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Speaking Smooth Things

Johnie Edwards

We are warned by apostolic teaching that there will be those, “. . . that serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple” (Rom. 16:18).

The trend today, among a lot of brethren, is to preach and teach in such a way as not to make one feel uncomfortable in the pew and that everybody should be able to leave the assembly only feeling good about themselves!

It is not uncommon to find, in some churches of Christ, the same attitude that prevailed in the thoughts of Israel of old: “Which say to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, Prophecy not unto us right things, *smooth things*, prophecy deceits” (Isa. 30:10).

We hear such things as, “Just preach Jesus and forget about the church”; “we must minister to the whole man; our main focus ought to be grace-righteous and not our own works-righteousness”; “if thou marry, thou hast not sinned” (unqualified); and other such statements.

It is time we get back to, “Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season, reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine” (2 Tim. 4:2).

It is to this end that this Special Issue is dedicated. We pray that you will take your Bible, read and study, and if these things be so, get busy obeying and teaching them.

I want to thank all of the writers of these good articles for taking the time to write that all of us might be aware of the “smooth things” which are being taught today!

Special Issue

“Speaking Smooth Things”

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Speaking Smooth Things About . . .

Marriage, Divorce & Remarriage

Donnie V. Rader

This special issue gives evidence that there is a trend towards softening the gospel message. As society and the religious world move in a more liberal direction, we too are affected. In that effort to be more tolerant, some have made the gospel message more palatable by “smoothing it out” in various ways.

What the Bible says about marriage, divorce and remarriage has not been exempt from this approach. A softened or smoother version of what the Lord taught on this subject would obviously be more acceptable to the masses. This is not to say that those who teach some of the ideas discussed below have that as their motive.

What Does The Word Say?

1. *The text.* Jesus said, “And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery” (Matt. 19:9). Though other passages address the subject, this one well summarizes what the Bible teaches on divorce and remarriage.

2. *What does the text say about divorce?* When Jesus was asked whether a man could divorce his wife for any reason (Matt. 19:3), he answered no. Though he didn’t give a “yes” or “no” reply, the reasons he cited point to that conclusion (vv. 4-6). The only reason for divorce given by the Lord is “fornication” (v. 9; cf. Matt. 5:32). Divorce for any other cause is without biblical authority.

3. *What does the text say about remarriage?* Jesus said that the man who puts away his wife (for a cause other than fornication) and marries another commits adultery. In that same text Jesus said that a man who puts away his wife (for fornication) and marries another does not commit adultery. In the second clause of our text, Jesus said that the one who is put away commits adultery when he remarries.

4. *What does that demand?* If we teach what Jesus taught in Matthew 19:9, our message will not always be “smooth” to the ears of our listeners. Those who divorce for causes other than fornication will be

See “Marriage” p. 378

“Speak Unto Us Smooth Things”

Johnie Edwards

Many today are crying for the same kind of things that Israel of old asked for when it was said of the Lord’s people, “Which say to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, Prophecy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits” (Isa. 30:10). Who would have ever thought that God’s own chosen people would have had such an attitude as this toward God and his word? In essence they were saying don’t tell us the truth, we don’t want to hear it. Things haven’t changed much, have they? What was the problem then and what is the problem today?

They Were Rebellious

Isaiah called them a rebellious people. “That this is a rebellious people, lying children, children that will not hear the law of the Lord” (Isa. 30:9). The Lord referred to them as “rebellious children” (Isa. 30:1). Stephen was stoned when he referred to the children of these people in these words: “Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears ye do always resist the Holy Spirit: as your fathers did, so do you” (Acts 7:51). When folks want to rebel against the Lord’s will, they will demand smooth things to be taught! We are seeing that being done today among a lot of brethren.

Did Not Take Counsel Of God

In commenting on his people, God said, “. . . that take counsel, but not of me” (Isa. 30:1). Hosea declared that Israel failed to consult God on spiritual matters. “My people ask counsel at their stocks, and their staff declareth unto them . . .” (Hos. 4:12). Instead of asking God, these people asked a piece of wood, their stocks and staffs! Can you imagine God’s people talking to a stick instead of God? Perhaps their stocks declared smooth things to them!

They Rejected Knowledge

Those who demanded smooth things also rejected God’s knowledge. Hosea penned, “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of God, I will also forget thy children” (Hos. 4:6). These people simply did not want to hear what God had to say. They were like those Paul mentioned, “And

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even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient” (Rom. 1:28). Those today who desire to hear smooth things do not want to hear the whole counsel of God preached! And this is sad.

They Set Up Kings, But Not By God

At one time God’s form of government for his people was that of judges. The Lord’s people grew tired of judges and cried, “Give us a king to judge us . . .” (1 Sam. 8:6). They no longer wanted to hear what God had to say. Their desire was to hear smooth things. So, they said, “. . . now make us a king to judge us like all the nations” (1 Sam. 8:5). They were saying, we want to be like those around us and we want to hear what they are hearing. Sound familiar? A lot of churches of Christ are crying the same cry, “we want to be like those around us.” So, speak unto us smooth things. Give us human organizations to do the work that the local church needs to be doing in evangelism, edification and benevolence. We do not want to hear sermons on the “organization and work of the New Testament church,” is the cry of many in churches of Christ. We are told these are sermons of the ’50s and we are living in the ’90s!” Brethren, this just means that we need to get back to basics and get to preaching on such things as the work and organization of the church.

Turn Aside Out Of The Path

Israel of old said, “Get you out of the way, turn aside out of the path, cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us” (Isa. 30:11). These people were so set on hearing smooth things that they wanted nothing to do with God.

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I weep with God’s weeping prophet Jeremiah as he faced the same attitude in his day. “Thus said the Lord, Stand ye in the ways, and see and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein” (Jer. 6:16). Many today do not want to hear sermons on the “strait and narrow way” (Matt. 7:13-14), but sermons on smooth things — things that make them leave feeling good and comfortable with a feeling that all things are well, when they may not be! I am not opposed to preaching sermons that cause people to leave feeling good about themselves when they have been obedient to God’s will. But, when people who are living in sin, leave feeling good about themselves, it is past time to examine our preaching.

They Despised God’s Word

God’s people did not respect God’s word. In fact, they despised his word. “Wherefore thus saith the Holy One of Israel, Because ye despise this word, and trust in oppression and perverseness, and stay thereon . . . (Isa. 30:12). Their failure to listen to God’s word brought destruction upon them (Isa. 30:13-14). When people despise what God has to say, they will demand smooth things be taught. After Paul had instructed the young gospel preacher, Timothy, to “preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine” (2 Tim. 4:2), he then said, “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears” (2 Tim. 4:3). What these folks were really saying was: “. . . speak unto us smooth things” (Isa. 30:10).

Today

Today, some brethren only want to hear “positive-preaching.” I am not opposed to preaching positive sermons. In fact, I do a lot of that. While at the same time, there needs to be some, “reproving, and rebuking” (2 Tim. 4:2), there must be some “shalt nots” as well with some “shalls.” By the preaching of some today in churches of Christ, you would think that all the false teachers have quit preaching false doctrines and everybody is preaching the truth. We hear such statements, “my righteousness is not based upon my personal righteousness but upon God’s grace” and, “I urge you to get hold of Chuck Swindoll’s book, *Grace Awakening*.” If you want to hear some smooth things, read Swindoll’s book. When we are told that our main focus ought to be on positive, grace-filled things with much love, joy, and excitement as it was in the New Testament, it is time to get back to some basic preaching which includes having, “no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them” (Eph. 5:11).

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The Lord's Church

Harold Fite

The theme of this special issue of *Truth Magazine* revolves around Isaiah 30:10. God's people wanted a change! They informed their seers that they would have to change their way of thinking. They instructed the prophets to cease prophesying "right things," but "prophesy deceits" — to speak "smooth things." God's word was too restrictive and condemning. They substituted their wisdom for God's wisdom. They were only willing to hear what they wanted to hear. They were probably buoyed by the thought "that a new day is dawning in Israel."

Today we hear an ill "Wind of Change" blowing across the kingdom of God. "Change Agents" are telling us we are going to have to change our way of thinking about the church or it will die. They have deduced that "the church is not relevant in these modern and changing times." It is not meeting the needs of the people. We must change its nature and form and work to gain a greater relevance in the world. This "will bring the lost into a church environment that makes sense to them."

Those who seek change tell us traditional worship must go! According to those who advocate changing the Lord's church, we must "change our way of worship so that it will be more appealing to the present generation of younger adults," who want "the freedom to worship in their heart language." Solos, special singing groups, drama, lifting up holy hands, hand-clapping, testifying, contemporary music are just a part of this heart language. The words of the wise man are appropriate here: "Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil" (Eccl. 5:1).

What are these needs the "baby-boomers" are demanding the church satisfy? For the most part they are physical and social. Churches are becoming more frequently involved in all kinds of social programs to satisfy the selfish, carnal demands of the populace. Churches are

becoming social institutions, preaching a social gospel, and church buildings are becoming community centers for social activities.

Not one of these programs, or all combined, will save one soul! But those who advocate changing the Lord's church recognize that social and entertaining programs will draw more people than the pure gospel of Christ. Those who are pushing change are seeking to destroy the uniqueness of the Lord's church and shape it in the mold of denominationalism. It places them on more of a competitive plane with the denominations. To denominationalize the church of our Lord is to drain it of its strength and destroy its uniqueness.

Is the church relevant to our times? Does it fill the needs of people today? The church in its primitive form is entirely relevant for the spiritual needs of man, but becomes highly irrelevant when placed in an area for which it is not designed. One can know the work of the church if the nature of the church is known.

The church is spiritual in nature (John 18:36). Jesus said, "The kingdom of God comes not with observation: neither shall they say, Lo here! or There! for lo, the kingdom of God is within you (Luke 17:20, 21).

Its purpose is to give culture to the soul. It exists, not for the entertainment of the masses, to alleviate hunger in the world, or to correct all social inequities and bad environments. The church doesn't minister to carnal minds. The carnal mind doesn't demand spiritual food. That is why the church is not relevant to some (cf. John 6:26, 27).

