as Paul and Barnabas did when they returned from their evangelistic journeys (Acts 14:26-28). It would be unscriptural and unwise for the sending congregation to try to dictate to the receiving congregation through the evangelist. The receiving congregation needs to understand their autonomy and not let this happen. Like Antioch, they could send a message back to the sending congregation if there were a problem with the evangelist.

We practice this many times each year in the brotherhood without violating the principles of autonomy. A congregation may be supporting a preacher full time. In addition to this, the preacher may conduct several gospel meetings each year in other congregations across the brotherhood. When he conducts a meeting at another congregation, their autonomy is not violated (at least, it should not be). If the evangelist does something wrong, the host congregation can admonish him or send him back home at any point in the meeting. Further, they have the right to reveal to the supporting congregation the preacher's errors and expect an appropriate response back from them. The autonomy of each congregation may be protected in this way.

In Titus 1:5, we have information that will help us to establish the principle that an evangelist can work with more than one congregation and not destroy the autonomy of any one of them. Paul wrote, "For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee." It is said that Crete was noted for having one hundred cities. I do not know about that. The map in one of my Bibles lists four, so we will work with four: Fair Haven, Goreyna, Lasea, and Phoenixe. The island of Crete is about 140 miles long from east to west. Titus was assigned the unenviable task of working with all the churches on this island. He was to set them in order and ordain elders in each city.

This example is also similar to the situation contemplated in the question in that a single evangelist is sent to work with more than one congregation. (It is unlike that situation in that Paul, rather than a congregation, sent Titus

there.) In this apostolic example, it is indicated that an evangelist can work with and set in order more than one congregation at a time without eroding the autonomy of any of them. The congregation in Fair Haven operated under its own umbrella of autonomy. Lasea, eight miles into the interior, had its own umbrella of autonomy, as did Goreyna and Phoenice. Any responsibility that Titus had in Fair Haven, he left there when he went to Lasea. In other words, when he left one congregation to go to another, he left behind one autonomous situation and entered into another. In doing this, he avoided building his own diocese and ruling over it and avoided the temptation of one church becoming a "mother church."

**Question #2:** When one congregation helps start a second congregation, is there any accountability of the second congregation to the first congregation? (Mother church?)

The examples presented above help answer this question. Roy H. Lanier, Jr., in an article called "Congregational Autonomy" published in **Spiritual Sword** (July 1996, Vol. 27, No. 4), wrote:

The structure is not vertical with hierarchical ascendancy, but horizontal with congregations existing side-by-side cooperating, assisting, and encouraging one another; yet where no congregation controls or dominates another.

Jerusalem helped Antioch by sending Barnabas there (Acts 11). Earlier, they had helped Samaria where Phillip had established the cause (Acts 8). But they did not dominate them. They cooperated, assisted, and encouraged them, but they did not exercise control over them. The second congregation is the church universal in miniature, just as the congregation is that helped to establish or assist it.

**Question #3:** Do we as individuals (or as evangelists) have the right or responsibility to make suggestions to a congregation where we are neither attending nor supporting, when we feel their actions are not the best?

We have to understand that providing teaching and instruction to another congregation does not violate its autonomy. In Colossians 2:1-8, Paul warned them of false teachers, even though he was not in their presence except in spirit. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 4:16-17:

Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me. For this cause have I sent unto you Timotheus, who is my beloved son, and faithful in the Lord, who shall bring you into remembrance of my ways which be in Christ, as I teach every where in every church.

None of this violated church autonomy in Colosse or Corinth.

John received the revelation of Jesus Christ in which there were messages from Jesus to the seven churches in Asia. Though John was not with them, he delivered to them the letters from Jesus. To Ephesus, he commended them for trying false apostles and finding them to be liars (2:2). He also warned them of the consequences of leaving their first love (2:4-5). He rebuked the church in Thyatira for tolerating a false-teaching woman who was calling herself a prophetess (2:20-23), and this rebuke contained a severe warning. In the next chapter, he let the church in Sardis know that, so far as the Lord was concerned, she was dead (3:1). Furthermore, in verse 2, he included a warning that her works were not perfect before God. In providing this information to these churches, John did not violate their autonomy.

The elders in Jerusalem took part in sending to other churches a letter containing teaching regarding circumcision (Acts 15). In verse 24, they warned the brethren about false teachers. They sent men with the written letter who would explain its contents orally to them (v. 27). In verses 28-29, we find that letter declared the principles of truth. While it is true that the Spirit inspired the content of the message, it does not change the fact that these actions were taken. God does not use a wrong means to declare a right message. Everything about the context suggests the action was approved. (The preceding thoughts and examples were taken from a quote from an article written by Harry Osborne, **Watchman Magazine**, "Protecting the Local Church," November 1997.)

Thus, we see that the Scriptures recognize no legitimate or scriptural autonomy for a congregation to do what it has no authority to do. You can throw a rock into a pack of dogs; the hit dog is the one that howls and yelps. When brethren desire to practice something contrary to the Word of God and an interested member, a gospel preacher, or a journal preaches the truth to them about their error, they begin to howl and yelp. Translated, the sound that comes from them is, "You violated our congregational autonomy!" When they do this, you know they have been hit by the rock of offense (1 Pet. 2:8).

In fact, in thinking about the times the subject of autonomy has come up, it seems that when someone cries "autonomy" as their defense for what they are doing, they are doing (or want to do) something that is wrong. Brethren, we must respect the autonomy of each local congregation, but autonomy is not an excuse to practice or preach false doctrine. Autonomy is not the basis for unity and fellowship. Doctrine and unity must be based on the revelation given to the apostles and prophets. If doctrine and unity are not based on the Word of God, then we are headed toward denominationalism. As I see it, so far as this subject is concerned, there are two ways of becoming like denominations.

First, we could actually organize extra-congregational institutions where one church or institution dominates another. Second, we could teach false doctrine and practice it while hiding under the concept of autonomy. Brethren, autonomy is not a hiding place that God has given to protect congregations from the truth. It is not designed to protect congregations from warnings against error. It is designed to protect congregations from being dominated by other congregations, a district superintendent, a mother church, a bishop over many congregations, or an earthly universal head. An autonomous church can preach and practice innovations—all the others can do is warn and provide information about the error. The offending congregation does not have to listen to them. However, remember that autonomy is a two-edged sword—while it permits congregations to practice and preach whatever they desire, the other congregations, because they too are autonomous, have the right to exclude congregations from their fellowship on the basis of unscriptural practices.

**Question #4:** What happens to church autonomy when a brother who has been disfellowshipped at one congregation goes to another congregation and is fellowshiped?

When someone comes to a congregation and places membership there, those who direct the affairs of that congregation need to know what the circumstances were in the previous congregation. If he is trying to escape being disciplined or to get out from under discipline that has been scripturally administered, the leaders in the receiving congregation need to know that. If he is honest, he will be up front and tell the new congregation about it. The leaders of the new congregation should get information about the matter from the previous congregation. When false teachers came from Jerusalem to Antioch (Acts 15), Antioch tried to teach them the truth. They would not listen. Therefore, Antioch had no recourse but to go to Jerusalem to see about the matter.

The congregation that disfellowshipped the brother who has now gone to another congregation needs to provide the receiving congregation with information about the situation. Each should protect and respect the other's autonomy in this matter. Remember this, the local congregation is the highest court on earth in the kingdom of God. For this reason, Jesus said "...tell it unto the church..." in Matthew 18:17. After being told to the church, there is no appeal beyond that—the unrepentant offender is to be treated as a heathen and a publican. This is a part of the entire picture of an autonomous church.

In 1 Corinthians 5, the church was instructed how to discipline an immoral man. They followed the plan, and the plan worked. We can do no less today. In 2 Thessalonians 3:6, the church was to discipline one of their own who was

acting in an indolent way. Each congregation has this right; the right to discipline should be respected by all. Congregations can make mistakes when they discipline someone, but until there is proof that a mistake has been made, let us not be a party to allowing someone to try to hide in another congregation. One has the right to become a member of any local congregation. But if he leaves a congregation, whether he has been disciplined or not, if he cannot go back to the congregation he left and worship with them and help them out in gospel meetings and any other work they are doing, something is wrong. I would not want to face Jesus in the Day of Judgment with an attitude like that. Just because you leave a congregation and are received by another does not relieve you of your responsibility. Each congregation should watch carefully those who come into their midst from other congregations. Remember, if they were trouble in the congregation from which they came, more than likely they will be trouble in their new surroundings. Therefore, even in discipline we should respect the autonomy of the congregation that scripturally administered the discipline. If you receive such into your fellowship, you become a partaker of his sins.

Our congregations believe in congregational autonomy or self-government. Our preachers do, too. You might wonder why we need to study this subject at this time. There is a good reason for studying it. History has shown that congregations easily give up self-government in certain areas. It also shows that many preachers go along with them without thinking much about it. In the early 1940s, churches in California started "The Systematic Mission Work Program." Local congregations were to pool one-half of their contribution into a special, extra-congregational fund that was to be administered by selected brethren. Preachers were to be supported out of this fund. The preachers who were to receive support from this fund were not chosen by local congregations but at the annual Labor Day meeting by a group of brethren representing the several congregations participating in the mission work program. This was a very successful program so far as results were concerned. As new congregations were established, they were encouraged to become a part of this program. The results in California were so successful, congregations in Missouri and Oklahoma began to develop similar programs like the one on the west coast. One interesting thing about this fund was the preachers and church leaders participating in it could and did preach blistering sermons against the Missionary Society developed by the Christian Church. It seemed difficult for them to see that their fund was nothing more than a smaller version of the one developed by the Christian Church. We shall also see that churches of Christ were involved in that fund as well. I first came to California in 1948. There was still much talk about the fund, but for the most part, it had vanished and local congregations were sending support to the preachers di-



rectly. Most congregations, if not all, had abandoned the mission fund. How did this fund violate the autonomy of the local congregations participating in it? First of all, since the congregations were to give one-half of their contribution to the fund, which was to be administered by selected brethren, they lost control of one-half of their contribution before it was received by a preacher. Secondly, they did not have a say, except at the Labor Day meeting, about which preacher or preachers would be supported by the fund. They did not have a say at all if they did not send a representative to the Labor Day meeting. Thirdly, the representatives of local congregations at the Labor Day meeting constituted a group larger than a local congregation. It was extra-congregational in its nature, and it was setting policy for all of the congregations that were participating in it. Fourthly, the selected leaders who administered the fund were extra-congregational, and no example for their existence could be found in the New Testament. The funds, the administrators, the extra-congregational meeting on Labor Day, and that method of selecting preachers and paying them out of the fund, have passed into history. I remind you of these things because if we do not study mistakes in our past, we will repeat them again.

In the area of benevolence, we had easily slipped into a similar extra-congregational organization without realizing what we were doing. In World War II, we were blessed with many young men who were conscientiously opposed to participation in carnal warfare in any form. When they refused to go into one of the branches of military service, they were placed in work camps in various places in the United States. They received very little money for this. They did receive bed and board. To help them, funds were created. I know of one in California and another in Missouri. Congregations and individuals were encouraged to contribute to these funds. The conscientious objectors were paid \$15.00 each month out of this fund; and if they had a family, they were given \$30.00. The fund was administered by men who were chosen in some way for that task. It worked! The congregations and individuals felt good about being able to help someone in need. Few, if any, thought anything about the fund being an extra-congregational organization. But it was, and this was not realized until several years later. I am giving you these examples to remind you how easily we can believe in autonomy and preach it, yet slip into a practice without realizing how we have given up at least a part of it.

There is one thing I can say for our brethren. When they have seen that they have created an organization that takes away a congregation's autonomy, they have been willing to give up the organization. We are sometimes careless about what we get into blindly. This is illustrated by an example that happened in 1952 at the Sulphur Fourth of July meeting. A general business meeting was

called with brethren from all across the country invited. Their agenda was to select two preachers to conduct the Sulphur meeting in 1953. Two preachers were selected. One preacher stood up and said, "Brethren, if there is no unit of organization revealed in the New Testament larger than the local church, then what is this today?" They immediately decided they had no business there. The Sulphur meeting should belong to the Sulphur congregation with decisions made by them and no one else. The extra-congregational business meeting was dropped immediately.