The church was conceived in God's mind (Eph.1:4-5, 11; 3:11); constructed by God through Christ (Eph.1:19-20); fulfilled in Christ (Eph.1:22, 23; Gal.1:22; 1 Thess. 2:14), and reigned over by him (1 Tim. 1:17; 6:15). He is

God's Righteousness Versus the Imputed Righteousness of Christ

Connie W. Adams

The ecumenical mood has caught up with us. Instead of uniformity of belief and practice, based on objective truth, the going concern is for "unity in diversity." In an attempt to broaden the base of fellowship, a smooth, but deadly Calvinistic doctrine has been pressed into service. It opens the door for fellowship with those who advocate instrumental music, institutionalism, pre-millennialism, false teaching and practice on marriage, divorce and remarriage, and who knows what next.

The Protestant doctrine of the imputation of the personal righteousness of Christ to the Christian, makes the grace of God an umbrella to cover sins of "weakness" and "ignorance." Instead of working to bring all to agreement with "the faith once delivered to the saints," a warm syrup has been poured all over us so that we can "build bridges, not fences" as some like to express it.

False Assumptions

"For the Lord promises nothing except to perfect keepers

of his law" (John Calvin). "His perfect law must be vindicated by being kept perfectly in a human life" (Edward Fudge, *A Perfect Salvation*). But we have a problem here. Man does not perfectly keep God's law. Ah, but Jesus did. "As Bunyan so beautifully put it, for thirty-three years Christ wove a garment of perfect righteousness to be given away" (*Present Truth*, April 1977, 21). Since we do not perfectly keep God's law, and Christ did, then somehow his perfect life must be credited to us. This is the doctrine of the imputation of the perfect righteousness of Christ. It is assumed then that the perfect life of Christ is a substitute for my sins. The truth is that his death was a substitute for my penalty.

What About Imputed Righteousness?

In Romans 4:3-8, Paul spoke of Abraham and said, "Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness." Even so, when the ungodly turns to believe on him who justifies, "his faith is counted for righteousness." He then quoted David who describes the blessedness

the head of the church (Col. 1:18), and exercises all authority in it (Col. 1:18; Eph. 1:22, 23; Jas. 4:12). Who is man to think he can improve upon that which God has created? How dare man prostitute the worship of God and make it a time of entertainment to satisfy carnal desires. "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:24). In doing so we will be worshiping "decently and in order" (1 Cor. 14:40).

Brethren, "It is an ill wind that blows nobody good." Be not "tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, in craftiness, after the wiles

of error" (Eph. 4:14). "By their smooth and fair speech they beguile the hearts of the innocent" (Rom. 6:18).

The church is equipped to do all for which it has been created. The passing from one generation to the next doesn't change this truth. The church is just as relevant today as it was in the first century. The church in Christ is designed to satisfy all the spiritual needs of man. This is the real need.

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of those unto whom God “imputeth righteousness without works.” “Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.” To impute means to credit to one’s account. Paul said nothing here about imputing the personal righteousness of Christ to man. The man to whom God does not impute sin is the one whose iniquities are forgiven and whose sins are covered.

Paul said that in the gospel is “the righteousness (justification) of God revealed from faith to faith, as it is written: the just shall live by faith” (Rom. 1:16-17). That “faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17). When a sinner hears, believes, and obeys the gospel, then on the basis of the shed blood of Christ (his sacrificial death, not his perfect life) God forgives and sins are covered. To that man God does not impute sin. Why? Because his sin is forgiven, covered. He is now justified, proclaimed righteous. He has emerged from darkness into marvelous light (1 Pet. 2:9).

But this smooth false doctrine proceeds from one false assumption to another. If Christ’s perfect obedience is transferred to our account, then it is not necessary for us to obey the gospel to be saved. Then when we sin, either through ignorance or weakness, when God looks upon us, he does not see the sin at all, but only the perfect obedience of Christ. Even though we may persist in this ignorant or weak sin, it does not matter. We are under the umbrella of grace. When that good-hearted man worships with the instrument, or supports the missionary society, or endorses church support of various human institutions through which to do the work of the church, or that sincere preacher who advocates that we should extend fellowship to those who have divorced and remarried without fornication as the cause of divorce, then we should not be judgmental about any of that, for God only sees the perfect life of Christ, not the sinful practice. Smooth? Yea, verily! Wrong? To be sure.

Fallacies

Such a doctrine *eliminates obedience*. Christ is the author of “eternal salvation to all them that obey him” (Heb. 5:8-9). Saul of Tarsus was to go into Damascus for there he would be told what he “must do” (Acts 9:6). We can’t even get a verse like these quoted before the charge of “legalism” pierces the air. We are told that we have just ruled out grace. Grace is the basis of our salvation. God did not offer his favor because we deserved it. But the question that has to be settled is whether or not that favor is bestowed conditionally or unconditionally. If unconditionally, then there is no escape from universal salvation. Grace is still grace when we believe and act upon what God said.

This notion *denies* the truth of *personal accountability*. “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” (Ezek. 18:20). “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” (2 Cor. 5:10). There is not a single passage which states that the righteousness of Christ is imputed to anyone. There is no passage which says that our sins were imputed to Christ.

This doctrine *falsifies the nature of man*. “Man . . . by nature utterly void of that holiness required by the law of God, positively inclined to evil. . .” (*The Standard Manual For Baptist Churches*, by Edward T. Hiscox, 60). “The fact that man, by nature, is a sinner . . . It is an eternal principle that man, because he is man, sins” (*The Grace of God*, by Edward Fudge, 14, 17). Does man sin? Yes. Does he ever obey the Lord? Yes. Now, when one obeys the Lord, does that mean that he is “inclined to good” and that “by nature”? If not, why not? The truth of the matter is that God made us with the power of choice. Every time I have ever sinned, I chose to do it. Every time I ever did something right, I chose to do it. Neither the nature of Adam nor the perfect life of Christ has been imputed.

This view *offers false security*. It leads people to think that error is as acceptable as truth. “Buy the truth and sell it not” (Prov. 23:23). A perverted gospel is not as good as the real thing. If you think it is, then ponder Galatians 1:6-9. Those who are determined, for whatever reason, to shelter those who teach error, do them no favor and render a disservice to the coming generation. Don’t be deceived by smooth things.

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Romans 14 and Fellowship

Tom M. Roberts

The militancy and aggressiveness of the gospel of Christ is an undeniable facet of New Testament Christianity. The uniqueness and distinctiveness of Jesus as the Son of God, the church which he established, and the “one faith” that the Holy Spirit revealed allows no quarter or compromise with false Christs, counterfeit churches, and perverted gospels. A battle has been engaged between the forces of good and evil and we are involved whether we like it or not. Jesus said, “He who is not with me is against me” (Matt. 12:30). Timothy was urged by the apostle Paul (who, as much as any other disciple, exemplified militancy) to “fight the good warfare” (1 Tim. 1:18). He also instructed the Ephesian brethren to “Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand” (6:11ff).

In such a battle, there can be no fraternizing, no compromise with the enemy. The Bible is replete with examples of those who compromised: Adam and Eve, Balaam, Samson, King Saul, Judas, Demas, and many others. The Judaizing teachers wanted compromise on which gospel they accepted and were soundly rebuked by Paul (Acts 15:1ff; Gal. 1:6-9; etc.). From ancient times, advocates of “unity in diversity” (compromise) have had prominent spokespersons. The theme of this issue of *Truth Magazine* reflects the warning of Isaiah against those of his day who said, “Speak to us smooth things, prophesy deceits” (30:10). Against this sentiment, Paul warned that we must, “Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but accord-

ing to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables” (2 Tim. 4:2-4).

Every generation has those who are ashamed of the gospel (Rom. 1:16), those who want “smooth things” and those who have “itching ears.” Like those of Israel who wanted to be “like the nations about us” (1 Sam. 8:5), we have some in the church who plead for unity in diversity, who want tolerance toward error, who are willing to sheath their sword and sit down at tables of compromise with those in error. Reactions against strong preaching abound. The editor and staff writers of *Truth Magazine* have been accused of “turning off a whole generation of younger preachers” because of the “hard preaching” being done. Many churches today are filled with unrest because strong preaching offends some while others feel that distinctive preaching is being omitted. I know of churches which have had to plead for their preachers to speak plainly, to preach a distinctive gospel message. Some of these preachers have gone into the liberal, institutional fellowship because they refused to preach the distinctive gospel in a local church and courted unity in diversity until asked to leave. When they leave, they find a church where smooth things are more palatable, where tolerance for error has a home. Epithets of disdain are hurled against those who preach “the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27). They are “watchdogs,” “guardians of orthodoxy,” “new Catholics,” “buzzards looking for dead carrion,” or “brotherhood managers.” Please note the disparity between those who want smooth things in doctrine but who are willing to use vitriolic language toward brethren who insist on sound doctrine.

Some who are currently espousing “smooth things,” who want tolerance toward error and unity in diversity, those who are embarrassed by strong preaching, have found what they believe to be comfort in Romans 14. This chapter of

The Language of Smoothness

the Bible which directs brethren to receive one another in “matters of scruples” (v. 1), “authorized liberties” (1 Cor. 8:9; 10:23), is being twisted and wrested (2 Pet. 3:16) so that some are willing to receive one another in sinful doctrines and practices. A rationale for open-ended fellowship with sin is being preached across the nation and around the world by esteemed brethren who, because of their reputation and popularity, are leading many astray. Of course, different brethren accept varying degrees of smooth preaching, but that there is a movement, a voice, a rationale for apostasy cannot be denied.

The leading voice for smooth things today is *Christianity Magazine* which began its maiden voyage into the sea of religious journalism by the keynote: “*accentuate the positive; eliminate the negative.*” That this is thematic and not incidental nor accidental is indicated by instructions to its writers from an editor to limit the use of Scripture. “*Each article is thus to be short and limited to one major point. Do not tell us all you know, but what you know most surely. Generally speaking, two or three passages should provide a sufficient base for such articles — perhaps even one.*” Not content just to limit the amount of Scripture, the same editor proposes suggestions to make the articles “popular.” “*Obviously, what we are after is a piece of journalistic writing. The thrust of the article should be practical, speaking to the real needs of people. The style of writing should be popular. We urge you to be your creative best: think of interest-catching leads, sharp illustrations, and, if appropriate, and if possible, sprinkle in a little wit.*” (Contrast that with the instruction of Paul to Timothy and Titus and the difference is obvious.)

Lest someone think this approach to religious writing inconsequential, error has been boldly taught by Ed Harrell in his series on Romans 14 in defense of Homer Hailey’s error (cf: *Homer Hailey: False Teacher?*, Nov. 1988; *The Bounds of Christian Unity*, Feb. 1989-May, 1990). Though this series of articles was a bold departure from the stated editorial theme of non-controversial material, that same editorial policy was reinstated when numerous brethren asked to respond. In effect, error was taught smoothly by Ed Harrell and no rebuttal was permitted. None of the other editors ever publicly rejected the error that was taught. Thus, Romans 14 was twisted by brother Harrell to teach that it “tolerates contradictory teachings and practices on important moral and doctrinal questions” (May 1990). The “important moral and doctrinal question” put under the aegis of Romans 14 by brother Harrell was the error taught by Homer Hailey on “aliens who would come to God” in adulterous marriages.

As this controversy has spread, and as Romans 14 has been widely used as a defense for fellowship on adulterous marriages, other brethren have advocated this twisted use of Romans 14 to allow fellowship in other areas. We have seen the beginning of departure, not the end.

It is not hard to recognize the voice of those who want “smooth things” to be advocated today. There are key phrases and “Shibboleths” that reveal a softness toward sound preaching and a desire to promote compromise. Have you been hearing this lately?

We need to have unity in diversity. We have more in common with some people than we have disagreements. Let’s just emphasize our agreements.

Let’s eliminate the negative and accentuate the positive. We have heard too much of preaching that is against sin.

We need to love one another and stop all this preaching against things. The Bible is just a love letter, not a pattern book.

We are hearing too much about the church and not enough about the cross; too much doctrine and not enough about Christ; too much law and not enough about grace.

We need to stop judging in matters of opinion such as shorts and swim suits, the use of wine, how many times members ought to attend worship services, clapping in services, gambling, and such like.

Who can say for sure that a certain doctrine is absolutely wrong. Do you know everything? Are you setting yourself up to be the another’s judge?

There are so many different positions on this subject (remarriage and adultery, use of wine, etc.) that who can be sure which is right. The Bible is just not clear on this subject.

It seems like there are some brethren who are intent on controlling the brotherhood. We need to have a moratorium on controversial preaching.

Let’s just let each local church decide for itself who it is going to receive into its fellowship. It is nobody’s business but the local church.

Have you heard about the large crowds that turned out to hear brother P.M.A. Goodspack? We need to get him here for a meeting so we can have large crowds too. He doesn’t condemn anyone.

Aren’t you tired of the old church of Christ traditions? We need to tune in to the Spirit more and liven up our worship with new songs like they sing at camp, clap our hands, be less formal and have shorter sermons.

We need to learn the language of young people. They are the church of tomorrow and we need to do things for them to keep them interested in the church. If we don’t watch out, we are going to lose our young people to other

Bible Baptism

John Isaac Edwards

History repeats itself! The children of Israel cried out to the prophets, “speak unto us smooth things” (Isa. 30:10) and Jeremiah declared, “The prophets prophesy falsely. . . and my people love to have it so” (Jer. 5:31). What happened then is going on today!

The time has come “when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables” (2 Tim. 4:3-4). Many today “by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple” (Rom. 16:18).

We must always demand the truth, no matter what, and we need men among us who have the courage and the conviction to preach the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth no matter what! Paul penned, “Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine” (2 Tim. 4:2).

Some Baptism Smoothies

There are a lot of smooth things being said today in regards to Bible baptism. Logan Fox, a Pepperdine professor, said, “It is possible to be filled with the Spirit without being baptized.” In his book, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, Carroll D. Osburn wrote, “There should be room in the Christian fellowship for those who believe that Christ is the Son of God, but who differ on . . . whether baptism is ‘for’ or ‘because of’ the remission of sins.” How much smoother can one get than this? This man is Professor of New Testament at Abilene Christian University. No telling how many young preachers are being affected by this smooth doctrine!

Max Lucado, who preaches for the Oak Hills church of Christ in San Antonio, Texas, said in a television interview in Nashville, Tennessee, July 2, 1997: “I believe in baptism. Jesus was baptized. The Bible teaches baptism. I just don’t believe that baptism saves you. I believe that Jesus Christ saves us. And baptism is one of those ways we celebrate our salvation. It’s really the initial step of the faithful believer.” In a radio broadcast, *When Your Heart*

churches that have planned youth programs.

Brethren, the battle against unity-in-diversity will never be won. The cast of characters and list of issues will change from generation to generation. Within the Lord’s church are some that are “ashamed of the gospel.” However irate some become when this charge is made, it must be emphasized that there are brethren who want to be tolerant of error, fit into modern society, eliminate strong preaching against sin, and go smoothly into apostasy. Their policy for smoothness is to use Romans 14 as a chapter of permissiveness, allowing error to be fellowshiped. Of course, some are ignorant of the danger and are shocked to hear this condemned, blaming those who oppose the error as the instigators of

controversy. Some stand on the side lines, shaking their heads, dismayed that names are called, hoping it will all go away of its own accord. However, we need not be naive. Error will disappear only when it is met by the “sword of the spirit” (Eph. 6:17). Such battles do not permit smooth sailing into apostasy. There will be controversies, battles, debates, and discussions. Through this fiery time, truth will triumph and those who want “smooth things” will depart into their place. Has it ever been any different?

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**We must always demand the truth,
no matter what, and we need men
among us who have the courage and
the conviction to preach the truth,
the whole truth, and nothing but
the truth no matter what!**

Needs A Father, KJAK, Lubbock, Texas, Lucado encouraged his listeners who were in need of salvation to pray a “sinner’s prayer” asking God to receive them as his child. Lucado then said, “Today is the first day you’ve ever prayed a prayer like that. Could you do me a favor? Could you write me a letter? I don’t have anything I am going to ask from you. I do have a letter I would like to send to you; I’d like to give you a word about the next step or two. I want to encourage you to be baptized, I want to encourage you to read your Bible. But I don’t want you to do any of that so that you will be saved. I want you to do all of that because you are saved . . .” Pretty smooth, don’t you think? And on and on it goes!

The Truth About Bible Baptism

As long as there are men who come along and speak smooth things about Bible subjects, there will be a need for us to teach the truth and expose and refute error. Whatever the Bible says about baptism is the way it is, and we need to believe it and obey it! What does the Bible say?

1. Bible baptism is for the remission of sins. The apostle Peter said very plainly, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ *for* the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38). To say that baptism is because of the remission of sins is to teach something the Bible just does not teach! We are not baptized because our sins are already forgiven. We are baptized in order for our sins to be remitted. The language of Peter in Acts 2:38 is parallel to that of Jesus in Matthew 26:28, “For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many *for* the remission of sins.” Did Jesus shed his blood because men had already been forgiven of their sins? No! He shed his blood to make the remission of sins possible. And, the remission of sins is not possible without Bible baptism! That is the truth! Which will you accept: the truth or a smoothie?

2. Bible baptism saves. Some will tell us, “I don’t believe that baptism saves.” Why not? The Lord said that baptism saves. “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:16). The word “and” is a copulative conjunction that ties “faith” and “baptism” together. It takes both faith and

baptism to save! Faith alone is not enough, as James declared, “Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only” (Jas. 2:24). If that’s not enough, listen to the apostle Peter, “The like figure whereunto baptism doth also now save us” (1 Pet. 3:21). I take my stand with the apostle Peter. What about you?

3. Bible baptism is a planting and a burial. Too many have the idea that salvation comes at the point of faith, and that baptism is something you do after you are saved as an outward showing of an inward feeling. Whatever that is, the Bible teaches otherwise. Paul taught, “Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death. . . . For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection” (Rom. 6:3-5). If you are made alive (saved) at the point of faith, then in baptism you are burying them alive! If not, why not?

4. Bible baptism washes away sins. Somebody may say, “Now wait a minute, I thought the blood of Christ washes away sins.” It does. John recorded, “Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood” (Rev. 1:5). The question is not, “Does the blood wash away sins?” The question is, “How does it do it?” According to John 19:34, Jesus shed his blood in his death. To contact the blood of Christ we must reach his death. This is accomplished in the watery grave of baptism, as Paul penned, “baptized into his death” (Rom. 6:3-4). The blood washes away sins as we are baptized into Christ. Until an individual submits to the Bible command to be baptized, he is yet in his sins! This is why Saul was instructed, “And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16). That may not be very smooth, but that is the truth and Jesus said, “Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32).

We need to take John’s advice, “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1). May we be as the noble Bereans, who “searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so” (Acts 17:11).

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Renew Promptly!

The Holy Spirit

Aude McKee

Commend brother Edwards for his selection of topics to be discussed under the above heading. Every one is vital to the purity of the Lord's body and every one is under attack, not only by the religious world in general, but by some of our own brethren. Fifty years ago it would have been unnecessary to discuss most of the subjects given consideration in this issue, so far as our brethren were concerned, but times have changed! Several of the fourteen subjects are of special significance because of their broad, encompassing effect. This is certainly true regarding the Holy Spirit. The "smooth things" you hear today regarding the Spirit and his work result in a minimizing of the power of the gospel of Christ.

In a volume entitled *The Christian Minister's Encyclopedia and Pulpit Companion* I ran across this

observation: "It seems unaccountable that intelligent beings should become so foolishly infatuated, that they should prefer deceit to sincerity, and falsehood to truth. And yet men do so, not in reference to temporal things, which are only of secondary moment; but in reference to the soul and the great realities of the eternal world. The more important the subject, and the more valuable is the truth relating to it; and the more needful to avoid error. So that to be willingly deceived in the highest of all concerns amounts to nothing short of moral insanity. Yet of this worst form of madness, men are most extensively guilty" (Sermon No. 15, Isa. 30:10, 559).

Some of the "smooth things" about the Holy Spirit that you hear today from some of our brethren:

- Don't get hung up on word for word inspiration.
- The word is not the sole influence leading to conversion.
- The prophecy found in Joel 2:28-32 is being fulfilled now.
- The Spirit is working mightily among our denominational neighbors.
- The Holy Spirit personally indwells the Christian.