Also, in the early 1950s, we sent an evangelist into foreign fields. He was sent to what is now called Malawi. At that time, the area was called Nyasaland. This was our first experience in foreign fields. Controversy immediately arose over how funds for that work should be handled. Articles were written against "The One Man Missionary Society" that seemed to have innocently been organized. Funds were being sent to the evangelist, and he would take the money and pay African preachers. One American evangelist refused to work in Africa and listed as one of his reasons the manner in which the work was being supported. To solve the problem, the evangelist in Africa provided a list of African preachers who needed support, and these were published. Congregations began sending their support directly to the African preachers, and that problem was solved. This history of the brotherhood goes back some sixty years from this time. Ronny Wade in his book, **The Sun Will Shine Again, Someday**, has given us a brief record of these examples beginning on page 152, and I have liberally borrowed much of this information about that period from his book.

This period of time does not represent the only time the church of Christ has had problems with the autonomy of local churches being usurped by extra-congregational institutions and organizations. What we call The Restoration Movement began in the latter part of the eighteenth century and the first part of the nineteenth century. Earl West in his book, **The Search for the Ancient Order**, Vol. 1, beginning on page 149 under the heading, "Early Efforts At Organization," gives us much insight into the development of organizations larger than a local congregation in the brotherhood. As early as 1831, Alexander Campbell was promoting the idea of an organization that would include a number of local congregations banding together in order that they might do the work of the church more effectively in converting the world. West observes about Campbell's viewpoint:

He believed the New Testament Church was to preach the word to convert the world. But, he believed the New Testament was not a code of Laws, and therefore, while it was up to the church to preach the word, since the New Testament offered no plan, any plan within

the bounds of reason was permissible on the ground of expediency. On this ground Campbell was ever wont to defend organizations outside of the local congregations doing the work of the church.

Just as soon as Campbell published his views on this matter, opposition immediately arose, saying, "There never was, and there never can be, any occasion for such a combination of the churches to build up the Redeemer's kingdom." The reason I bring this time period with some of its events into this study of "The Autonomy of the Church" is to show that after the Restoration Movement began, well-meaning brethren brought up the idea that the local congregations were not suitable by themselves to carry out the work of preaching the gospel to the world without some human organization expediting this work for them. When a congregation became a part of The American Missionary Society or any of the other societies that developed during that time, they gave up their right of self-government in many areas of their work, such as selecting a preacher to support, selecting an area in which to work, and how their money was to be used. We can easily fall into such traps today without realizing it. At the close of the apostolic age, when the last apostle had died, the church was known only by the individual congregations scattered over the world. The work of Christ to evangelize the world was carried on through the influence of the local church in its community. Even in apostolic times, the churches felt no need of an organization devised by human planning through which the church could cooperate to evangelize the world. They had fervency and zeal. The history of the church has well shown that the less zeal and devotion there is in the church, the more institutionalism and human organization are needed. On page 186, West quotes David Lipscomb who wrote in 1887, "Any society that takes from the churches of God, the work committed to them, or that transfers the control from the earnest, devoted elders is sinful in all shapes, principles and works." In that period, there were brethren who advocated the societies, but there were strong and dedicated men who stood up against them and fought them with the Word of God. I think this is sufficient to show that we must be on guard today to oppose anything that takes away any of the autonomy of any church in our brotherhood.

I want to devote the rest of my study to the teachings of the Scriptures so far as the autonomy of each local congregation is concerned. I must note that the word "autonomy" is not found in the Scriptures, nor is its literal meaning, "self-government." However, there are many examples showing this was the practice of the New Testament church.

Ephesians 3:10-11 states, "To the intent 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." Every missionary society, whether it be the American Missionary Society, a society composed of just two or more churches, or a one-man missionary society, that has been created to make known the wisdom of God is an insult to God's eternal purpose, whether it is intentional or not. Every congregation that is not actively engaged in going into the world and preaching the gospel is thwarting God's eternal purpose of the church, whether they are doing it ignorantly or otherwise. One is the sin of commission and the other is the sin of omission. Using God's eternal purpose for the church, the gospel was preached to the whole creation. Colossians 1:23, "If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister."

In Acts 13:1-3, the Holy Spirit chose a local congregation as the entity that was to separate Paul and Barnabas for a work to which the Holy Spirit had called them. The congregation fasted, prayed, and laid hands on them and then sent them away. They traveled through Asia Minor and established several churches. On their way back to Antioch, they visited these congregations again and taught them and further set them in order. Acts 14:23 reads, "And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed." They returned to Antioch in Acts 14:27, "And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles." We have already seen that the gospel was preached to the whole creation through the church, and now we have the example of the Antioch church being able to establish the cause in Asia Minor. This was also true in reference to supporting the preachers who were carrying the gospel to the whole world. The local church could do that. Philippians 4:16, "For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity." They did not need a society through which to send the money. They did not send it through the Jerusalem church. They sent it directly to the apostle. That is our model today. The church in Thessalonica knew what to do about spreading the word without the aid of any other organization. 1 Thessalonians 1:8, "For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to Godward is spread abroad, so that we need not to speak any thing." Even in Corinth where Paul used wages from other congregations to enable him to preach to them the gospel, Paul was directing them to grow and begin reaching beyond Corinth:

For we stretch not ourselves beyond our measure, as though we reached not unto you: for we are come as far as to you also in preaching the gospel of Christ: Not boasting of things without our measure,

that is, of other men's labours; but having hope, when your faith is increased, that we shall be enlarged by you according to our rule abundantly, to preach the gospel in the regions beyond you, and not to boast in another man's line of things made ready to our hand (2 Cor. 10:14-16).

The church in Corinth was not doing anything to spread the gospel, perhaps, because of all the internal strife in which they were involved. Paul wanted their faith to grow so they could enable him and others to preach the gospel unto the parts "beyond you." This is what we need to teach to strengthen congregations. No wonder the gospel was spread to all the known world in that generation. In 1 Timothy 3:14-15, Paul declared that the church is the "pillar and ground of the truth."

The church is also the organization God designed and gave for the purpose of doing benevolent work. When someone, regardless of how far off they lived, had a need, the local congregation either supplied the need, as Antioch did in Acts 11:29-30; or they cooperated with other congregations in a concurrent action to supply that need, as the churches did in supplying the wants of Jerusalem and Judea in 1 Corinthians 16:1-5 and other related passages. In a study of this example of benevolent work, you will immediately see how each congregation acted independently and yet acted concurrently with other congregations. You will find also that they kept control over their own contribution to this work until it reached its final destination or use point. They chose their own messengers and sent them with the money. The money was given to the elders of the congregations in need. That is when the sending church lost control of its funds.

Through God's blessings, we have grown so much as a brotherhood. We have grown so much in foreign fields. A lot of money is poured into the work of supporting preachers and benevolent work. Here we must be careful lest we repeat the history of the restoration pioneers and our own history of the last sixty years. We do not need any extra-congregational institutions or organizations to do this great work in which we are engaged today. Be proud of the autonomy you have because it is God-given, and He expects you to use it according to His eternal purpose. 4635 Larkin Road, Live Oak, CA 95953

# Christian Freedoms

*by Raymond Fox*

As Christians we have willingly submitted ourselves to the moral law of Christ. Jesus is Lord and for this reason He has the authority to establish the moral principles by which we must govern our lives. We show our respect for His Lordship by obeying Him over all others. At the same time, Jesus has given us the dignity of making countless choices in a myriad of areas in the Christian life. To live successfully with a clear conscience, Christians must be able to distinguish between the laws of Christ that obligate us to live in a certain way and the freedoms we have in Christ that allow us to make choices. Confusion and discord result when Christians mistakenly turn choices into obligations or obligations into choices. The following study will clarify the contrast between the choices and the moral obligations we have in Christ. In addition, the present study will discuss the proper use of our choices so we can avoid causing others to fall into sin when they imitate our conduct.

## **The Meaning of "Freedom"**

In 1 Corinthians 8 and 10, the Apostle Paul discusses at great length the careful exercising of the freedom we have in Christ. In the original text, two Greek words appear in these chapters that are both translated "freedom." (The word translated "freedom" in the New International Version is also translated "liberty" in other translations.) One of the words, *exousia*, which occurs in 1 Corinthians 8:9, refers contextually to the authority or right one has to make a choice. In 1 Corinthians 9:12, the same word is translated as "right" (NIV) when Paul defends his "right of support." Paul had the right to choose to accept or refuse financial support from the congregations. He was not obligated to accept it. The other Greek word, *eleutheria*, which appears in 1 Corinthians 10:29, means "freedom," that is, the opposite of bondage or obligation.

Freedoms in this context are aspects of our conduct about which we have no moral obligation to act in one way or another. We have the privilege of choosing. Specifically, Paul talks about the eating of meat in these passages as an example of a Christian freedom. The Old Testament established various laws prohibiting the nation of Israel from eating certain kinds of food. The New Testament, however, does not contain such laws. We can choose to eat what we wish as long as we give thanks to God for His blessings (1 Tim. 4:1-4).

In addition to the fact that freedoms involve choices in contrast to the obligations of moral law, freedoms also refer to *individual* choices. Paul also discusses the use of freedoms in Romans 14 where he states in verse 3, "The

man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God accepted him." If a certain aspect of our behavior involves the freedom to choose, one Christian cannot require another Christian to make the same choices. The individual Christian must be free to make his or her own choices in those areas of the Christian life in which the New Testament gives us this freedom.

Furthermore, genuine freedoms cannot involve sin. If the New Testament truly gives us the freedom to choose between alternatives, then none of those alternatives will involve sinful behavior. In fact, the responsible exercise of our freedoms does not affect our relationship with God in any way. Concerning the eating of meat, Paul wrote, "But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do" (1 Cor. 8:8).

One other characteristic of freedoms that logically follows is that we cannot use our personal choices in the area of freedoms as a standard for judging others. Since freedoms are individual choices, it does not make sense for one person to use his or her personal preference as the norm by which to judge the behavior of those who do not share that same personal preference. Paul expressed the unreasonableness of doing so when he wrote, "For why should my freedom be judged by another's conscience?" (1 Cor. 10:29).

Paul's discussion in 1 Corinthians of the freedom to marry or remain single illustrates the aforementioned qualities of a genuine freedom. In 9:5 and 7:1-2, he explains that he has the same right as the other apostles to marry a woman who is a believer or, if he so chooses and can control his physical desires, to remain unmarried. The freedom to decide whether to marry or not has the four characteristics of a freedom: (1) it is a genuine choice and not a moral obligation; (2) it is an individual choice; (3) neither of the two alternatives necessarily implies sin; and (4) neither of the choices is reason to judge or condemn another person's conduct.

### **The Meaning of Moral Law**

Much of the discussion and controversy surrounding the subject of Christian freedoms stems from confusion between freedoms and moral principles. What is clear from Paul's writings to the Corinthians and the Romans is that, even from the time of the first century, some Christians have treated liberties as if they were law and others have treated law as if it were liberty. Precisely to what does moral law refer?

Moral law, by definition, is law that governs conduct, distinguishing right behavior from wrong behavior, commending right behavior and condemning wrong behavior. A moral code is that set of laws one must obey in order to be

right. There is great confusion in society today about the nature of moral laws. Many people are accustomed to talking about "moral values," but "moral" and "values" are contradictory terms. Values are concepts or beliefs that compare the relative importance or usefulness of different things. We might say, "It is important to enjoy the kind of work you do for a living." But if you do not enjoy your work, you are not morally wrong. Likewise, we would never say, "It is important not to abort a fetus" or "It is not useful to abort a fetus." The question of abortion is a moral one and not a matter of values, and so for this reason we talk about whether abortion is "right" or "wrong." Moral laws are not values—moral laws obligate one to act in a certain way, and if one does not act in that certain way, then he or she is morally wrong. For Christians, any law of the New Covenant that Jesus established for us to obey is a moral law because it is obligatory for Christians as members of the covenant. (Some religions have tried to make a distinction between what they call "moral laws" and "ceremonial laws" in order to support their doctrinal peculiarities. For example, those who still worship on the Sabbath instead of the Lord's Day claim that the Sabbath law was a moral law as opposed to the laws related to worship, which were "ceremonial" laws. Hoping to retain the Sabbath law for today, they argue that moral laws are more obligatory than ceremonial laws. Such distinctions are contrived. The reality was that a man died for not keeping the Sabbath (Num. 15:32–36) and another man died for touching the Ark of the Covenant (2 Sam. 6:1–7), an act of ceremonial desecration. The fact is, for those under the covenant, all laws of that covenant are equally obligatory and therefore moral in nature.) Therefore, the first distinction between moral laws and freedoms is clear: moral laws are obligatory while freedoms are choices.

Next, whereas freedoms constitute *individual* choices, moral laws are *universally* obligatory to all people who are within the scope of those laws. Every Christian who has been baptized into Christ has accepted and is bound to obey the moral obligations of the New Covenant law established by Christ. For instance, it is not up to the discretion of the members of the local congregation to determine how they express worship to God. On the contrary, each congregation of the Lord's church must worship according to the same rules established by the New Testament. Since the New Testament commands only singing to praise God in worship, then the use of instrumental accompaniment is not a choice or a freedom. Singing without instrumental accompaniment is the moral obligation of each congregation.

Furthermore, since moral law involves universal obligation to God's law, the violation of moral law constitutes sin. "Everyone who sins breaks the law" (1 Jn. 3:4). Although the exercise of freedoms or personal choices does not



bring us any closer to God or take us any farther away from Him, disobeying a moral law will separate us from Him because the violation of moral law is sin.

In addition, it logically follows that moral laws also constitute the basis for judgment, determining whether one is morally right or wrong before God. The following table summarizes the contrasts between freedoms and moral law:

| <b>CONTRASTS BETWEEN MORAL LAW AND FREEDOMS</b> |                                |
|---|--------------------------------|
| <b>Moral Law</b>                                | <b>Freedoms</b>                |
| Obligation                                      | Choice                         |
| Universally applicable                          | Individual discretion          |
| Violation of moral law is sin                   | No choice is implicitly sinful |
| Basis for moral judgment                        | Not the basis for judgment     |

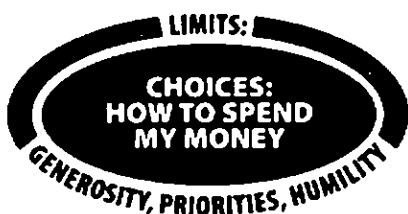
### **The Relationship Between Moral Laws and Freedoms**

Although freedoms offer Christians choices, those choices still have limits. Freedoms are not absolutely free. Take, for example, the famous lie that Ananias and Sapphira proffered during the early history of the New Testament church. They had sold a piece of land and gave part of the proceeds to the apostles for distribution to the needy Christians and kept the remaining portion. Their lie consisted of telling the apostles that they were giving *all* of the proceeds to the needy. Perhaps their motive was the desire to appear pious and generous before the other disciples, but, nonetheless, they lied and were condemned for it. When Peter confronted Ananias with his lie, he told him, "Didn't it [the land] belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal?" (Acts 5:4). With these words Peter reminded Ananias of the freedom he had. He and his wife were not obligated to give anything. Their decision about how to use their land, whether to sell it, and whether to give part or all of the money to the needs of the saints were matters of their own discretion. Making decisions about the use of our economic resources is a freedom we have as Christians. The law of Christ does not obligate us to give a certain amount to the needy. "Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Cor. 9:7). However, this freedom has certain limits, and certain specific moral laws form those limits. Although individual Christians can choose how they will use their money, their decisions should not originate from sinful motives, but instead must reflect generosity, spiritual priorities, and humility.

A Christian's choice concerning apparel further illustrates the relationship between freedoms and moral law. Since the New Testament does not specify exactly what articles of clothing a Christian may wear, Christians have many

choices about apparel that involve styles, colors, sizes, materials, etc. This freedom of choice, however, is not absolute. The fact that Christians have many choices does not imply that those choices are unlimited. The moral principles of modesty, decency, and propriety (1 Tim. 2:9) form limits to our choices about apparel. Whatever choice a Christian makes about clothing, that choice must conform to these moral limits.

The following illustrations picture the important relationship between freedoms and moral law:



### **Distinguishing Between Freedoms and Moral Law in the New Testament**

Understanding the difference between freedoms and moral law leads us to the question of how the New Testament tells us whether a certain aspect of conduct is a freedom or a moral law. How does the New Testament express freedoms?

In many instances the New Testament explicitly gives us the freedom to make a decision, such as in the case of how to spend our economic resources. The statement, "Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give..." (2 Cor. 9:7) clearly identifies the amount we give as a choice. Paul explicitly calls the eating of meat a freedom (1 Cor. 8 and 9). He describes the decision to marry or remain unmarried as a personal choice (1 Cor. 7:1-2).

The New Testament also implicitly grants us choices. Implicit freedoms are those choices that the New Testament does not specifically describe but that we must make in order to live and serve God. Concerning public worship, the New Testament does not tell us how many songs we can sing, how many prayers we might pray, what the exact order of our worship should be, or what the exact hour or length of time our worship should be. These elements are clearly decisions we have to make if we are to conduct worship services, but the New Testament does not specify the decisions we *must* make. Therefore, these decisions are freedoms, choices that congregations can make without obligating others to make the same choices. The New Testament does not

specify the secular jobs we may hold, the style of house in which we may live, or the kind of transportation we may use to travel. Since we must work, we must live somewhere and we must travel around in some manner—these decisions are choices the New Testament implicitly leaves to our discretion without describing the choices. Remember, however, that we must make these decisions within the limits of any applicable moral laws.

How does the New Testament express moral laws? A moral law is any principle that expresses, explicitly or implicitly, an obligation that we must obey. The imperative language of commands expresses explicit obligations. "Go and make disciples of all nations" (Mt. 28:19) is clearly an obligation and not a choice. The New Testament implicitly teaches moral obligations by describing examples of moral conduct. Jesus said, "I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you" (Jn. 13:15). Paul said, "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1). While examples of moral conduct may not contain the language of a command, they are obligations nonetheless. The test to determine if a particular teaching is a moral law is to discover if the four characteristics of moral laws mentioned previously (obligation, universal application, violation of which is sin, and basis for moral judgment) apply to the teaching.

The New Testament, of course, uses language to describe specific freedoms and moral laws. One essential step in distinguishing freedoms and moral laws in the New Testament is understanding the language in which they are expressed. Every freedom or moral law has descriptive characteristics. The descriptive characteristics specify the essential and relevant attributes of the choice or the moral law. In order for us to know how to apply the choice or how to follow the moral law, we have to know exactly what the Scriptures are talking about. Confusion results in discussions about laws and freedoms when people are not sure what they are talking about.

For example, is it a freedom or a sin to decorate a pine tree and put it in your home during a certain season of the year? There are some people who believe that the way in which they decorate their home is a liberty, while others believe that decorating an evergreen tree and placing it in their home would violate the moral prohibition against idolatry and thus constitute sin. The answer to this question lies in discovering the relevant descriptive characteristics of the conduct in question and any moral laws that people might think are relevant. We ought to ask ourselves, what are the *Scriptures* really talking about? and what are we talking about? Are these two the same? People who believe decorating a pine tree is sin refer to two passages from the Old Testament. First Kings 14:23 speaks of the sin of the people of Judah who put idolatrous images beneath "every spreading tree." (Please note that the King

James Version translates this phrase as "every green tree." The Hebrew word translated "spreading" or "green" actually means "flourishing" and is not describing an evergreen tree. The same word describes an olive tree in Psalm 52:8.) The other passage, Jeremiah 10:1-5, speaks of the futile customs of the Gentiles who cut down trees and carved them into idolatrous images. What are the relevant descriptive characteristics of the moral prohibitions that appear in these passages? Contextually, the passages are describing acts of idolatry associated with trees: one in which idols are placed beneath a tree and the other in which a tree is carved into an idolatrous image. Do these characteristics describe what people today do when they bring a pine tree into their home and decorate it? Usually not. Most likely they are using a decorated tree as an adornment in their home. Of course, if someone decorated their home with images that in reality represented idolatrous worship, then that person would be passing beyond the limits of choice. When we do not pay close attention to the relevant descriptive characteristics of some example of conduct, more than likely we will end up confusing freedoms with moral laws.

Providing examples of freedoms versus moral laws will sometimes involve controversy because that is, after all, the nature of the problem. People confuse freedoms with moral laws. Even in the first century church there were controversies over whether eating meat offered to idols was a freedom or a moral sin and whether circumcision was a liberty or a moral obligation. Today, controversies have erupted over a wide variety of issues. We can solve these controversies by paying close attention to the differences in the nature of freedoms and moral laws and by carefully analyzing the descriptive characteristics of the freedoms and the moral laws in question.

Most importantly, we must humbly respect the Word of God as the ultimate judge to determine whether a certain practice is a freedom or moral law. There is no doubt that people occupying both sides of a controversy can be very convinced they are right. Only contextually accurate interpretation of God's Word can solve the controversy. Both sides need to bravely ask, "What do the Scriptures really say?"

### **The Abuse of Christian Freedoms**

Paul raises the issue of Christian freedoms in 1 Corinthians because there were those at Corinth who were abusing their freedoms and others who were judging their brethren based on matters of choice. We can understand how people abuse freedoms by thinking, for instance, of the freedom of speech specified in the United States Constitution. An abuse of this freedom would bring harm to others, such as falsely crying "fire!" in a crowded theater. In 1 Corinthians Paul describes how Christians can abuse their freedoms.

In 1 Corinthians 8 and 10 and Romans 14, Paul used three Greek words that are synonyms and essentially mean to put a stumbling block in the way of another person, causing him to stumble spiritually. Contextually, Paul describes how one might cause others to stumble by "wounding their weak conscience" (1 Cor. 8:12). Our conscience has the power to approve of our conduct when we do what we believe is right, giving us feelings of peace and satisfaction. We wound our conscience with feelings of guilt when we personally do something that we know or believe is wrong, or at least doubt may be right. Therefore, one would cause another to stumble by influencing that person to do something that would wound their conscience with guilt. It is absolutely necessary for Christians to protect their conscience. If we were to begin to do things we are not certain about, then the truth would lose its value to us and we would become careless about doing what is right. Wounding the conscience is a sin (1 Cor. 8:11-12).

The issue Paul addresses in 1 Corinthians 8 and 10, as an example of the abuse of Christian freedom, is the eating of meat that has been offered to idols. The Gentiles who worshiped idols sacrificed meat offerings to their idols. Of course, the inanimate idols did not consume the meat, so the worshipers would sell it at the meat market (1 Cor. 10:25). In addition, the Gentile idol worshipers convened feasts in which the participants ate the meat that had been offered to idols (1 Cor. 8:10). Some Christians, who clearly understood that the idols were nothing but pieces of stone and wood, could eat this meat without any reservations. Other Christians, perhaps because they had recently left idolatry to become Christians, could not eat the meat without still thinking that, in some way, they were worshiping the idols (1 Cor. 8:7).

In reality, Christians have the freedom to choose whether they want to eat meat or not. There is no moral law against eating meat (1 Tim. 4:3-5). When making a decision about how to exercise a freedom, what is most important is that "each one should be fully convinced in his own mind" (Rom. 14:5). Whatever choice a person makes, that person must be convinced that the choice is correct. If Christians are not convinced that what they are doing is correct, then they run the serious risk of doing something that will cause them to have a guilty conscience afterwards. If a Corinthian Christian were to eat meat that had been offered to an idol and then afterwards think that he had done something wrong, he would have sinned. His sin, however, would not have been in the eating of the meat itself since in reality the idols were nothing, meat was only meat, and we are free to eat whatever we want to eat. His sin, instead, would have been in wounding his conscience by doing something he was unsure about and later feeling guilty for doing it. Remember, wounding the conscience is sin.

Abuse of the freedom to eat meat takes place when one brother, who is certain that eating meat is a freedom, eats meat offered to idols and by his eating influences another brother to eat who does not have this same confidence. When the other brother, whose faith is not as strong, eats the meat, he experiences remorse because he believes he might have sinned by eating the meat. Paul, through the authority of Christ, holds the stronger brother responsible for influencing the weaker brother to do something he later regrets. The stronger brother has abused his freedom by causing another brother to stumble and sin against his conscience (1 Cor. 8:9-12). There is no freedom that is important enough to risk causing another brother to sin by wounding his conscience (1 Cor. 8:13). In this case, the stronger brother should have sacrificed his freedom in order to protect his brother's conscience.

Today we do not confront precisely the same problem the Corinthians faced concerning the eating of meat; however, there are many examples of freedoms that we have today that have the potential to raise problems of conscience. In the congregation at Corinth, Paul was not describing *potential* problems, but *actual* problems. Any freedom has the potential to be a stumbling block for a weaker brother. However, a stronger brother is responsible to abstain from exercising his freedom if the potential for causing someone to stumble becomes real and present, as it was in Corinth.