In Hendersonville, Tennessee there is a group that identifies themselves

as The Community Church of Christ. In less than ten years, at least nine people have left the Lakeview church and joined Community. The ones who left and went to Community, while I preached at Lakeview, were continually complaining about the preaching. "You are not giving us what we need. We need more preaching on love. We need more inspirational sermons." And what has happened in Hendersonville is occurring all over the country. The teaching that the people at Community want and get is a concrete example of all the five points made above. On April 1, 1995, they had this recorded telephone message: "Hey, you've got the Youth Message and Prayer Line. Can you imagine what the Lord is doing? It is mighty and powerful, isn't it? 'It shall come to pass in the last days, saith the Lord, I will pour out My Spirit on all people: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy' (Acts 2:16-17). Pray for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit in your home and in your school. God is doing mighty things right now. Don't let any part of your life be left out."

In 1 Corinthians 2, Paul forever settles the matter of the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures. The revelation was made, he affirms, "not in words which man's wisdom teaches, but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual" (KJV). The

NIV translates the passage: “We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words” (vv. 12, 13).

If it takes more than God’s word to convert the sinner, it is strange that the Holy Spirit had Paul to write: “I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise. So as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also. For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith” (Rom. 1:14-17). All of us remember well the commission of Jesus: “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:15-16). The gospel is the word-for- word revelation made by the Spirit and when a person is led by the gospel, he is being led by the Spirit (Rom. 8:14).

The affirmation that Joel 2:28-32 is being fulfilled now is ludicrous (“Laughable or hilarious through obvious absurdity or incongruity,” *New American Heritage Dictionary*). Can those who make such a claim speak in tongues (languages they have not learned)? Can they prophesy (speak by the Holy Spirit’s inspiration)?

Any time respect for the authority of the Spirit-inspired Scriptures diminishes, regard for religious institutions unauthorized by God increases. Several illustrations of this point could be made from the Nashville area, but we will continue with Community. On October 29, 1993, this item appeared in the Henderson-

ville *Star News*. “For the first time in Sumner County history, churches are combining their youth for an evening of celebration. This is historic because it involves Baptist, Methodist, Catholic, Assembly of God, Church of Christ, Interdenominational, and Nazarene churches. The event will be Sunday, Nov. 7, at 7:30 p.m. at Music Village.” And then the list of denominations participating are listed and among them is the Community Church of Christ. The Holy Spirit says that “whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God” (2 John 9-11). He then went on to say that anyone who bids God speed to such is a partaker of his evil deeds!

Finally, teaching that the Holy Spirit indwells the child of God personally has the potential for great harm to the cause for which Jesus died. In a sermon delivered at Highland in Abilene, Mike Cope asked, “But what are you going to do with the many wonderful Spirit-filled, Jesus-like prayerful believers who don’t go to church where we go, who weren’t baptized the same way we were baptized, and whose doctrine doesn’t line up exactly like ours? This was the crisis for me” (*The Spiritual Sword*, Vol. 29, No.2). Brother Cope’s “crisis” exists because he believes the Spirit can fill (indwell) a person separate from the word. It is a fact that deity indwells God’s people. 1 John 4:12-16 teaches plainly that God dwells in the Christian, Romans 8:10 affirms that Christ indwells, and 1 Corinthians 6:19 tells us that the Spirit is in the Christian. But Ephesians 3:17 makes it clear how Jesus indwells — it is through faith. Note verses 14-19:

For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded

in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to be able to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.”

The heart of man is the abode of God, his Son, and the Holy Spirit and this condition of heart is brought about by the power of God’s word. Some claim that the Spirit indwells personally, but does nothing as a result of that indwelling. One difficulty with that position (in addition to it being unscriptural) is its potential for harm. I tell my little boy that a butterfly is in his stomach but not to worry because it is dormant — it does nothing. Time passes and then one day he has a queer feeling and the result? “Dad was wrong! That butterfly is doing something to me.” I attended a meeting at one of the churches of Christ in Murray, Kentucky a number of years ago, and the preacher affirmed that he had been guided to a parking place on one occasion by the Spirit and at another time was directed to a hospital room where an opportunity to teach was afforded. The indwelling Spirit, he believed, was acting supernaturally on his behalf.

When we read Isaiah 30:10, we need to remember that it was the people of God who wanted God’s message watered down. Someone wrote some years ago that “this generation has been indoctrinated, brainwashed, and conditioned to react against ‘war,’ ‘defense,’ ‘militancy,’ ‘contention,’ and other such words with contempt. To this group the connotations which these words conjure up are repulsive and abhorrent by their very nature. In contrast, such words as ‘love,’ ‘peace,’ ‘harmony,’ ‘unity,’ ‘brotherhood,’ etc., are pleasing to their ears and essential elements of their vocabulary.” These are the kind of people in the church who are crying the same words that Isaiah heard about 700 years before our Lord was born — “Speak unto us smooth things.”

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Instrumental Music in Worship

Lewis Willis

Music is divinely authorized in the worship of the church. The question is: What kind? This issue has long been divisive between the Lord's church and denominationalism. Perhaps the most distinctive thing about our worship, compared to that of denominational churches, is our use of *a cappella* music. There are several other differences but the use of vocal music is most noticeable to our visitors.

How important is the issue of music in the church? Music is no more important than prayer, the Lord's supper, giving, or teaching which is true to the Scriptures. However, it is every bit as important as any of these other authorized and required practices.

One need not spend much time in examination of what the New Testament says about instruments of music in worship. As a matter of fact, *no time* is needed *since the New Testament says absolutely nothing about instruments of music and their use in the worship of the church*. Does that thought send any message to us at all? We have an on-going major dispute in modern religion *over a subject that is not so much as mentioned* in describing the music we are to offer unto God. On the surface, one would think people would pause and reflect upon the significance of that fact. Through the years, this point has been emphasized to denominationalists, but it has received a rather cool reception, to say the least.

The Music Authorized For Worship

Allow me to list the passages which address our subject. This will not require much space, because *there are*

only nine passages in the New Testament which address the music of the church. Read the following passages: Matthew 26:30; Mark 14:26; Acts 16:25; 1 Corinthians 14:15; Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16; Hebrews 2:12; 13:15; James 5:13. They all use either *sing, sang, sung, or singing* to describe the music of our worship; there are no exceptions!

One needs help to misunderstand the teaching of God's Word on this subject. And guess what? *That is exactly what he gets!* On every hand there are preachers who readily speak "smooth things" and "deceit" to all who will listen. We hear them say things like, "*I think . . . I believe . . . I feel . . . It seems to me . . . I don't see anything wrong with . . .*" in reference to the use of mechanical instruments. Actually, who cares what they think, believe, or feel? If we were worshipping them, that would be important information to have. However, since we worship God, we must discover what he thinks on the subject by reading and following the passages cited earlier.

The "smooth things" and "deceits" which brethren are now preaching all over the country will produce a generation which will conclude that it is all right to disagree over the use of the instrument in worship.

Nonetheless, just as ancient Israel liked the words of the false prophets; people today like the "smooth things" and "deceits" which they hear. As long as this spirit prevails, there will always be a dispute between them, and those who follow the guide of the Scriptures in their practice.

A Battle At Our Doorstep

A division over institutionalism and sponsoring churches produced a division in the church in the 1950s. As a result, most brethren have little knowledge of what is going on among liberal churches today. These liberal churches are in

the process of dividing today, and one of the issues dividing them is instrumental music in worship. Some of their most prominent preachers regularly participate in worship with denominations in which instrumental music is used.¹ As these new apostates move further to make themselves just another denomination, they are beginning the process of softening up their followers to accept the instrument in their worship. They have already begun to speak “smooth things” and “deceits” to their members, and many, if not most, of their members are falling for the deceit.

They speak “smooth things” in referring to the worship of the church. Rubel Shelly writes of our worship “*tradition*,” with the obvious point being that if vocal music is nothing but a “*tradition*,” it can be changed. We have several “*traditions*” (two songs, a prayer, and another song) that we readily change, so the thought is, we can change the “*tradition*” of vocal music as well. “*The problem is*,” Shelly says, “*those traditions become so fixed that they are seen by many to inhibit true worship . . .*”² He further suggests that those using vocal music “. . . *be a bit more understanding and incorporating toward the Baby Boomers and Generation X-ers who want some things more in sync with their pulses and those of their searching contemporaries.*”³ Shelly advises that we stop fighting one another over the “*externals*” of our worship. Larry Bridgesmith writes of our “*worship styles*,” adding that “*we probably need to be more concerned about the idolatry in our theology than finding a worship style we like . . . we must remain vigilant to use worship forms consistent with biblical freedoms which connect with God seekers who are not familiar with the way we have always done it.*”⁴ You see, folks, it’s just a question of style, externals, traditions, and biblical freedom in deciding if we will use instrumental music, at least, according to these men. These expressions are the “smooth things” which are spoken to deceive.

What do these pseudo-intellectual infidels think of our position that there are five acts of worship? Listen to Shelly: “*This is the result of a penchant for systematizing rather than good theology. The very language misleads — leads away from a significant biblical truth. It is more precise to say that worship is always an attitude of reverence before God that is exhibited by appropriate actions. Fundamentally, there are three types of actions that are appropriate to the corporate worship of the church: praise, prayer, and preaching.*”⁵ This little “deceit” will open the door to any action, including the use of instrumental music, so long as your *attitude of reverence* is maintained. You can also easily guess who is going to decide what *actions are appropriate*.

Dave Miller itemized some of the changes this modern theology has already brought to the worship in liberal churches. Special music (including solos and choirs) is common; drama (using costumed actors) is used; the Lord’s

supper is observed on any day; babies are dedicated in the assembly; hand clapping and lifting up of hands, Pentecostal-style, are common; women are used to lead songs and prayers; and religious holidays, like Christmas and Easter, are observed with the *appropriate actions* gleaned from denominationalism.⁶

With ample space, this list could easily be expanded upon. The battle rages in liberal churches over these questions. Having years ago abandoned divine principles regarding scriptural authority in order to get church support for human institutions, these brethren who oppose this next generation of apostasy (such as Buster Dobbs, editor of *Firm Foundation* and Alan E. Highers, editor of *The Spiritual Sword*) are left virtually powerless to stop the march of heresy. The division among them has already happened. The only thing to be determined is how many of their churches will adopt the “smooth things” and “deceits” which they are being taught. “*Professing themselves to be wise . . .*” they have foolishly fallen further from the Lord than before (Rom. 1:22).

Conclusion

The message to us is, we must continue to preach the truth, even on “old” subjects like instrumental music. Already seed has been sown, through the controversy over the application of Romans 14 to matters of “doctrinal differences,” which can lead us down the same, sad path institutional brethren have traveled. The “smooth things” and “deceits” which brethren are now preaching all over the country will produce a generation which will conclude that it is all right to disagree over the use of the instrument in worship, without it affecting the fellowship of brethren. Folks, if Romans 14 tolerates false teaching and practice on marriage, divorce, and remarriage, why does it not do the same on the use of instrumental music? We know our duty in regard to things like this. “Now I beseech you, brethren, *mark them* which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and *avoid them*. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and *by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple*” (Rom. 16:17-18).

¹ Max Lucado exchanged pulpits with Trinity Baptist Church, 4/2/95, *The Spiritual Sword*, 10/96, 4.

² *Wineskins*, Vol. 3, No. 5, 5.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*, 9-10.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁶ *Spiritual Sword*, 10/96, 25-28.

The Role of the Woman in the Church

Andy Alexander

The times we live in give rise to many problems that must be addressed in the Lord's church. In every age the sins prevalent in the world affect the church to some degree and we must be on guard against these sins and warn others lest they be adversely affected by them. This special issue of *Truth Magazine* focuses on a number of these topics. This article will address the subject of the woman's role in the church and the speaking of smooth things by some among us on this subject.

As with most Bible subjects, the Bible's teaching on the role of the woman in the church is misunderstood, perverted, or just plain ignored by the vast majority of religious denominations. Denominational churches have women serving in many leadership capacities. Women lead in prayers, lead singing, sing solos, and preach. They serve as priests, pastors, ministers, counselors, and various other offices within their denominational churches. This is partly due to the fact that denominations of men no longer respect the Word of God. A retired pastor for the Presbyterian church arguing for broader acceptance of homosexuality stated, "The Bible is not an infallible book, it is not error free" (*Courier Journal*, Louisville, Kentucky, March 8, 1998, A-1). With this kind of mentality it's no wonder that women in denominational churches have taken leadership roles in direct rebellion to God's word.

Women are as active in making decisions for their particular denomination as any man. This has been a common practice for a number of years, but with the advent of the modern feminist movement it has become more pronounced.

What has this to do with the Lord's church? Exactly this: things that take place in denominational churches have a way of worming their way into the true church,

creating division and apostasy. Instrumental music was borrowed from the denominations and this innovation caused division among God's people. The social gospel was invented by the churches of men and eventually introduced into the Lord's body, bringing more division. The sponsoring church embraced by liberal members of the church of Christ is a copy of the denominational concept of centralization and has caused much harm and schism within the body of Christ.

So it is with the "women's movement" within the churches of Christ. The more liberal, institutional churches have women serving the Lord's supper, leading singing via "praise teams," serving as deaconesses, teaching mixed classes of adults, leading in prayer, and occasionally preaching from the pulpit (for examples, see Peggy Sanford, "Cookies To Communion: The Changing Roles of Women in the Church of Christ," *Integrity*, Issue 5, 1997, 82-87). The pressure of the feminist movement and the desire to be like the "nations" round about have aided in this perversion of the woman's role in the church.

What is the woman's role in the church? What can she do? Can she serve in a leadership capacity over men? These questions must be answered in the light of God's word and not with the prevailing attitudes of society, the practice of denominational churches, or the apostate churches of Christ. "To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isa. 8:20). The speaking of smooth things to God's children lulls them into complacency and opens the door to unscriptural innovations. It was so in Isaiah's day and continues to be so some 2700 years later (Isa. 30:9-10).

God is the One who dictates the role of women in his church and he specifically states, "Let a woman learn in

silence with all submission. And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence” (1 Tim. 2:11-12). This command prohibits a woman from leading in the assembly over men. Man is not at liberty to void this command. Also, man should not place the woman in a position that would tempt her to violate this command or allow a woman to take a leading position herself.

One argument for allowing a woman to lead the assembly is that if a man asks a woman to address the assembly, then she is acting under the authority of the man who called upon her. However, he has asked her to do something that violates God’s will and no man has the authority to do such (1 Tim. 2:11-12; Col. 3:17).

Another argument is that some women are more capable of leading than some men. Who leads in the assembly is not a matter of ability, but one of authority. Women have no authority from God to lead the assembly. God does *not* permit it (1 Tim. 2:11-12)! The fact that some women are more articulate or better singers than some men does not change God’s word on the matter. Men are charged with leading in the assemblies of the saints and women are commanded to submit quietly to their leadership.

The argument could be made that a particular woman has more knowledge of a given situation than any of the men, so it is easier or better for her to make some announcement than the less knowledgeable men. Why are the elders or men less knowledgeable? Can the men not acquire the knowledge they need and then pass it on to the congregation? The presence of ignorant men still does not give the woman the authority to address the assembly in a leadership capacity (1 Tim. 2:11-12). Only unlearned or weak men would allow such to take place.

The presence of women in business meetings is becoming more prevalent. This has been likened to Bible classes where men lead and women participate. Actually, the business meeting by its very nature is a decision-making process, an exercise of leadership, and God has excluded

women from such leadership roles. While some advocate women’s active participation, others claim the women are to sit silently while the men transact the necessary business. However, are we not placing women in a position where they will be tempted to break their silence and speak up when they believe the men are making a mistake? Why introduce a practice for which we can give no affirmative authority from Scripture? Godly men can consider the needs of women without involving them in leadership roles. The men have a responsibility to lead in such a way as not to lord it over the congregation (1 Pet. 5:1-3). Elders or men are not to be tyrants, ruling with no concern for those they are leading. The fact that some men have lorded it over the congregation and abused their position of leadership does not give the woman the right to rule (1 Tim. 2:11-12). Two wrongs do not make a right.

Women leading prayer in prayer groups with men present, women attending business meetings, women waiting on the Lord’s table, and women making announcements to the assembly are some examples of women easing into leadership roles in the church. These practices are not authorized by God and churches which allow any or all of these practices are paving the way for further departures from God’s word on the role of women. Places where one or more of these errors are practiced are conditioning the congregation to accept women in leadership roles. The place to stop it is at the beginning. Do not let the sinful practices get a foothold.

Women exerting pressure to take a leading part in the assembly, or men who encourage women to take such a part, are sinning and need to repent. Our liberal society does not want to hear sin condemned and sinners called to repentance, but we must obey God and do those things which he has commanded in the way he has commanded. “Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 1:13).

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Sin

Johnie Paul Edwards

God's people of old requested that the prophets speak smooth things (Isa. 30:10). The reason they wanted to hear smooth things was because they were rebellious children (30:1), they would not take counsel of God (30:1), they did not put their trust in God (30:2), they would not hear the law of the Lord (30:9), and they despised God's word (30:12). Truly, those who despise God's word had rather hear smooth things than the truth of God's word. But, for those interested in truth, what is the truth about sin? The Bible teaches that . . .

Sin Is Against God

When Potiphar's wife cast her eyes upon Joseph and said, "Lie with me" (Gen. 39:7), Joseph refused and said, "There is none greater in this house than I; neither hath he kept back any thing from me but thee, because thou art his wife: how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (Gen. 39:9). Joseph knew that to lie with another man's wife would be a great wickedness and would constitute sin against God. All men should know what Joseph knew about sin!

Sin Is The Transgression of God's Law

The Apostle John revealed, "Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law" (1 John 3:4). Ask people today what is sin and you'll get about as many answers as people you ask. The Bible teaches that sin is the transgression of the law. "Every one that doeth sin doeth also lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness" (1 John 3:4, ASV). Anytime we violate God's law, by either going beyond or falling short of it, we sin!

All Unrighteousness Is Sin

In 1 John 5:17 we learn, "All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death." The Scriptures are careful to teach us that *all* unrighteousness is sin! Too many want to pick and choose when it comes to sin. But, what kind of things are included in Scripture as unrighteousness? Paul, as he wrote

about the Gentiles, said, "Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, spiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful: Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them" (Rom. 1:29-32).

Whatsoever Is Not of Faith Is Sin

The fourteenth chapter of the book of Romans ends with the words, "for whatsoever is not of faith is sin." Clearly, when we act apart from faith we sin. This was the reason that the man that doubted regarding the eating of meat was damned when he ate, "because he eateth not of faith." Obviously, God requires that all things religiously be done in faith and according to the faith. When we do things according to the faith we do that which is authorized or taught in God's word. While to eat or not to eat meat was an authorized liberty, for "let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not . . ." (Rom. 14:3), not all things fall into authorized liberties. The context of Romans 14 must be understood. It has to do with "nothing unclean of itself" (14:14), and things that "are pure" (14:20). Some things are outright matters of sin. John taught, "Whosoever

It is clear as one reads and studies God's word that some things are good and some things are evil. There is no middle ground! We are taught to do that which is good (Heb. 13:16). We do such or become guilty of sin.

transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son” (2 John 1:9).

To Know To Do Good And Not To Do It Is Sin

“Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin” (Jas. 4:17). This principle is important and is being contrasted with rejoicing in boasting and the statement that “. . . all such rejoicing is evil” (4:16). It is clear as one reads and studies God’s word that some things are good and some things are evil. There is no middle ground! We are taught to do that which is good (Heb. 13:16). We do such or become guilty of sin. There are many things identified by God as good, but when we fail to do them we sin.

To Say We Have No Sin Is To Lie

“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8). The reason that none can say that they have no sin is because “. . . all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). Some refuse to admit sin. Such is to be guilty of lying.