An interesting example of a freedom that could potentially harm someone's conscience relates to the case of Christians who were Catholics before becoming Christians. Because of my work as a teacher at the local detention center for youth, I know many young people from a Catholic background who are members of criminal gangs. When one of these young men whom I knew very well was shot and killed, I decided to attend his funeral out of respect for his family and other young men whom I know were his friends. His funeral was a Catholic mass. I attended the ceremony, but sat in the back of the auditorium and respectfully did not participate in the activities. I knew, because of what the Scriptures teach, that the ceremony itself meant nothing. The activities represented the empty traditions of men. However, some of the members of our congregation of the Lord's church have come from a Catholic background. Some of these members, especially those who most recently converted to Christ, may not be able to attend such a funeral without wounding their conscience, thinking they were doing something wrong by merely being present. I carefully explained to the members why I went and that I did not participate in the ceremony. Imagine, though, if one of the brothers or sisters in Christ whose faith is weak had seen my example and decided to attend a Catholic mass for some reason. Next, imagine that after attending the mass, the weaker brother feels guilty, even though he did not participate in the cere-

monies. Now what had been a potential cause for stumbling has become a reality. At this point, I would have been guilty for having contributed to the wounded conscience of my brother. To insure that we do not cause someone to stumble, we are responsible to make certain that what is a potential for causing someone to stumble does not become a real case of stumbling. This responsibility includes the decision not to exercise the freedom. If I knew that by attending the funeral I might cause one of my brothers to stumble, I must not attend. Preserving my brother's conscience is far more important than attending the funeral. At the same time, those brothers or sisters who have doubts about doing something must abstain from doing it.

Take for example another freedom that has the potential for causing someone to stumble: the use of Modern English versions of the Bible. We have the freedom to choose the version of the Bible from which we wish to read as long as that version is faithful to the original text. In the congregation of which I am a member, we use the New International Version, because, among other reasons, we have many members whose level of English competence is very low. We have many copies of the NIV in the pews at our meeting place for the benefit of those who come to worship and do not bring their own copy of the Bible. Imagine that someone comes who is not fully convinced that we have the freedom to choose an accurate version. Imagine that this person believes the only accurate version of the Bible is the King James Version. If they do not bring their own Bible and are forced to use a copy of the NIV from the pews, then they might wound their conscience by doing something about which they are not fully convinced. Therefore, to avoid allowing this potential abuse of freedom to become a real possibility, we also need to have some copies of the KJV available for those who wish to use that translation. If we were to compel the brother who has doubts about the NIV to use this version, we would be guilty of causing him to sin against his conscience.

Consider another cross-cultural example of freedom and the potential for stumbling. One family tradition that has special meaning to my family is Thanksgiving dinner. For us this is an important family time in which we gather to enjoy each other's company and give thanks together for what God has given us. We also invite many brothers and sisters from the congregation to share with us whose unbelieving relatives usually have a drinking party at that time of the year. Although we give thanks for what we have, we do not consider this time together to be a religious ceremony or tradition. Nevertheless, I know at least one brother in Christ from another cultural tradition who believes that eating a special meal on "Thanksgiving Day" is a manmade tradition and therefore sin. He and his family do not have a special meal on this day, nor do they pay any attention to what other people are doing at this time.

We are exercising our freedom to invite people to our home for a meal and the freedom to decide when and under what circumstances we give thanks to God. As long as this other brother does not imitate what we are doing and then regret his decision, we have not caused him to stumble. The potential for him to stumble may be present, but as long as he is convinced in what he does not do, he has not wounded his conscience and we have not caused him to stumble. For now, the potential for abuse is not a real possibility because he adamantly refuses to participate in any such meal. Since this brother is not going to stumble, we do not need to sacrifice the freedom we are exercising.

Just as important as it is to understand the meaning of causing someone to stumble, it is also necessary to understand what it does not mean. The KJV in some places uses the word "offence" to translate the idea of "stumbling block." Unfortunately, the use of the word "offence" in this context has produced some misunderstanding about Paul's teaching. The word "offend" or "offense" in our Modern English vocabulary commonly means to hurt someone emotionally, to annoy, bother or frustrate someone. Hurting someone's feelings, however, is not the same as the idea of creating a stumbling block for someone and causing him or her to fall into sin. Christians have sometimes been reluctant to exercise their freedoms because they think they might hurt someone's feelings. Although it is essential that love for one another govern our relationships as brothers and sisters in Christ, making someone feel bad is not the problem that Paul is addressing in the context of abusing freedoms.

### **The Paradoxes of Christian Freedoms**

With regard to the practice of freedoms and the possibility of stumbling blocks, there is always a strong brother who has sufficient knowledge to understand what freedoms he really has and a weak brother who has limited knowledge and whose conscience can be unnecessarily wounded. The relationship between the strong brother and the weak brother in a congregation is most interesting because it is characterized by paradox. A paradox is an unexpected conclusion with seemingly contradictory results. For example, one commonly present paradox is that the weaker brother actually thinks he is the stronger one. The weaker brother usually refuses to participate in some activity because, although it is in reality a freedom, he thinks it is sinful. By his non-participation, he believes he is stronger than those who do participate. He is the one who is standing for the "truth" and refusing to compromise. Such is the case of the brother who steadfastly believes that it is wrong to eat a special meal on "Thanksgiving Day." He believes it is a human tradition equal to the traditions that Jesus condemned in Matthew 15:9. By virtue of his stand, he believes he is spiritually stronger than those who participate. He is, in reality,



weak because of his lack of careful Bible study. The traditions condemned in Matthew 15:9 were religious traditions that the Pharisees bound on people, teaching that it was impossible to please God without following their traditions. Furthermore, their traditions invalidated the commands of God by contradicting those commands. Eating a special meal on a certain day of the year and giving thanks is clearly not on the same level as the traditions of the Pharisees.

Another paradox arises when the weaker brother condemns the stronger brother, though the stronger brother commits no sin and only exercises a freedom. Paul refers to this paradox by stating, "For why should my freedom be judged by another's conscience? If I take part in the meal with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of something I thank God for?" (1 Cor. 10:29-30). Being criticized for doing something that is right unavoidably strikes us as unjust. Consider, for example, the case of a woman teaching the Word of God in a private setting. We know the Scriptures forbid a woman to teach the Word of God when the congregation meets together in public worship and other similar public circumstances (1 Cor. 14:34; 1 Tim. 2:11-12). There are, however, many examples of women in the New Testament who taught in private settings (Acts 18:24-26; Tit. 2:3-5). A person with insufficient knowledge may think that a woman cannot teach in any environment if she cannot teach when the congregation comes together. Such a person might condemn a woman who exercises her freedom to teach in private. In such a case, she would be falsely condemned, not for sin that she commits, but for the good that she contributes. Concerning the practice of freedoms and judgment based on freedoms, Paul wrote, "Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another" (Rom. 14:13).

A third paradox occurs when the weaker brother actually causes the stronger brother to stumble. The weaker brother is usually the one who stumbles by following the example of the stronger brother and practicing some freedom, yet without sufficient knowledge to avoid wounding his conscience. However, the stronger brother may abstain from exercising some freedom for the purpose of protecting the weaker brother's conscience. This abstinence may lead to another problem if, for some reason, the stronger brother feels he is somehow doing something wrong by abstaining from his freedom. Consider the previously mentioned example of using the NIV in worship. One of the reasons we use the NIV in our worship services is because some members of the congregation have a very limited English vocabulary and simply cannot understand the antiquated English used in older versions. Imagine that someone in the congregation believes it is wrong to use a Modern English version like the NIV. If for the purpose of protecting this person's conscience I were to stop using the NIV, I would wound my conscience. I would think I would be committing a wrong by not allowing those with limited English to understand

the teaching. What is the solution to such a dilemma? Paul wrote, "Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind" (Rom. 14:5). The brother who believes that the KJV is the "authorized" version must not use the NIV to avoid wounding his conscience and I must not require him to use the NIV. At the same time, I must allow others to use it.

### **When the Weak Brother Demands Compliance to His Opinions**

An understanding of the paradoxes in the relationship between the weaker brother and the stronger brother also reveals that the weaker brother is not always in danger of stumbling. In some cases the weaker brother, who does not have sufficient knowledge to recognize a freedom as a freedom, judges those who exercise the freedom. While he is condemning others, he resolutely refuses to participate in the freedom. Such a brother is *not* in danger of stumbling by wounding his conscience. Nevertheless, he is liable to divide the congregation by attempting to bind his opinion on those who do not agree with him.

The controversy in the first century church over circumcision illustrates this problem and its solution. When Jesus died on the cross, circumcision, which had been a law for those under the Old Covenant, became a freedom. One could now choose to be or not to be circumcised. Timothy, for example, chose to be circumcised in order not to alienate the Jews as he traveled with Paul preaching the gospel (Acts 16:3). However, there were Jews in the early church, who had been converted to Christianity and the New Covenant, still believing circumcision was a moral law. When the Jewish Christians attempted to bind circumcision on the Gentiles as a law, serious problems erupted that threatened to divide the church. These Jewish Christians were saying, "Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved" (Acts 15:1). They had turned a freedom into an obligatory law and were using it as the basis for judgment. To find an inspired solution to the problem, the Christians in the affected areas appealed to the apostles who were at Jerusalem (Acts 15). In their decision, the apostles directed the Jewish Christians not to bind circumcision on the Gentiles. Whether to be circumcised or not was a freedom, a choice that each individual Christian should make without fear of condemnation. At the same time, the apostles reminded the Gentiles to obey the moral laws that every Christian was subject to, including prohibiting sexual immorality and practices associated with idolatry. The principle set down by the apostles serves us today when similar controversies confront us: the weaker brother must not bind his choice in matters of freedom on other Christians even though he believes his opinion is law.

The apostle Paul provides even more instruction on such cases in Titus 3:10. Paul writes, "Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second

time. After that, have nothing to do with him." "Divisive person" comes from a Greek word that is sometimes translated "heretic." This word has an interesting origin. In the Greek language it originally meant "to make a choice," then it denoted a divisive spirit that comes from binding one's choice or opinion on others (see **Vine's Dictionary of New Testament Words**). The weaker brother who believes his choice in matters of freedom is really a law and attempts to bind it on others is demonstrating the divisive spirit about which Paul warns.

In the mission work in Central America there is an instructive example of this problem. A few Christians have been converted from a denomination that believes one must pray from a kneeling or prostrate position. Standing to pray is, in their viewpoint, a sinful act of self-exaltation and pride. The New Testament, on the contrary, does not specify a certain posture for prayer. In fact, the publican in Luke 18:13, whom Jesus commended for his humility, was standing while praying. These Christians who sincerely believe they must pray on their knees are welcome to occupy this posture during prayer. They are free to choose the posture they wish to have. But if they, in turn, were to bind their chosen posture on other Christians, judging them for not praying from a kneeling position, they would be demonstrating the divisive spirit Paul warns about in Titus 3:10. In matters of freedom of choice, they must not bind their choice.

### **Conclusion**

In his discussion of Christian freedoms, Paul emphasizes the overriding principle that should guide all of our relationships: we must not seek our own good but "the good of many, so that they may be saved" (1 Cor. 10:33). The strong brother must not carelessly exercise his freedoms without regard for the weaknesses of those whose knowledge is inadequate. He may cause them to wound their conscience by doing something about which they are uncertain. He must be willing to sacrifice his freedom to preserve the spiritual welfare of his brother. Likewise, the weak brother must not bind his choice on other Christians. He runs the risk of dividing the body of Christ over something that should be a matter of choice. If he does not believe in the choice that others make, he should not make that choice and he should not condemn those who do.

The Scriptures are truly amazing for many reasons, but one of those reasons is that they anticipate and offer solutions for problems we experience nearly two millennia after the writing of the New Testament was finished. Man has not changed, his needs have not changed, and the Scriptures, because of their divine origin, remain vitally relevant. 753 Saucito Ave., Salinas, CA 93906

# The Christian and the End of Time

*by Ronny Wade*

## The End of All Things

But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers (1 Pet. 4:7).

The meaning of this phrase has been the subject of much dispute. Some commentators affirm that it is a direct reference to the speedy return of Christ and go so far as to claim that both Christ and the apostles believed and taught the idea. Careful examination, however, seems to clearly indicate that neither Christ nor the apostles taught or believed that the second advent would occur in their generation or at a time immediately in the future.