Man Can Be Made Free From Sin

Since sin leads to eternal death (Rom. 6:23), we need to be made free from sin. How does this happen? Romans 6 teaches, “Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness” (6:18) and “But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life” (6:22). Romans 6 reveals several things involved in being made free from sin. Being made free from sin involves, being baptized into Jesus Christ (6:3), walking in newness of life (6:4), no longer serving sin (6:6), not yielding our members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin (6:13), and obeying from the heart (6:16). This is God’s plan for man being made free from sin. “But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life” (Rom. 6:22).

The Blood of Jesus Christ Cleanseth Us From All Sin

The plan for such cleansing is revealed, “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). In John 8:12 Jesus equated walking in the light with following him. “Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that *followeth me* shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life” (John 8:12). In following Christ the child of God confesses his sins and “. . . he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

The Wages of Sin Is Death

“For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is

eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 6:23). We all need to know that the end of serving sin is death, eternal death! Paul in Romans 6 deals with living in sin and explains that the walk of a Christian is not one of sin, but in newness of life (6:6). We are to be dead to sin (6:11), not let sin reign in our mortal bodies (6:12), and we are not to yield our members as instruments unto sin (6:13). The end of living in sin is eternal death and the end of serving God will be everlasting life through Jesus Christ our Lord. James taught, “Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death” (Jas. 1:15).

Sin Should Be Laid Aside

The apostle to the Hebrew Christians wrote, “Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us” (Heb. 12:1). To successfully run the race that ends in eternal life, we must: lay aside every weight, lay aside sin, run with patience, and look unto Jesus (Heb. 12:1-2). As Paul wrote to the Colossians, we read, “But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him” (Col. 3:8-10).

Man Can Die In His Sins

Jesus said, “. . . that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins” (John 8:24). God planned for repentance and remission of sins to be preached (Luke 24:47). It was preached and we need to continue preaching it! Christ was sent into the world to be a propitiation for sin (1 John 4:10), that is he was “manifested to take away our sins” (1 John 3:5). The blood of bulls and goats could not take away sin (Heb. 10:4). Christ’s blood can take away sin in that in him “. . . we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins” (Col. 1:14). “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool” (Isa. 1:18). Rather than dying in our sins, we should choose to die in the Lord, for “. . . 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).

May we ask not for the “smooth things” (Isa. 30:10), but for the “old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls” (Jer. 6:16).

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The Deity of Christ

Harry Osborne

For many years, brethren have opposed the error of the so called “Jehovah’s Witnesses” who deny the deity of Christ. As brethren responded by affirming Christ’s deity, they have consistently made the same arguments which will comprise the bulk of this article. Brethren did not find it necessary to redefine the concept of deity to affirm that Jesus possessed and exhibited his divinity while on earth. Neither did they find it necessary to explain *how* Jesus was both deity and humanity while on earth. Generally, brethren merely affirmed his co-existent deity and humanity and left the *how* to God as a matter unrevealed (Deut. 29:29).

In recent years, however, strange sounds have come from some brethren who seem alternately to reject and then confess the deity of Christ while on earth and as he presently exists in heaven. The smoothness of those variations has left a question about which view is actually held by such brethren. The pursuit of that question is not the purpose of this article. However, the need to speak “right things” in answer to the “smooth” error of the following statements should be apparent to all who love the truth:

Jesus performed miracles as a man and through the assistance of the Holy Spirit. He did not perform miracles through his own innate power as the Son of God for this would have been to deny his humanity.

Jesus Christ did not give up divinity for just 33 years. He gave it up for all time — all time. It wasn’t just temporarily as Superman stepped out of the phone booth. He gave it up for all time.

These statements manifest an abandonment of the truth regarding the deity of Christ as set forth in the word of God. What does the Bible have to say about the past and present divine nature of Christ?

1. *Jesus possessed divine nature upon the earth.* While

upon the earth, Jesus affirmed his knowledge of his eternal existence (John 8:14). In the same context, he claimed to be the same “I AM” as present in the time of Abraham (John 8:51-58). The knowledge possessed by Jesus of his eternal nature and previous place with the Father was not the knowledge of a mere man, but an evidence of knowledge which predated his earthly existence (John 13:1-3; 16:25-28). He remembered the heavenly glory which he shared with the Father in the eternal realm and sought it again after completion of his redemptive work (John 17:4-5).

Jesus further claimed, “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30). Upon hearing this claim, the Jews sought to kill Jesus for blasphemy because he made himself God (John 10:31-33). If such was a misunderstanding, Jesus failed to correct it. Every indication from the text is that the Jews rightly interpreted Jesus’ claim to be divine, but they wrongly rejected his claim to divinity. A similar circumstance led the Jews of his time to persecute Jesus because he “called God His own Father, making Himself equal with God” (John 5:16-18).

Jesus’ description as the “Son of God” evidences the truth of this claim because a son shares the nature of his father. If the Father is divine, the Son’s divine nature logically follows. Remember that Jesus claimed to be and was recognized as the “Son of God” while on the earth (John 10:36; Luke 1:35). That is why he could rightly be called Immanuel, “God with us,” in fulfillment of prophecy (Isa. 7:14; 9:6; Matt. 1:22-23).

2. *Jesus possessed and demonstrated divine power upon the earth.* When Jesus healed the man sick of the palsy, it was to prove that he had “authority on earth to forgive sins” (Mark 2:1-12). This was not a power shared by the apostles, but one unique to Christ and his divine power to forgive even as he later did upon the cross (Luke 23:39-43). When Jesus rebuked the winds and the sea to produce an immediate calm in the midst of a great storm, the disciples asked, “What manner of man is this, that even the winds

and the sea obey Him?” (Matt. 8:26-27). Later under similar circumstances, Jesus’ power over the natural forces caused his disciples to worship him and exclaim, “Of a truth thou art the Son of God” (Matt. 14:22-33). Thus, they saw his divine nature as the Son of God confirmed by a manifestation of Jesus’ divine power causing them to give to Jesus that which belongs only to God — *worship*.

Jesus also affirmed his divine power to bring about his own resurrection saying, “I lay down my life, that I may take it again . . . I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again” (John 10:17-18). He made the same claim earlier in stating, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up . . . He spake of the temple of His body” (John 2:13-21). Paul affirmed that Jesus “was declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead” (Rom. 1:4). How could Jesus be proven “the Son of God with power” if he never used his own divine power and was divested of such power when he came to earth? In commenting on Romans 1:4, Moses Lard wrote:

Moreover, when we reflect on all the facts in the life of Christ, not one strikes the mind as so overwhelming a proof of the presence in him of divine power, underived or undelegated, as his raising the dead (*Commentary on Romans 30*).

This principle is true not only of Jesus’ own resurrection, but also of the other resurrections performed by his power — “*underived or undelegated*.” He clearly said, “I am the resurrection and the life” (John 11:25).

Jesus also demonstrated his possession of divine knowledge upon the earth. As previously noted, he manifested a knowledge of his prior existence in the eternal realm with the Father (John 13:3; 16:28). Jesus also demonstrated a full knowledge of that which was going to happen unto him in the future (John 13:1, 11; 18:4). He also had a knowledge of the hearts of men (John 6:64; 1:47-51; 4:16-19, 39). Such knowledge is not within the power of a mere man (1 Cor. 2:11).

3. *Jesus presently possesses and demonstrates divine nature and power as he rules in heaven.* Jesus has now returned to the glory shared in the eternal realm before man ever came into existence (John 17:4-5). The same power of Jesus that produced the creation of all things is now being used to “uphold all things by the word of His power” (Col. 1:15-18; Heb. 1:3). If Jesus gave up his divinity for “all time,” how could he presently have all power in heaven and on earth? Yet, that is what the Bible presently claims for Jesus (Matt. 28:18).

4. *Jesus’ acceptance of worship on earth and in the heavenly realm affirms his possession of the divine nature*

on earth and his continued possession of that divine nature in heaven. While on earth, Jesus was worshiped at his birth (Matt 2:11). He was worshiped by his disciples (Matt. 14:33). He was even to be worshiped by angels while in his earthly ministry (Heb. 1:6). While still on earth after his resurrection, Jesus received worship (Matt. 28:9; John 20:28). At his ascension, Jesus was worshiped (Luke 24:50-52). In his present reign from heaven, Jesus now receives worship from those before the throne (Rev. 5). Jesus never refused worship directed towards him. When coupled together with scriptural teaching about whom we are to rightfully worship, the implication regarding the present possession of Jesus’ divine nature and his exercise of the divine prerogative of accepting worship is obvious (Rev. 19:10; 22:9; Matt. 4:10).

Conclusion

As Paul extolls Jesus towards the end of his first epistle to Timothy, Paul affirms that the same Jesus “who before Pilate witnessed the good confession” is the “blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords” (1 Tim. 6:13-16). Jesus did not leave his divine nature behind for all time or for any time when he came to this earth. The Bible clearly teaches that a part of Jesus’ existence included the “days of His flesh” (Heb. 5:7). However, that very affirmation suggests that the same “He” had an existence both *before and after* that time which was not characterized by “flesh,” a mortal nature. That “He” was the same divine spirit known as the Word who came into the world in a body prepared for him (Heb. 10:5). After that fleshly existence, the same “He” re-entered his heavenly glory (John 17:4-5; Rev. 5). “Unto Him that sitteth on the throne, and unto the Lamb, be the blessing, and the honor, and the glory, and the dominion, for ever and ever” (Rev. 5:13).

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The Plan of Salvation

Weldon E. Warnock

The expression “the plan of salvation” is not found in the Bible. Certainly, the thought or concept is there. The nearest the Bible comes in using this phrase is when the demonic woman at Philippi said of Paul and Silas, “These men show unto us the way of salvation” (Acts 16:17). This notion is embodied in the statement, “the gospel of our salvation” (Eph. 1:13). According to 2 Timothy 1:9 salvation was purposed (planned, Beck) by God through Christ before the world began.

Some of us mistakenly conceive of the plan of salvation as hearing, faith, repentance, confession, and baptism. Careful study of the Bible will show that there is far more to the plan of salvation than these five steps. Indeed they are part of the plan, but these alone would leave out the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is Jesus who saves. We cannot provide the way of salvation. We must trust in him and surrender our hearts to his will. Peter said, “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). We sing that grand old hymn, “We have heard the joyful sound, Jesus saves. Jesus saves.”