- Jesus declared that He Himself did not know the day or hour (Mt. 24:36) of His return. This being the case, it is certain that no apostle could know.
- Christ said, "...Whosoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done (Mary's anointing) shall be spoken of for a memorial of her" (Mk. 14:9). Preaching the gospel in the whole world was a task involving generations and centuries, not merely a lifetime.
- Christ, in an analogy spoken in the parable of the talents, said, "Now after a long time the lord of those servants cometh..." (Mt. 25:19). There is nothing here that speaks of any "speedy return."
- Paul evidently did not expect the second coming in his lifetime since he spoke of his own resurrection from the dead, along with the resurrection of all the Corinthians, as an event scheduled for the future (2 Cor. 4:14). Furthermore, his saying, "We shall not all sleep..." (1 Cor. 15:51), applies to Christians who may be alive at the coming of the Lord, and not to himself or the Corinthians of his generation.
- In his letters to the Thessalonians, written before the Corinthian letters, Paul affirmed that "the coming shall not be except the apostasy come first" (2 Thess. 2:3), and the apostasy was understood to involve a great amount of time.

The weight of scriptural evidence is against the idea of anyone knowing the time of the Lord's second return. The temptation, however, to speculate about it has been so great that a number of men have ventured to predict it.

William Miller, the founder of Seventh-Day Adventism, predicted that Christ would return in 1843. Disappointed, he revised his figures and set the time as October 22, 1844. When this failed, he could see that he had been

wrong. It should be said to his credit that he, at that time, withdrew from the field of religious leadership. He wrote: "We expected the second coming of Christ at this time, and now to contend that we were not mistaken is dishonest. I have no confidence in any new theories that grew out of the movement" (quoted by Canright in his book **Seventh-Day Adventism Renounced**, p. 77).

Joseph Smith, the founder of Mormonism, also prophesied about the second coming of Christ. He wrote: "The coming of the Lord which was nigh even fifty-six years should wind up the scenes." (*Millennial Star*, Vol. 15, p. 205). Charles T. Russell, the founder of the Jehovah's Witness sect, said: "That the Lord must be present and set up his kingdom and exercise his power so as to dash the nations to pieces as a potter's vessel before A.D. 1914 is then clearly fixed." (*Millennial Dawn*, Vol. 2, p. 170) When this prophecy failed, he tried to justify it by saying that Christ came, but the world did not see Him. Such excuses only underscore the futility of predicting what the Lord has clearly taught no man knows.

The reason some believe in a "speedy return" is due to such passages as, "...the day is at hand..." (Rom. 13:12), "The Lord is at hand" (Phil. 4:5), "...the coming of the Lord is at hand" (Jas. 5:8), "...it is the last hour..." (1 Jn. 2:18), and "...the time is near" (Rev. 1:3).

All of these passages were undoubtedly written to inspire watchfulness and preparedness on the part of Christians rather than teach that the second coming of Jesus was an imminent event. It must be remembered that if these Scriptures do teach that Jesus is coming in the near future, they have been teaching it for nearly two thousand years.

What then is the meaning of "...the end of all things is at hand"? The meaning of the phrase literally is "of all things the end draws near." But what end? As we have already noticed, it cannot be the end of the world and judgment day. Such an interpretation would make Peter a liar since two thousand years have passed since the statement was made.

These words were written on the eve of the destruction of the Jewish state. The Law with its worship, feast days, and ceremonies had been terminated with the death of Christ. However, unbelieving Jews, in their resistance to Christianity, had persisted in teaching and binding the Law. Soon the temple and Jewish economy would perish in the destruction that was to fall upon Jerusalem. The end was in sight, and with it would come trial and persecution "for all, and particularly those who had espoused a religion traceable to Jews" (Woods). Unfortunately, Christians would also suffer, along with the unbelieving Jews, because of the doom that would soon befall the Jewish state. Thus,

in the following verses, we have Peter's admonitions regarding how they should conduct themselves.

### The Fiery Trial

Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial among you, which cometh upon you to prove you, as though a strange thing happened unto you: But inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings, rejoice; That at the revelation of his glory also ye may rejoice with exceeding joy (1 Pet. 4:12-13, ASV 1901).

Peter had dealt with the suffering of the saints from time to time throughout this epistle (see 1 Pet. 1:3-9). The idea of this verse is to point out that such suffering is not alien to them as Christians. In fact according to 2 Timothy 3:12, it was to be expected.

The "fiery trial" is a reference to the impending persecutions that would be associated with the coming destruction of the Jewish state. Some writers (Coffman among them) feel that "the fiery trial" could refer to the "shameless burnings of Christians to illuminate the gardens of Nero..." He feels that these persecutions might have already begun at the time of this writing and preceded the events that would occur when Rome marched against Jerusalem. Coffman further states:

The Neronian persecution broke against the Christians, sending countless thousands of them to their flaming death as torches to light the orgies in Nero's gardens, or feed the wild beasts in the Coliseum, or to be crucified, tortured, burned alive, beheaded, or suffer any other horrible death that the pagan mind could invent. All earthly possessions of Christians perished in that holocaust.

The Jews made an insurrection against Rome; and following the death of Nero, the pagan emperor organized a war of extermination against them. Jerusalem was utterly destroyed, some 1,100,000 of its population, including Jews, throughout the area being butchered by the Romans. Thirty thousand young Jewish males were crucified upon the walls of the ruined city, the lumber stores being exhausted to supply crosses... (Commentary on 1 & 2 Peter).

McGarvey quotes Josephus as follows:

The emperor Vespasian, and his son Titus, after a three years' siege, took Jerusalem and destroyed its temple A.D. 70. Of the temple proper not a vestige was left standing, but the vast platform upon which it stood composed partly of natural rock and partly of immense masonry, was for the most part left standing. The destruction of the city and temple, however, was so complete that those who visited could hardly believe that it had ever been inhabited.

### Scarcely Saved versus Abundant Entrance

For the time is come for judgment to begin at the house of God: And if it begin first at us, what shall be the end of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous is scarcely saved, where shall the ungodly and sinner appear? (1 Pet. 4:17-18, ASV 1901).

Peter affirmed that "it is the season" for judgment (severe trial) to begin at the house of God or the church. The judgment of 2 Corinthians 5:10 could not be the meaning here since it has been almost two thousand years since Peter penned these words, and the judgment spoken of was impending and at hand.

The "end" of them that obey not the gospel refers to the doom that awaits those to whom he referred. The meaning is that if the church is soon to fall into this fiery trial and severe persecution, how much greater will be the suffering and wretchedness of those who do not rely on the Lord, those who have not the promise and comfort of the gospel.

"The righteous scarcely saved." "Scarcely" means that something is to be accomplished "with great difficulty." No doubt is expressed as to the outcome, but that such a thing is possible. A righteous man is one who keeps the commandments of God. The idea expressed by Peter is simply that the trial and suffering would be so great that even the pure and good would with great difficulty escape the destruction which it threatened. If this is the case with the righteous, then what of the sinner and ungodly?

The "judgment soon to begin" does not refer to the general judgment for the following reasons:

- The general judgment was then and still may be in the distant future.
- In this judgment, the righteous will scarcely be saved; whereas, the deliverance of the righteous in the last day and their entrance into the heavenly kingdom will be richly supplied. "Wherefore, brethren, give the more diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never stumble: for thus shall be richly supplied unto you the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet 1:10-11, ASV 1901).
- Since the same writer declares that the "righteous will scarcely be saved" and the faithful shall be "richly supplied" with an entrance to heaven, it follows that he does not refer in these passages to the same salvation.

What then is the "salvation" referred to in our text? We have already learned from this writer of a "trial" and "extreme suffering." This trial was to soon come upon the saints. There was an "end" approaching which necessitated a sound mind. They were also to be "sober in prayer." In this coming disaster, they would "scarcely" be saved.

We believe the reference is to the impending destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman armies. The terrible effects of this trial would extend into the remotest sections of the earth. Note the similarity between the words of Peter and those of Matthew 24:1-28, especially verse 22 "And except those days had been shortened, no flesh would have been saved; but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened" (ASV 1901). Hence, the "salvation" under consideration was the deliverance from complete destruction in the persecution that swept over the world in connection with the destruction of the temple and the Jewish state in Jerusalem. *P.O. Box 10811, Springfield, MO 65808*



# Domestic Qualifications of Elders

*by Glenn Ballard*

Our subject focuses on those qualifications relative to the potential elder's wife and children. The principal Bible verses we will concern ourselves with are Titus 1:6 and 1 Timothy 3:2-5. A good place to begin is with a reading of these Biblical texts.

## **Titus 1:6**

(NKJV) ...if a man is blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination.

(NASB) ...if any man be above reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion.

(Knox) ...one whose children hold the faith, not accused of reckless living, not wanting in obedience.

## **1 Timothy 3:2,4-5**

(NKJV) A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife...one who rules his own house well having his children in submission with all reverence (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?).

The plan of this study will be to consider, as thoroughly as possible, two distinct issues: first, the significance of the phrase "husband of one wife" and second, the meaning and implications of the phrase "faithful children."

These qualifications, once understood, are not optional matters as it relates to the eldership. The word "must" in 1 Timothy 3:2 and in Titus 1:7 in the phrase "the bishop must be blameless" is the Greek word *dei*. Thayer defines the word, "it is necessary, there is need of, it behooves, is right and proper. It denotes any sort of necessity." Thus, it is translated by the English word "must," clearly affirming the necessity of these qualities.

## **Husband of One Wife**

As you might expect, there are a number of interpretations regarding this phrase. (1) Some believe it forbids polygamy; the case of a man living with more than one wife. (2) Others believe it forbids digamy; that is, a second

marriage.<sup>1</sup> (3) Still others question whether or not the phrase actually requires a man to be married at all.

The Greek of the passage reads **mias gunaikos andra**, literally, "a man of one woman," or "the husband of one wife." The word "one" is from the Greek cardinal numeral **mias** which Thayer defines as, "used 1. universally, a. in opposition to many... 2. Emphatically, so that others are excluded, and is the same as, a single" (p. 186). Arndt and Gingrich define the word "2. Single, one only" (p. 230).

Several translations may be helpful to us. J. B. Phillips has, "He must be married to one wife only." The Berkley Version says, "one wife's husband." The New English Bible renders the phrase, "faithful to his one wife." A literal word for word translation of **mias gunaikos andra** is "one woman man." But when the marriage relationship is so obviously under consideration, it means "a husband of one wife" or "a man of one woman."

A number of conclusions can be drawn from this qualification. First, an elder is to be a married man. A bachelor cannot qualify, nor can a woman, despite the modern denominational practice. In fact, it is amazing the number of commentators who said this phrase did not necessarily require an elder to be married. A number of them merely asserted "this does not mean he must be married," leaving the reader to wonder about support for this conclusion. But one writer actually made a case for his view. Don DeWalt wrote a book titled **The Church in the Bible** published by College Press. Lesson Nine of this book is about the Eldership. He writes:

There has been a good bit of discussion over this verse as to whether this would exclude a single man from the office. The following should be carefully considered before a decision is reached: 1) The grammatical construction both in the Greek and the English does not suggest this exclusion.

*{If "must be a man of one woman" does not at least suggest the exclusion of the unmarried from the eldership as I am advocating, then words mean absolutely nothing gb}*

The Greek word for "husband of one wife" could be literally translated "a one woman man," not that he must be married, but if he is, he should not be a polygamist, but a "one woman man." From the

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<sup>1</sup> Technically, digamy may refer to any second marriage regardless of whether the first wife died or was put away scripturally for fornication. However, the word "digamy" is often used to describe a second marriage following a divorce for some reason other than fornication. It is important to know how the person using the word understands it.

English construction it would not be necessary to use the modifier "one" if all that is intended is that a man must be married.

*[First, it is not all that is intended that the man be married, but that his marriage be of a specific type, one of faithfulness to one woman only. That is precisely why the modifier is necessary. Second, if Paul's language forbids more than one wife, it just as clearly forbids less than one. The elder is to be a man of one woman—no more and no less. DeWalt goes on to add a second reason for his view on page 106. gb]*

The moral conditions of that time were such that polygamy was practiced by many outside, and even some inside of the church. The terminology used by Paul was for the purpose of preventing this evil practice.