Though Jesus saves, and without his blood we cannot be cleansed from our sins (1 John 1:7), yet he saves conditionally. If there are no conditions, then universal salvation would have to be so because God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34; Rom. 2:11). Regardless of how sincere one may be and how often he says, “Lord, Lord,” he must do the will of the heavenly Father (Matt. 7:21). Here is where the above five steps come in. We must do them in order to obey Christ and be saved as an alien sinner. Though the five steps are not put together in one passage as a unit, they are taught nevertheless in the New Testament. Examples of New Testament conversion plainly show this.

When the conditions of salvation to become a Christian are clearly and forcefully taught by faithful gospel preach-

ers, some of the self-appointed intellects (?) pompously ridicule those of us who adhere to these divine precepts as “five-steppers.” Well, so be it! The truth of the matter is that we are all “steppers.” The problem is that they have gotten in step with a bunch of gospel-perverting denominational preachers. They need to get in step with Jesus (1 Pet. 2:21).

Some of our preaching brethren don’t even know what to do to be saved. They have “jumped the traces” and put on the same yoke with Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, Billy Graham, and others of like persuasion. We read the following from the mouth of Max Lucado, a preacher in the church of Christ from Texas, December 1996 on radio station KJAK, Lubbock, Texas:

You can be sure that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor ruling spirits, nothing now, nothing in the future, no powers, nothing above us, nothing below us, nor anything else in the world will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

You see in God, by virtue of your adoption, you have a divine affinity, you have eternal security, and you have a golden opportunity.

I cannot imagine an orphan turning down an opportunity to be adopted. With one decision, with one raising of the hand, with one agreement to leave the orphanage, that person all of a sudden goes from being abandoned to claimed, from having no name to having a new name, no future to a new future, he leaves the orphanage and enters the house of the father.

That’s what God offers you. There is no quiz, no examination, no charge. All you have to do is to say yes to the Father. And many of you have done that. But I have a hunch that not all of you have. I have a hunch that there is a few of you listening, even now, and God is using this to pull on your heart. The Holy Spirit is informing you of something that you have never really heard before — and that is, God is ready to be your Father. Maybe you never

understood that the invitation was for everyone. Maybe you thought you were not worthy. Maybe now you do understand. God will make you worthy, and the invitation is for you. And all you have to do is call him Father. Just call him Father. Just turn your heart to him even right now as I am speaking. Call him your Father. And your Father will respond. Why don't you do that?

With instrumental music playing in the background, "Father, I give my heart to you. I give you my sins, I give you my tears, I give you my fears, I give you my whole life. I accept the gift of your Son on the cross for my sins. And I ask you, Father, to receive me as your child. Through Jesus I pray, Amen" (Copied from *The Spiritual Sword*, January 1998, edited by Alan Highers).

Brother Lucado's heretical doctrine is not recent among us in denying the necessity of water baptism for the remission of sins for an alien sinner. Logan Fox, a graduate of David Lipscomb University, a professor at Pepperdine University for a short time and a preacher in the church said, "It is possible also, that one might be born again and filled with the Spirit without being baptized, but happy is he who can with gratitude and confidence point to the day he was baptized" (*Voices of Concern*, Robert Meyers, 18). This shows the arrogance of men in light of Jesus' explicit statement, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:5). Fox said a man can be born without the water (baptism), but Jesus said he could not!

Randy Mayeux, a so-called gospel preacher, stated, "I don't know many in our fellowship who are arguing that the New Testament doesn't teach baptism. It's what happens to the person who doesn't understand that way" (*Behold the Pattern*, Goebel Music, 230). Well, try this same reasoning on faith. We believe faith in Christ as the Son of God is essential. What about the Jew or others who do not understand it this way? Jesus still said, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" (Mark 16:16). Woe unto the man who would offer salvation on lesser terms! Mayeux also said, "I have preached and believed, I believe deeply that the New Testament teaches that salvation is a free gift of God period! You are saved by grace alone." This not only eliminates faith, but also repentance and, yes, water baptism.

We are hearing that an alien sinner does not have to understand the reason for which he is being baptized in order to be saved. Rubel Shelley said, "Lately I have been bothered by two false teachings about baptism which are being circulated in our fellowship . . . unless one expressly understands that baptism is for (i.e., unto) remission of sins, he has not been baptized for the right reason, is still in his sins and needs to be baptized again" (*Behold the Pattern* 278). The Bible teaches we obey from the heart (Rom.

6:17-18). How can one obey God and do it for the wrong purpose? This is like saying we can eat the Lord's supper acceptably while at the same time not discerning the Lord's body. Strange reasoning. Buff Scott, who gravitated to the Christian Church, said, "I am convinced that the honest unimmersed who are seeking to serve the Lord but who die without coming to an adequate understanding of the new birth, will be eternally saved by God's grace and mercy." What a presumptuous statement! The highest authority for this is Buff Scott.

Brethren, we continually thank God for his wonderful grace and matchless love. Indeed by grace are we saved (Eph. 2:5). No man lives above sin. By the deeds or works of the law no flesh is justified in God's sight (Rom. 3:20). This plainly shows that we cannot be saved by perfect law keeping or perfectionism. All of us sin and come short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23). Hence, we must depend on grace. We have to come to God by the way of the cross. There is no other way. However, none is saved by grace alone. Grace must be appropriated. This is done through faith (Rom. 5:2). This is not faith alone, but a trusting, obedient faith which entails repentance (Luke 13:3; 24:47), confession (Acts 8:37), and water baptism (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 22:16; Rom. 6:3, 4; Gal. 3:27; 1 Pet. 3:21). By God's grace Jesus tasted death for every man (Heb. 2:9), but the benefits of his death, namely, his blood, are received in water baptism (Rom. 6:3).

The Pentecostians, the Ethiopian eunuch, Paul, Cornelius, Lydia, and the Philippian jailor had Christ preached to them and all responded in the same manner. None was saved by faith only, repeating after the preacher the so-called sinner's prayer or direct operation of the Holy Spirit. Unless you were saved the same way these were saved in the examples stated above, you have not been saved. Think seriously about it. God's great plan of salvation will be consummated at Christ's second coming (cf. Heb. 9:28; 1 Pet. 1:5).

Let us be careful that we be not led away by these nefarious doctrines promulgated by men who are making shipwreck of the faith.

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The Two Covenants

Frank Jamerson

The apostle Paul said: “For these are the two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai . . . (the other from the Jerusalem above” (Gal. 4:24). That should be sufficient to prove that there is more than one covenant, but further study will show that there are many covenants mentioned in the Bible, and though fellowship with God was always available to men, all were not under the same covenant.

According to “Quick Verse” there are 292 uses of the word “covenant,” fifteen uses of “everlasting covenant,” two of “perpetual covenant,” and there are many other covenants not specifically so called. The word covenant is defined as: “between nations: a treaty, alliance of friendship; between individuals: a pledge or agreement . . . between God and man: a covenant accompanied by signs, sacrifices, and a solemn oath that sealed the relationship with promises of blessings for keeping the covenant and curses for breaking it” (*Theological Workbook of the O.T.* I:128). W.E. Vine says the word may refer to “a promise, or undertaking, human or divine . . . an agreement, a mutual undertaking, between God and Israel — see Deut. 29 and 30 (described as a ‘commandment,’ Heb. 7:18, cp. ver. 22).” Hebrews 7 says “there is an annulling of the former commandment . . . for the law made nothing perfect . . . (and) Jesus has become a surety of a better covenant” (vv. 18, 19, 22). Here the law of Moses is called the *former commandment* that was weak, and is contrasted to the *better covenant* given through Christ. Thayer says: “a disposition, arrangement, of any sort, which one wishes to be valid . . . we find in the N.T. two distinct covenants spoken of (Gal. 4:24), viz. the Mosaic and the Christian . . . *diatheke* is used in 2 Cor. 3:14, of the sacred books of the O.T.” (136, 137). A covenant may refer to a promise, or a purpose of God. God’s eternal purpose (salvation of man in Christ, Eph. 1:3-11) has never changed, but a covenant may also refer to instructions, or law. Moses said, God “declared to you His covenant which He commanded you to perform,” and that covenant

included the Ten Commandments (Deut. 4:13; 5:2, 3).

God was in relationship (or covenant) with Adam and Eve, but their relationship was severed because they violated his instructions (or covenant). Hosea said Israel “like Adam, transgressed the covenant” (Hos. 6:7, NASV). Circumcision was both a “covenant” (a command of God) and a “sign of the covenant” (the special relationship) between God and Abraham (Gen. 17:9-11). It was also included in the covenant God made with Israel (Lev. 12:3), thus, a sign of a special relationship between God and one nation, but it was also a law (Acts 7:8; Gal. 5:3). The Sabbath was a sign of God’s special agreement with Israel (Exod. 31:16, 17). It was also part of “His covenant . . . the Ten Commandments” (Deut. 4:13, 23), or “the law of commandments” (Exod. 24:12; Deut. 4:44).

When Hilkiah “found the Book of the Law of the Lord given by Moses” (2 Chron. 34:14), King Josiah, “made a covenant (agreement) before the Lord, to follow the Lord, and to keep *His commandments* and *His testimonies* and *His statutes* with all his heart and all his soul, to perform the *words of the covenant* that were written in this book” (v. 31). The “words of the covenant” were read in “the book of the law.” Covenant here refers to the revelation of God’s will, his law. There are many covenants, and more than a half dozen called “everlasting,” but my assignment is to discuss the two major covenants — the Old and the New (2 Cor. 3:6, 14), the First and the Second (Heb. 8:7), the one given through Moses (John 1:17; Gal. 3:19) and the one given through Christ (Heb. 8:6). We will affirm that God predicted the passing of the first covenant *before* it was given, *at the very time* it was given and *while* it was in effect.

Before The Old Covenant Was Given

Long before the Old Covenant was given, God gave a picture of its demise. While the promise to Abram was waiting to be fulfilled, Sarai suggested that her husband go

into Hagar and bear children (Gen. 16:2). After Isaac was born, Sarah told Abraham to “cast out this bondwoman and her son; for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son” (Gen. 21:10).