*[His third piece of evidence appears to be the most compelling. gb]*

John the Apostle, was an elder (2 John 1, 3 John 1) and it is evident that he remained single. He was left a son to a desolate mother (John 19:26-27). Tertullian, the writer, spoke of John in this manner: "Here, too, we may without much hesitation, accept the traditions of the church as recording a historic fact when they ascribe to him a life of celibacy." We conclude therefore that a single man may hold the office, but a married man must have only one wife (pp. 105-106).

My comment on DeWalt's words will have to be brief. As to John's use of the title "the elder" with reference to himself, the word was used in a nonofficial sense and only to describe his advanced age (and perhaps because he may well have been the lone surviving apostle when the epistles were written) (cf. comments by Wayne Fussell (Contending for the Faith), Guy N. Woods (Gospel Advocate), and Burton Coffman). DeWalt's argument is extraordinarily weak and presumptuous, especially in light of Paul's words in our text. Again, this writer affirms that an elder in the Lord's church must be a married man.

The second conclusion has to do with the prohibition of marriage in the Catholic Church. In the years following the first century, the idea became popular that there was more holiness in celibacy, leading the Catholic Church to forbid their bishops to marry. Note that what Paul required by inspiration, the Catholics forbid.

Third, it is obvious that a polygamist (a man with more than one living wife) cannot qualify as an elder. Such a circumstance would disqualify a man from being a faithful Christian in the first place.

Beyond these obvious conclusions, what more does Paul intend for us to conclude? The context of both 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 deals with the character of the potential elder. What kind of man is he? Wuest said, "Since

character is emphasized by the Greek construction, the bishop should be a man who loves only one woman as his wife." In his commentary on Titus 1:6 David Lipscomb says the phrase means "Having one wife only and faithful to her—a faithful husband." These comments emphasize that, if we are not careful, we can overlook the kind of man the elder is to be while focusing strictly on the number of marriages he has consummated. The "man of one woman" indicates an attitude about love and marriage.

In the *Contending for the Faith's Commentary on 1 Timothy*, Paul Walker poses the question, "Is it possible for a man to be married to the same woman for fifty years and not really be a 'one-woman man'? I think so." I do, too. While being faithful sexually (which seems to be where we place the focus), he may not have been a faithful provider materially or emotionally. Perhaps he is a great communicator at work, but a very poor companion to his wife at home and insensitive to her needs. We must not compromise the obvious meaning of "one wife"; but at the same time, the greater significance of this phrase is seen in the way the husband is committed to his wife and the relationship he sustains with her. That relationship is what qualifies him. Every elder must be above reproach in his marital life and his sexual life.

The logical necessity of this qualification is due largely to the nature of the work of shepherding a congregation. It is the nature of the work (when done correctly and zealously) for the elder to spend much time with both men and women. It is critical that the elder be a "man of one woman," that his relations with his wife be healthy and honorable so that (1) he will not likely be tempted by others, and (2) he will be able to counsel and guide young married couples and those contemplating marriage.

**Question:** Does "one wife" mean one living wife, or one wife at a time (thus forbidding a polygamist)?

The requirement of one wife clearly forbids polygamy, but that is not the primary reason for this qualification. In fairness, numerous commentaries affirm that is the very reason for the words here. However, some historians deny that polygamy was widely practiced, saying it was a violation of Roman law; on the other hand, there is substantial evidence that the law was quite lax concerning such marriages. William Barclay notes that Ovid and Pliny had three wives each, Caesar and Anthony had four, Sulla and Pompey had five, and Herod had nine. *Kittel's Theological Dictionary* (p. 780) mentions some of the same marriages. James McKnight, in a footnote on 1 Timothy 3:2, says polygamy was common. His paraphrase of the passage is, "the husband of one wife at a time." A. T. Robertson similarly says, "One at a time, clearly."

While this passage obviously disqualifies a practicing polygamist, it is not so clear that polygamy is the thought in view. Alford points out, "...the Apostle Paul would not have stipulated a specific requirement for an elder that was also required of all other Christians. It seems to be a thoroughly established doctrine in the New Testament that there is to be one woman and one man in Christian marriage. See 1 Corinthians 7:2-3, Ephesians 5:31, and others. So again, why would Paul stipulate that an elder could not be a polygamist when no Christian was accepted as a polygamist?"

**Question:** How does the qualification apply if his first wife died and he has remarried?

In answer to this question, let us first pose another. Does the death of an elder's wife disqualify him? Must he resign? Is he no longer qualified to shepherd the flock? Technically, he is still a "man of one woman," having been the husband of one wife. Scripturally, nothing would disqualify him at that point. The death of a spouse does not alter the character of the man, his reputation, or his influence. Some might make the argument that he is no longer able to open his home and show hospitality as before. But that, too, depends on the man. Most men of "elder age" are able to clean and keep a house, prepare meals, use a catering service, or entertain at any of the hundreds of local restaurants. The loss of a wife certainly affects his ability to serve, but it does not destroy it.

But to the second part of the question—what if he remarries? The Revised Standard Version (1946) renders the phrase, "married but once"; but a later edition of the RSV changed this wording because there is no support for it in the Greek.

Paul taught that a widow may remarry "only in the Lord" (1 Cor. 7:39-40; see also Rom. 7:2-3 and 1 Tim. 5:14). Paul also said, "Therefore I desire that the younger widows marry, bear children, manage the house, give no opportunity to the adversary to speak reproachfully." Furthermore, Hebrews 13:4 affirms that "marriage is honorable in all..." This truth would apply to a faithful elder. Therefore, there is no disqualification if he remarries "in the Lord."

Although it proves nothing, but only illustrates, consider this hypothetical situation. What if a man has raised his children in an exemplary manner, and all who know him attest to his fatherhood; his relationship with them is above reproach, he is loved and respected by his children, and all of them are model Christians; but all of them are killed in a tragic automobile accident during a family outing? Yesterday he had faithful children. Today he has none. Does that situation affect his ability to shepherd the flock of God? No. Similarly, the

death of a wife, all other things remaining the same, does not disqualify an elder. Further, he may remarry as long as he follows the biblical teaching to remarry in the Lord. However, he is not obligated to remarry, just as he would not be required to father additional children to replace the ones who died.

There is one other point we need to address regarding the "man of one woman" issue. Some have taken the position that the Greek word **mias** (translated "one" in both Titus 1:6 and 1 Timothy 3) should be translated "first." Therefore, an elder is to be a man "of the *first* wife."

The root word **mia** is found seven times in the New Testament with reference to the first day of the week. In every case, the actual Greek phrase is "the one (**mia**) of the week," with the word "day" being supplied by the translators. One other time it appears where it is translated by the word "first" in Titus 3:10 where it refers to the first admonition given to a sectarian man. There, too, the literal phrase is "a sectarian man after one [**mia**] and a second admonition reject."

Strong's Concordance defines the word as "one or first." The same word appears in Luke 9:33, John 10:16, Acts 4:32, 1 Corinthians 6:16, 2 Corinthians 11:24, and Hebrews 10:12; and in each case the meaning of **mia** is clearly "one," not "first in order." Based on the references in Strong's, **mia** appears at least sixty-eight times in the New Testament (its root word appears many more times than that), and in the overwhelming majority of cases, the clear import of the word is the number one. In fact, there are other Greek words (**proton**, **protos**) that mean "first in order" or that imply a beginning in a series. Please consider the following references: Matthew 7:5, 16:9, Romans 1:16, Matthew 19:30, 22:25, 22:38, John 19:32, Hebrews 8:7, 9:18. If Paul had meant to say "first wife," he could have chosen a word clearly meaning that. We must reject the idea that "one" (**mia**) in 1 Timothy and Titus implies a first wife, therefore forbidding a second marriage after the death of his wife. Zerr points out that some say the phrase "man of one woman" means "never married but once" and that the phrase "to be" at the beginning of the verse should be rendered "having been" which makes the phrase include the past as well as the present tense. The Greek Interlinear has the phrase in present tense "to be." Zerr goes on to say another theory is that it means "one wife only." But that third word "only" is added without any authority from the Greek. There is no word in the Greek text to justify it.

Further, Zerr contends that to stipulate for elders "'one wife only' would imply that the church had in its fellowship men who were polygamists (with more than one wife), and such a character is not permitted in the church concerning any of the men."

**Question:** Does this passage disqualify a man who has been divorced if he had the exception?

Divorce and remarriage (scriptural or not) has always posed a greater threat to the well-being of the Lord's church than the matter of polygamy. Among Christians, it was generally understood and believed that polygamy was wrong. Historians tell us that many felt the same way about second marriages, in spite of Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 7:39. Vincent affirms "the opposition to a second marriage became very strong in the latter part of the second century." This was, of course, after the New Testament was written. I understand this qualification to teach against the practice of divorce that was so common in New Testament days.

It seems to be in our nature, in the aftermath of a broken marriage relationship, to assume some degree of fault on the part of both parties. That is not to say there is ever a justifiable reason for committing adultery. Nor do I mean to say there is never an "innocent" partner. But the partner we call "innocent," in almost all cases, shares part of the blame for the failed marriage. If it were the case that an elder's wife was unfaithful to him, it would at least cast some doubt upon his ability to manage his house well. In both Titus and 1 Timothy, there is an over-arching qualification that the potential elder must be "above reproach, blameless"; which means the man cannot be charged with wrongdoing or be impeached in the sense of a charge being proven against him. Also, in both lists, the very first specific character virtue is that he be the "husband of one wife." When these two ideas are taken together, viz. that (1) both parties of a failed marriage generally share the blame, and (2) an elder is to be blameless; then a divorced man is precluded from the eldership, even if he claims the exception.

The Living Word Commentary has the following note:

...his marriage must not be a second marriage that violates God's will. And this would apply to all Christians, especially to those who were appointed to be teachers and examples to other members of God's family. This would not imply that God's standard for a bishop is higher than for other Christians. But it does suggest that the officially ordained teachers of the church must not only teach but also exemplify the "sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the teaching which accords with godliness" (p. 56).

Despite the forgoing quote, this writer [gb] strongly believes that God's standard for a bishop *is* a bit higher than the standard for other Christians, if only in the degree to which he is expected to possess the qualities listed. James said that not many were to become teachers because they would receive "a

stricter judgment" (3:1). If teachers will be scrutinized more closely than others, then certainly so will elders. In answer to the third question, in the case of a divorced man (which I believe is the principle application of the phrase), a second marriage—even if the exception is claimed—disqualifies a man from serving as an elder, and at the very least makes it inexpedient for him to serve. Coffman quoted the commentator Ward thusly:

"Above reproach" dominates the whole list. Thus anything reprehensible in the marital relations of a prospective elder would certainly disqualify him.

### **Faithful Children**

Now we will turn our attention to the other domestic qualification mentioned in these verses: the elder's relationship with his children.

Let us begin this part of the study by simply acknowledging the divine wisdom of this qualification. In his book titled **Biblical Eldership** Alexander Strauch says the Puritans referred to the family household as the "little church." This perspective of the family as a little church (or the church in miniature, a microcosm of the church) is in keeping with the Scriptural rationale that if a man cannot shepherd his own family, neither will he be able to shepherd the extended family of the church. Shepherding the local congregation is more like managing a family than like running a business. In fact, a man might be very successful in business, a capable public official, a brilliant office manager, or a heroic military leader; but be a terrible father and a terrible elder. Thus, a man's ability to oversee, guide, and manage his family household well is a prerequisite for overseeing the household of God.

David Lipscomb said, "The family is the nursery of the church and these two act and react upon each other so that a bad or weak father can never be an efficient elder." It is fair to say that a Christian man's family is God's proving ground—it is a place of testing to see whether he should be entrusted to serve as a steward or overseer of God's family. Paul is saying a man's ability to keep his children submissive and respectful is the very thing that causes us to believe in his ability to also keep the members of God's family submissive and respectful of the authority of God and to follow His will in all of their relationships with each other.

The Greek word here is **hupotasso** (subjection, submission) and it implies subordination. The word is used in reference to the wife's submission to her husband (Tit. 2:5) and Jesus' obedience to His parents (Lk. 2:51). In the context of 1 Timothy 3, we could also point out that Paul had already written to the church at Ephesus (where Timothy was now serving) admonishing children to obey their parents in the Lord and admonishing fathers to bring up



their children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (Eph. 6:1-4). The qualification follows specific teaching on this point, and there should have been evidence that fathers had complied with the teaching. The word "gravity" (respectful) is used by Paul in 1 Timothy 2:2 to describe the life of every Christian in relation to kings and those in positions of authority—"a quiet and peaceful life, godly and respectful in every way."

The very first training for godly conduct and lifestyle is in the home. If the child does not learn to respect authority at home, he likely will not learn it or show it in his relation to church leaders or at school or in society generally. If a man's children are open to the charge of being "profligate [wasteful] and insubordinate" (Tit. 1:6), it evidences his inability to teach, to thoroughly exemplify the will of Christ, and to rule his own family.

**Question:** What does the expression "faithful children" mean? Does it mean they must be faithful Christians or simply respectful of their father?

Zerr gives a concise treatment of these two views, including mention of Thayer, Robinson, and others who define the phrase "faithful" as "believers in Christ." But then he adopts the second view because he sees the main point as the father's ability to control his children and to command their respect. Numerous other commentators also quote from Thayer to prove the word *pistos* means "one worthy of trust, that can be relied upon," and thus maintain that the word does not necessarily mean the children must be members of the church. This view makes "faithful children" in Titus 1:6 equal to the phrase "having children in submission with all reverence" in 1 Timothy 3:4. Burton Coffman adopts this view as well.

In fact, the phrase "believing children" (or "faithful children") can indicate the relationship of a child to the elder as his father, thus suggesting trustworthiness and loyalty to a parent. On the other hand, it is relatively easy to show that the word is synonymous in the New Testament with being a Christian. Please consider 1 Timothy 4:3, 10; 6:2; Acts 10:45. Whether the word means "one who is trustworthy and reliable" or "one who is a Christian" is determined by the context. The context of both passages suggests the relationship of children to fathers, but it seems to me that in Titus there is more in view. Look at the words that immediately follow. The elder's children are "not open to the charge of being profligate." The Greek word means "wasteful." The KJV has "not accused of riot." This phrase suggests the children are old enough to participate in wrong living, therefore are also old enough to be Christians. The Greek word translated "profligate" is the same word used in Ephesians 5:18 in describing the conduct of one who is drunk with wine. It is also used in Luke 15:13 of the prodigal son who was guilty of

also used in Luke 15:13 of the prodigal son who was guilty of loose living. It seems safe to conclude that children old enough to conduct themselves in such a manner are also old enough to obey the gospel and embrace the Christian faith with its higher moral demands.

The Greek word translated "insubordinate" ("unruly," KJV) carries the meaning of "undisciplined and rebellious." It is also used in 1 Timothy 1:9 to describe those who are lawless (cf. Tit. 1:10). This fact suggests the children are old enough to recognize authority and reject it. It follows that they are also old enough to recognize and yield to the ethical requirements of the Christian life. Therefore, in this context, "faithful children" in the sense of being Christians is very defensible and is most likely the correct interpretation.

Don McCord made a valid observation in a sermon published in **Old Paths Pulpit**. He said, "I cannot understand how my children can be faithful to me only (if that is what the word means here), and not be faithful to God (as is by some contended). This is an incongruity of the first order." If a father teaches his children the Word of God, their faithfulness to him and their respect for his influence will guide them to embrace and obey that teaching, thus becoming a child of God. An elder's children are to be Christians, at least those who are old enough to be Christians, and every elder must have at least one child old enough to be a Christian.

**Question:** Is a father responsible for the faithfulness of his children after they have become adults? If a man's adult child becomes unfaithful, is he disqualified?

The context of both passages relates to a father's relationship with his children and the management of his household. Some scholars point out that this word "children" normally refers to those who have not yet attained independent adulthood and, therefore, the conduct of adult children is not under consideration. We all recognize that once we are born we are always the biological offspring of our parents, but there comes a time in human experience when we are no longer regarded as a child, but as an adult. Paul said, "When I became a man I put away childish things." There is likewise a time when a youngster is part of his father's household, and there is a time later when he establishes his own household and is responsible for himself.

The Greek word translated "house" in 1 Timothy 3:4 is *oikos*, which Thayer defines as "the inmates of a house, all the persons forming one family, a household." The qualification Paul gave to Timothy was "one that ruleth well his own house; having children in subjection with all gravity." When are the children considered members of his house? When does he rule over them

or have them under his authoritative supervision? When they are part of the household family.

We should not make a blanket judgment that if an adult child of an elder leaves the church or is deemed to be no longer faithful, he is thereby disqualified to serve. A quote from Robert Taylor in his book **The Elder and His Work** is insightful:

An elder is responsible for his children as long as they are under his rule at home. He is responsible for their behavior and the training he gave them while they were under his leadership. If they were Christians then and were faithful in the same while under his influence, then he met the qualification set forth in the Timothy and Titus tables of eldership requirements. It seems grossly unfair to say of any elder who has a son or daughter forty or more years of age and who has been gone from home for twenty or more years, who is now not faithful as should be the case, that this godly elder can no longer serve. Yet this same son or daughter was faithful to the Lord all the days he or she lived under the roof of the father.

Note first that the apparent unfairness of disqualifying a man solely on account of an adult child who goes astray is recognized by many and is troublesome to many. Here, wisdom and church autonomy must be relied upon. The church has to answer the question, "Do the actions of the adult child affect the elder's reputation or his ability to guide the church? How does he deal with the error in his own adult children? Does he countenance it, overlook it, or does he openly rebuke it? Second, circumstances may arise involving adult children that would clearly warrant an elder's resignation or removal. For instance, if a man had several children who were faithful while at home, but two or more of them left the church as soon as they were old enough, we would naturally question how grounded they were. Perhaps we would wonder if they were church members because of their own convictions, or did they only play the part due to pressure from their father? But these kinds of situations should be considered on their own merit and within the local congregation. We should not place them all in a generic category without considering the circumstances and whether those circumstances in any way mitigate (not justify) the person's departure from the church. In fact, it creates problems if the adult child of an elder departs from the faith, but it does not necessarily disqualify the man.

**Question:** Must an elder have more than one child?

Some argue that the word "children" is plural and therefore must mean two or more. Others say the word is used in a generic sense and can mean one

or more. As always, Scripture is its own best interpreter and offers abundant testimony to the fact that the word "children" even in its plural form—is used generically and cannot be dogmatically bound to require more than one child. In fact, the Bible uses the word "children" to include only one child. There are numerous examples. In Genesis 21:7, Sarah exclaimed with joy, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah should have given children suck? For I have born him a son." Her one son Isaac satisfied the requirement of the word children. Rachel said, "Give me children or else I die" (Gen. 30:1). Did she mean that giving birth to only one child would not alleviate her barren condition and fulfill her hunger for motherhood? Is a woman with only one child less of a mother than the woman with multiple children? The Year of Jubilee brought freedom to the servant and his children (Lev. 25:40–41). Does this mean that a servant with only one child would be denied his freedom because he did not have a plurality? The answer to these questions is evident. More importantly, there are numerous New Testament examples of the same principle (see Mt. 19:29; Mk. 10:29; 1 Tim. 5:4; Col. 3:21; Eph. 6:4). Even in our text, Paul says, "...faithful children not accused of riot or unruly" (Tit. 1:6). How many unruly children does it take to disqualify a man? Do we require two or more? Clearly, no one would argue for such a meaning in any of these places. In fact, we know that the same rule of usage applies to our language today. The point in 1 Timothy and Titus is not how prolific a man's procreative powers have been, but how effective the man has been in rearing and training his offspring, regardless of their number.

In summation, the requirement of the passage may be stated thusly: an elder's children must be in subjection to him. Those old enough to be Christians must be faithful, hopefully for life, but at least as long as they are living at home under the father's supervision and care. If we allow ourselves to get so caught up (or bogged down) in arguments about the number of children, we are likely to neglect to give the proper attention to the more crucial matter, namely, whether the prospective elder has a relationship with his offspring that reflects his ability to teach them God's Word and to exemplify godliness in his own life. A father is to nurture his children in such a way that they love and respect him and desire to imitate his faith.

Some may argue that a man who has raised two or more children has experience in settling conflicts that the man with only one child does not have. However, the man with only one child, who has raised him in such a way that he is not spoiled, but obedient and respectful, has had an experience just as useful in the eldership.

David Lipscomb wrote:

A man who knows how to train children and lead them in the right way—in a kind and gentle manner so as to make worthy men and women of them—is exercising the qualities given here for the bishop. The same qualities are needed for the proper training of a family that are needed for the training of a congregation...His management of his family is the evidence of his ability to lead the church.

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# Christians and their Use of Money

*by Art Lynch*

In examining this topic, there are some basic statements with which we should start. First, the responsibility for financial giving is a critical component of the Christian's responsibility. Without the giving part, there would be no discussions of the Christian and their money. Second, we would like to look at the term "treasury" and specifically its use in connection with the temple. Third, we will consider what the Scriptures say about the collection and how it should be used.

## The Treasury

The word "treasury" is used in the New Testament six times and translates two Greek words. They are as follows:

**gazophulakion** (1049), from **gaza**, "a treasure," **phulake**, "a guard," is used by Josephus for a special room in the women's court in the temple in which gold and silver bullion was kept. This seems to be referred to in Joh 8:20; in Mar 12:41 (twice), Mar 12:43 and Luk 21:1 it is used of the trumpet shaped or ram's-horn-shaped chests, into which the temple offerings of the people were cast. There were 13 chests, six for such gifts in general, seven for distinct purposes.

**korbanus** (2878), signifying "the place of gifts," denoted the temple "treasury," Mat 27:6.

"Treasury" is a term that was used in the Old Testament and the Gospels to refer to the gifts given by the people to support the work of God. This "treasury" gives us some insights into uses for the money under the Old Testament law. We can see how, based on each of these thirteen trumpets that the Lord could distinguish the contributions. (Mk. 12:41; Lk. 21:1). There was also a special treasury-chamber that was used to deposit money that was used for educating children of the pious poor.

In his book **The Temple**, Alfred Edersheim says the court covered a space upwards of two hundred feet square. All around ran a simple colonnade and within it, against the wall, the thirteen chests, or "trumpets," for charitable contributions. These thirteen chests were narrow at the mouth and wide at the bottom, shaped like trumpets, hence the name.

Their specific objects were carefully marked on them. Nine were for the receipt of what was legally due by worshippers; the other four for

strictly voluntary gifts. Trumpets one and two were appropriated to the half-shekel Temple-tribute of the current and of the past year.

Into trumpet three those women who had to bring turtledoves for a burnt and sin offering dropped their equivalent in money, which was daily taken out and a corresponding number of turtledoves offered. This not only saved the labor of so many separate sacrifices, but spared the modesty of those who might not wish to have the occasion or the circumstances of their offering to be publicly known.

Trumpet four received the value of the offerings of young pigeons, trumpet five received contributions for the wood used in the temple, trumpet six received money for incense, and trumpet seven received money for the golden vessels for the ministry. If a man had put aside a certain sum for a sin offering, any money that was left over after its purchase was cast into trumpet eight. Similarly, trumpets nine through thirteen were destined for what was left over from trespass-offerings, offerings of birds, the offering of the Nazarites, of the cleansed lepers, and voluntary offerings. This practice gives the impression the trumpets were used as a savings account for the unidentified needs of the temple. This space of the treasury was probably where the Feast of Tabernacles (Jn. 7:8; 8:20) was conducted.

### Almsgiving

The word "treasury" is *korbanus* and means "a votive offering and the offering consecrated to the temple fund; by extension, it refers to the treasury itself, i.e., the room where the contribution boxes stood." Mark provides a clear account picturing Jesus as He focused on the manner in which people were putting money into the treasury. Jesus knew how they gave and was concerned about it!

And Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury: and many that were rich cast in much (Mk. 12:41).

Jesus sat by the treasury, the court of the temple containing the collection boxes. **Gazophulakion** is the word used for treasury. Holes were bored in the top of each box into which people placed their money. Jesus noted that the crowd of people consisted of both rich and poor. The word "beheld" means "to be a spectator or to discern." Christ was discerning how or in what manner the people cast money into the collection boxes. It was clear to him that the widow gave the most in terms of quality. The widow's contribution was significant enough that the Lord called the disciples over to the treasury.

And he called unto him his disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury (Mk. 12:43).

The Greek word for "called" is **proskaleomai** and means "to call toward oneself; i.e., to summon; or invite." Jesus was so happy with what He saw that he felt that the disciples just had to see! To my knowledge, there are only three other times the Lord called His disciples to him in this manner: (1) Matthew 10:1; Mark 6:7, (2) Luke 6:13, and (3) Luke 19:15.