Paul said those who “desire to be under the law” (of Moses), need to hear what the law said. Then he referred to this story and said “which things are symbolic. For these are two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai (represents bondage of the law) . . . but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all . . . So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman but of the free” (Gal. 4:21-26, 31). If the covenant that was given on Mount Sinai is still binding, we are still children of the bondwoman!

At the Time the Old Covenant was Given

When God gave the Old Covenant, Moses came down from the Mount, and “did not know that the skin of his face shone,” and the children of Israel “were afraid to come near him.” He called them to him and “gave them as commandments all that the Lord had spoken with him on Mount Sinai. And when Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil on his face” (Exod. 34:29-33).

The Holy Spirit used the passing of the glory on Moses’ face as figurative of the “ministry of death, written and engraved on stone” passing away (2 Cor. 3:7). The concealing of the fading of the glory was symbolic of the fact that some whose “minds were hardened” still did not see that the Old Covenant had passed away. “For to this day, when they read the Old Covenant, the same veil remains unlifted” (v. 14, RSV). Paul said God “made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant” (v. 7). The Old Covenant was glorious, but the New is more glorious! The Old “passed away,” the New “remains”!

God never intended for the law given through Moses to be permanent. Paul said it “was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made” (Gal. 3:19). Like Ishmael, when the promised Seed came, it was “cast out.” It served its purpose as a tutor (or bus driver) to “bring us to Christ,” but after “faith,” (or “the faith”) came, we are “no longer under the tutor” (Gal. 3:23-25). Paul was not talking about “Judaizing of the law,” but the basic purpose of the Old Covenant. It served its purpose, and is still valuable (Rom. 15:4), but as surely as “the faith” has come, we are “no longer under the tutor.”

While the Old Covenant Was In Effect

God, through Jeremiah said: “I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah — not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt (cf. 2 Chron. 5:10), My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the Lord . . . for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will re-

member no more” (Jer. 31:31-34).

Those who advocate one covenant assert that this was fulfilled (simply “renewed”) in the restoration from Babylonian captivity and again under Christ. It is true that the basic principles stated, existed under the first covenant (the law of Moses), just as many of the things in the first covenant existed before Mount Sinai, but that does not prove that the new covenant was established upon the return from Babylon.

The prophecy of Jeremiah is quoted twice in the book of Hebrews. After the first quotation (Heb. 8:8-12), the writer concluded: “In that He says, A New Covenant, He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away” (v. 13). Before the New Covenant could come into existence the first had to become obsolete, or vanish away. When Jeremiah prophesied a New Covenant it implied that the current one would become old and obsolete. Jim McGuiggan commented: “Hebrews 8:13 doesn’t say the old covenant was ‘becoming old.’ It specifically says ‘In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made (perfect tense denoting completed action with results continuing in the present — the first covenant stands ‘having been made old’)” (*The Reign of God* 91). The first covenant became obsolete, not “renewed,” and the new was given! If the New Covenant was given during the post-exile period, why did Haggai exhort the people to keep the word that the Lord covenanted with them when they “came out of Egypt” instead of when they came out of Babylon (Hag. 2:5)? Ezra told those who had returned, and married foreign wives, to “put away all these wives and those who have been born to them.” Is this part of the New Covenant? Should we tell those who marry “foreign wives” (or those not in the covenant), to put them away? Ezra said “let it be done according to the law” — not according to the New Covenant (Ezra 10:2, 3; Deut. 7:3)! The Old Covenant was given through Moses to one nation (Deut. 5:2, 3). The New Covenant was given through Christ to the whole world (Mal. 3:1; Matt. 28:18-20).

Jeremiah 31 is quoted again in Hebrews 10:16, 17. The writer then concludes: “Now where there is remission of these, there is no longer an offering for sin” (v. 18). If the remission of sins that Jeremiah prophesied was fulfilled in the post-exile period, why did Malachi condemn the Jews for not sacrificing the proper animals? Did animal sacrifices cease during the post-exile period? (There was a sense in which sins were forgiven under the Old Covenant, when people offered animal sacrifices [Lev. 17:11], but this is not what Jeremiah prophesied. The Hebrew writer said the law “can never with those same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect . . . For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins . . . for the law made nothing perfect . . . God having provided something better for us,

that they should not be made perfect apart from us” [Heb. 10:1, 4; 7:19; 11:40]. Christ died “for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant” [Heb. 9:15], not because they had been forgiven!

When Jesus died on the cross, he “broke down the middle wall of division between us, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace” (Eph. 2:14, 15). The law, having been given to the Jew and not the Gentile (Deut. 5:2, 3; Rom. 2:14; 3:1, 2), brought enmity, but it was taken away and a New Covenant made with the Jew first (as Jeremiah prophesied), and then the Gentile (Rom. 1:16). Yes, many of the principles in the Old are repeated, but it is a New Covenant.

The Blood of Animals Versus the Blood of Christ

“Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read in the hearing of the people. And they said, All that the Lord has said we will do, and be obedient. And Moses took the blood, sprinkled it on the people, and said Behold, the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you according to all these words” (Exod. 24:7, 8). The Hebrew writer tells us that the first covenant was not “dedicated without blood. For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water, scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, saying, This is the blood of the covenant which God has commanded you” (Heb. 9:19, 20). This “blood of the covenant” was “blood of calves and goats,” not the blood of Christ! Though Jesus died for the transgressions under the first covenant (Heb. 9:15), he did not dedicate that covenant with his blood. His covenant

went into effect when the appointed sacrifice was made — his death (Heb. 9:15-17). A man who “rejected Moses’ law” is contrasted with one who “counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing” (Heb. 10:28, 29).

Conclusion

Many teachings found in the Old Covenant are also found in the New, but the Old was dedicated with the blood of animals, and the New with the blood of Christ. Understanding this basic biblical distinction frees us from the impossible task of determining whether every practice in the Old Covenant is moral, or ceremonial — which is an accommodative human distinction. When Paul told the Romans, “you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ” (his death), he included the law that said “thou shalt not covet” (Rom. 7:4, 7). To the Corinthians, he said “the ministry of death, written and engraved on stones” passed away (2 Cor. 3:6-11). Both of these passages contain what is called “moral law,” but we died to it, and it passed away! We grant that many moral principles have not changed. Some before Sinai were incorporated into the Old Covenant, and some in the Old Covenant were incorporated into the New Covenant, but if it is not in the New Covenant, it has not been dedicated by the blood of Christ. What God spoke “through angels proved steadfast” (Heb. 2:2; Gal. 3:19), but “the great salvation” was “first spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him” (Heb. 2:3). *Let us hear Christ!*

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“Marriage” continued from page 2

pricked by what Jesus said. Those who remarry contrary to what Jesus authorized will be disturbed. Those living in adultery must cease their sin of adultery (separate from an unlawful mate) to conform to what Jesus said (cf. Mark 6:17-18). That would be anything but easy (cf. Ezra 10:9-10, 44). The Lord’s message is not a soft and smooth gospel.

How Are Men Speaking Smooth Things About Divorce And Remarriage?

1. *Not teaching on divorce and remarriage at all.* Those who just avoid the subject, whether it be because they think it to be too controversial or because they are afraid of the consequences, have softened the gospel message by leaving that part out. Some men, because their position differs from many in the congregation, will agree not to teach on divorce and remarriage. While they may not be teaching

error, they are not teaching the truth. The whole counsel is not being preached (Acts 20:27). At least part of the word is not being preached (2 Tim. 4:1-2). Those who sit at the feet of such men may never hear the truth about divorce and remarriage.

2. *Encouraging divorce for any cause.* The permanence of marriage that the Bible teaches is not popular. When some brother encourages divorce (teaches that it is scriptural) for causes other than fornication (as long as one does not remarry), he makes the message more acceptable to those who do not respect the fact that marriage is for life. That is a smoother message for the couple that fuss and fight all the time and want out of their marriage. God’s law does not authorize it.

3. *Teaching that the guilty party can remarry.* The Lord’s

instructions (Matt. 19:9) allow one to put his mate away for fornication and remarry. Some brethren teach that the one who has been put away for fornication (“guilty party”) can also scripturally remarry. That is a smooth message to the ears for the guilty party, because Jesus never authorized it. In fact, Jesus said, “and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery” (Matt. 19:9b).

4. *Allowing some put away people to remarry.* Some argue that the one who has been put away (for a cause other than fornication) can remarry if the former mate remarries first. Others argue that if one is put away by a mate who has committed fornication, he can remarry. Neither of these is authorized by the Lord. In contrast, Jesus said, “and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery” (Matt. 19:9b; 5:32b; Luke 16:18).

5. *Telling the alien sinner he is not amenable to the law of Christ.* Even though the gospel (the law of Christ) is for all nations (Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:15) and Jesus applied his teaching to “whosoever” (Matt. 19:9), we are told by some brethren that Christ’s law on marriage only applies to Christians who are married. Thus, non-Christians are neither governed nor judged by what Jesus taught. If one divorces (for whatever cause) and remarries he can continue with the mate he has when he obeys the gospel. He becomes amenable to the law of Christ when he is a Christian. That is a far more convenient message than what the Lord presented in Matthew 19:9.

6. *Redefining adultery.* When men are allowed to redefine adultery to mean “covenant breaking” (the unscriptural divorce and remarriage) and not the unlawful sexual activity with the second mate, the message of Christ is so much smoother to the ears of those in second or third marriages. That means that if they repent of breaking the covenant with their first mates and determine not to do it again, they can stay together. No lexicon or passage justifies this arbitrary definition of adultery (cf. the use of the term in Matt. 5:28; John 8:4).

7. *Speaking of the ambiguity of Matthew 19:9.* Some have spoken of the ambiguity of Matthew 19:9. I understand their point to be that they are unsure if this text is even authorizing remarriage when divorce is for the cause of fornication. They are quick to suggest that their point is even more “conservative” than what I and others teach on Matthew 19:9. However, my concern about such discussion is that if we convince our hearers that there is ambiguity with Matthew 19:9, they may conclude that we cannot be certain that one who puts away his mate (for some cause other than fornication) and remarries commits adultery. Since we can’t be certain what Jesus was really saying, we would need to tolerate a diversity of doctrines on divorce and remarriage.

Let us be content with what Jesus taught. Let us preach it as it is revealed.

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