Jesus points out that a key component of the treasury was the attitude surrounding the giving to God. Likewise, in the New Testament Church, attitude is the key component in the collection for the saints. Let us consider the practice of almsgiving in order to help us better understand the Christian's responsibility to contribute. Consider the following verses:

Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: that thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly (Mt. 6:1-4).

Here the discussion begins in verse one by talking about the attitude that is necessary when one chooses to give something before God. The word "alms" means: "**eleemosune** (1654), connected with **eleemon**, 'merciful,' signifies (a) 'mercy, pity, particularly in giving alms,' Mat 6:1 (see below), 2 4: Act 10:2; 24:17; (b) the benefaction itself, the 'alms' (the effect for the cause), Luk 11:41; 12:33; Act 3:2-3, 10; 9:36, 'alms deeds'; Act 10:2, 4. 31" (Vines).<sup>1</sup>

The laws of Moses made ample provision against poverty and if they had been strictly kept, in letter and spirit, there could not have been any destitution. The Gospels recognized the duty of almsgiving and enforced it, and this virtue was a peculiar mark of a Christian in the early age. Almsgiving was not made a definite rule, but was left to the constraint of inward principle and feeling to prove the sincerity of love.

<sup>1</sup> In Mat 6:1, the RV, translating *dikaiousune*, according to the most authentic texts, has "righteousness," for KJV, "alms." Historically, it is explained as a great work of kindness shown by the Jewish person of old. The Hebrews had no word for a free gift to the poor, such as alms, but used righteousness for such acts.



Encouragement of idle vagrancy was denounced as wrong and such idlers were scorned. Since the destruction of Jerusalem, the Jews have regarded their poor as the people of God and those who give to them are credited with as much virtue as if they kept all the commandments, and they teach that alms-giving atones for their sins.

We see more about the giving of alms in Luke's account of the Jesus and the Pharisees. Listen to the principle that he teaches those who were so worried about the outward things.

But rather give alms of such things as ye have; and, behold, all things are clean unto you (Lk. 11:41).

But give for alms those things which are within; and behold, everything is clean for you (RSV).

But give what is inside the dish to the poor, and everything will be clean for you (NIV).

In this passage, the Pharisees have confronted the Lord about the washing of hands. They were so focused on the outward traditions that they had forgotten that the inward person was the most important! Jesus had to remind them that it was what was on the inside that counted. In his next statement He says, "But rather give alms..." He tells them that the way to improve their perspective is to start from an attitude of giving! Why would He say such a thing? Giving causes a cleansing effect on human beings! By showing compassion for the poor, all things would become clean for them.

In the next chapter, Luke records more about the attitude of giving to God and more specifically putting first things first.

For all these things do the nations of the world seek after: and your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things. But rather seek ye the kingdom of God: and all these things shall be added unto you. Fear not, little flock: for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. 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 (12:30-33).

Here we have the lesson of who is in control of things. God will supply all of our needs and even tells us not to worry about the things that will be happening around us. God knows what we need (see vv. 30-32)

Let us consider how God viewed the alms offered by Cornelius:

And when he looked on him, he was afraid, and said, What is it, Lord? And he said unto him, Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God (Acts 10:4).

Cornelius stared at him in fear. "What is it, Lord?" he asked. The angel answered, "Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God (NIV).

The offering of alms was important to God. Cornelius was noted for his: (1) godly devotion, (2) respect for God, (3) almsgiving, and (4) prayer. The term "alms" in verse 4 indicates compassion shown to the poor. Cornelius' acts of service were a memorial before God. When God says that there is something worth memorializing, then we should take note of it! What kind of memorial have you built with prayer and alms?

### The Collection for the Saints—Its Purpose

Members of the church are to contribute weekly to a common fund for the support of the work of the church.

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. And when I come, whomsoever ye shall approve by your letters, them will I send to bring your liberality unto Jerusalem (1 Cor. 16:1-3).

The collection for the saints was used for various purposes as is highlighted in the Scriptures. Below we have tried to chart out the scriptural uses of the Lord's money under the Old and New Testaments.

| Topic       | Old Testament   | New Testament          |
|-------------|---|------------------------|
| Fatherless  | Deut. 24:17   | 1 Cor. 9:9             |
| Widows      | Deut. 24:18   | 1 Tim. 5:16; Lk. 12:41 |
| Strangers   | Deut. 24:19   | Acts 11:29-30          |
| Priests     | 2 Kgs. 12:16; Lev. 2:3; Num 3:48; Josh 13:14; Deut. 2:6-8   |                        |
| Poor Saints |   | Acts 11:29-30          |
| Elders      |   | 1 Tim. 5:10, 17        |
| Preachers   |   | 1 Cor. 9:9             |
| Temple      | Ex. 35:27; 36:5; 1 Chron. 29:3; 2 Chron. 24:6, 10; Ezra 1:6 |                        |

## Care for Needy Saints

Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea (Acts 11:29).

In this verse the writer tells us that the learners, each or every one according to his ability sent aid. These brethren determined (Gk., "to mark out or bound to appoint, decree, specify") to help based on the need before them. Paul wrote:

That I should be the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Ghost (Rom. 15:16).

The language here indicates that first Paul was a minister of Jesus Christ and that he was ministering the gospel. The word "minister" is from the Greek **leitourgos** and means "a public servant, i.e., a functionary in the temple or gospel, a worshipper or beneficiary." This word conveys the responsibilities similar to those obligations of the temple worshiper. He then uses a different Greek word for minister, **hierourgeo**, which means "temple-worker, i.e., officiate as priest," to call to mind that he is ministering the gospel of God.

Paul introduces some similarities between the Old and New Testament roles that would lead one to think that he would have been supported under the Old Testament or the New Testament for the work that was done to further the work of the Lord. Listen to this verse from the RSV and NIV:

to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit (RSV).

to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles with the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit (NIV).

Paul continues the discussion later in the chapter about the situation in Jerusalem as can be seen from the verse noted below in the various translations.

For it hath pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor saints which are at Jerusalem (Rom. 15:26).

It is important to note the reaction of folks at Macedonia and Achaia. It was one of **eudokeo** ("to think well of to approve"). The Christians determined they were in **koinonia** ("partnership, participation") with their brethren who were suffering. The funds were to be distributed among the **ptochoi** ("beggars, paupers") saints in Jerusalem.

In the next verse we learn that they were pleased due to the fact that they were about to be partakers in the spiritual and carnal things. The language

conveys they were sharers in spiritual things and under obligation to also share with others in the carnal things! From this it seems there was some obligation on the part of Gentile Christians to share with others.

The Corinthians set aside money to care for need saints.

For the administration of this service not only supplieth the want of the saints, but is abundant also by many thanksgivings unto God; whiles by the experiment of this ministration they glorify God for your professed subjection unto the gospel of Christ, and for your liberal distribution unto them, and unto all men; and by their prayer for you, which long after you for the exceeding grace of God in you. Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift (2 Cor. 9:12-15).

### Care for Widows

The use of the Lord's money to support widows was both proper and needed in the days of the apostles. However, there was not a blanket authorization to help any and all widows from the church collection. Paul clearly shows the need to look at the basic individual responsibilities before charging the church. He told Timothy the following instructions:

If any man or woman that believeth have widows, let them relieve them, and let not the church be charged; that it may relieve them that are widows indeed. Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine. For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The labourer is worthy of his reward (1 Tim. 5:16-18).

The widows indeed could be supported by the treasury, but the requirement is that the relatives provide relief or support to them. In the Greek, the term "relieve" indicates "to help." "Charged" in the Greek means "to weigh down." Thus, the instruction is, do not let the church be weighed down when others can help.

### Support of Preachers of the Gospel

In his writings to the church at Corinth, Paul says he does not want the church to be confused about the liberty afforded to those preaching the gospel in a fulltime capacity.

Or I only and Barnabas, have not we power to forbear working? Who goeth a warfare any time at his own charges? Who planteth a vineyard, and eateth not of the fruit thereof? or Who feedeth a flock, and eateth not of the milk of the flock? (1 Cor. 9:6-7).

Paul first insists on the ability and the right of the soldiers of the Lord to forbear or not work on the carnal job. He emphasizes the point by showing how important it is for one who goes to war to keep his focus on fighting and

not on keeping the supplies needed to sustain him. The need to avoid distractions was of great significance. Further, no one goes to war and pays the bill individually! The Greek word is **opsonion**, "the rations for the soldier and the stipend or pay." The need to support the soldier is clear. Next is the illustration of the vineyard and flock, again this is clearly stated. Similar illustrations appear in Deuteronomy 20:6 and 1 Peter 5:2.

Paul writes:

And not that only, but who was also chosen of the churches to travel with us with this grace, which is administered by us to the glory of the same Lord, and declaration of your ready mind: avoiding this, that no man should blame us in this abundance which is administered by us: providing for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men (2 Cor. 8:19-21).

The highlight of this passage is the phrase, "that no man should blame us in this abundance." The word "abundance" is from a Greek word that indicates liberality or excess; the word "administration" means, "to be an attendant." The thought is similar to the priest attending the temple.

Regarding financial support he had received from Philippi. Paul wrote:

Notwithstanding ye have well done, that ye did communicate with my affliction. Now ye Philippians know also, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only. For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity. Not because I desire a gift: but I desire fruit that may abound to your account. But I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God. But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:14-19).

### Support of Elders

Elders can be supported from the church collection. In the following verses, we see that the elder is worthy of double honor. They were to be supported just as the ox is fed from the very corn that he plows; so the elders plow in the cornfield of the Lord and thus are worthy of the honor of eating the corn.

Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine. For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The labourer is worthy of his reward (1 Tim. 5:17-18).

Peter writes:

Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind (1 Pet. 5:2).

Peter warns those over the flock to not be influenced by filthy lucre, i.e., eagerness for base gain. This passage shows that the ones feeding the flock can receive financial support.

### **Parable of the Unjust Steward (Lk 16:1ff)**

And he said also unto his disciples, There was a certain rich man, which had a steward; and the same was accused unto him that he had wasted his goods (v. 1).

He wasted them not as we would think of today in the sense of carelessness and extravagant spending. His wasting involved fraud and concealment of his action from his master.

And he called him, and said unto him, How is it that I hear this of thee? give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward (v. 2).

He is required to give an account of his stewardship because he could no longer be a steward. This involved him providing a full accounting of where the business stood at that point in time (a balance sheet & income statement). The reality of not having his position any longer is staring him square in the face.

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad. Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are made manifest unto God; and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences (2 Cor. 5:10-11).

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil (Eccl. 12:13-14).

Then the steward said within himself, What shall I do? for my lord taketh away from me the stewardship: I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed (v. 3).

He immediately decides that there are types of work he will not do. Common labor (digging in a field) is beneath him and he is too proud to beg. Notice how the thought process works with him in dealing with his situation:

- He is not doing his job (his fault)
- His fruits become obvious (people see his works)
- He knew what his responsibility was

- He knew what his state or status was with his boss!
- What could he do?
  - He could fake it! (that is what he was doing)
  - He could quit
  - He could work hard and pay it back (repent)
  - He could get an honest job and work hard
  - He could beg
- By process of elimination, he decides working hard and begging are out since surely a man of his status in life could not be seen doing these things by others who know that he is a steward.
- So he does the next best thing:
  - He steals from his Lord
  - He lies to his Lord
  - He cheats his Lord
  - He transacts business dishonestly
  - He does harm to others by the lies
- But he is still too proud to beg and work hard

I am resolved what to do, that, when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses (v. 4).

If we do not want to serve faithfully, it shocks God so much that He tells us to use mammon to obtain eternal habitation. His plan was to make friends with all of the people by forgiving their debt to the lord. The lord is faithful, he was shocked at the unfaithful servant.

The main point of verse nine is: be friends with rich folks so they can help you when your riches fail and welcome you into their homes (dwellings). Note that it requires faithfulness to do anything in the world. The world recognizes faithfulness and rewards it.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, let us keep God's purpose in mind, viz., the furthering of the gospel. Let us keep the thought of our individual responsibilities first and the collection second, and most of all may we prayerfully consider how we use the Lord's money. 7740 W. Michigan, Glendale, AZ 85302; [art85@earthlink.net](mailto:art85@earthlink.net)