

TRUTH

Some Things My Mother Taught Me

Marc C. Gibson

A godly mother is one of the greatest blessings one could

ever have. Though women have been placed by God in a submissive role that was caused in part by Eve's transgression, "nevertheless, she will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control" (1 Tim. 2:11-15). I believe the principle here would apply equally to a mother who raises adopted children. There are many responsibilities on the shoulders of mothers every day. We should take time to reflect on what our mothers taught us. Mothers have a tremendous influence on their children. Here are some things my mother taught me.

1. Patience — Any marriage will require a load of patience on the part of both the husband and wife. A patient wife is a blessing to any husband. There may be times of difficult work or unstable emotions when patience is needed. The woman can be a soothing element to the rough edges of the man. The calmness of the wife can temper the impetuosity of a husband. And then come the children. Patience can be in short supply as the house fills with scurrying feet and

scattered toys. Immature actions can test the limits of patience. I know my mother had to put up with a lot from five children, and we tested her patience many times. Dad was very busy with factory work, selling shoes, and farming while mom patiently saw to the daily needs of the home. It had to be done, and Mom's patient endurance taught me to take one day at a time and to diligently do whatever work needed to be done.

2. Discipline —

Mom still has the paddle that warmed my backside on occasion. It has a picture of a deer and a bear with the words written in the middle: "The little deer with the bare behind." It took me awhile to figure that out, and it sure did not amuse me then like it does now. I understand now that Mom did not enjoy using that paddle, but I needed it from time to time, and I am better for it (loving corporal punishment works! Parents today need to use it instead of listening to the modern psychobabble of human wisdom — read Proverbs 13:24; 22:15). Mom is quiet and reserved, but could be very

*"And ye shall
know the truth,
and the truth
shall make
you free"
(John 8:32).*

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Worship Services In Modern Denominations

Mike Willis

When one reads the Saturday paper of the coming events at the churches in the area, he almost thinks that he is reading the coming attractions in the entertainment section. The worship services of the mega-churches in America that are broadcast are major productions featuring professional entertainers, choirs, and professional motivational speakers. The audience is *watching* the service rather than *participating* in the service.



One thing that Americans will not accept is something that is “boring.” With the option of over seventy channels on cable TV and over a hundred on satellite programming, Americans channel surf looking for that which is most entertaining. We are used to switching from one program to another that is more entertaining. In comparison with television, religious worship is boring to most Americans. Three songs, a prayer, the Lord’s supper, taking the contribution, and a 30-45 minute lesson can hardly compete with television entertainment.

In an effort to reach the audience, the denominations use a variety of new things in their worship. Worship is casual, a come-as-you-are atmosphere, with members attending dressed like they were going to a little league game. The presentation of worship may feature a drama presentation or it may have some celebrity to speak (coach of a popular professional team, a politician, an entertainer). Special stunts are presented to increase the crowd (“I will kiss a pig if we have 500 in worship on Sunday morning!”). Music is one of the big drawing cards, with quartets, solos, and semi-professional bands presenting their portion of the worship.

The preaching is adjusted to reach this crowd as well. Doctrinal preaching is eliminated in favor of motivational and devotional lessons; sermons on family relationships, relating “inspiring” stories of believers, testimonials, and other spiritual pabulum (at best) are the common fare. The situation is that described by Paul: “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables” (2 Tim. 4:3-4).

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“God Spoke To My Heart”

Larry Ray Hafley

Many proclaim their personal salvation because “*God spoke to my heart and saved me.*” Why not accept such a claimant? Why do we not believe their testimony and receive him into the temple of God?

First, if we accept his claim, how do we deny similar visions and visits when given by Jews, Muslims, and pagan witch doctors? They, too, have had “experiences” with Deity. Upon what basis do we denounce their cases as fraudulent and deniable while pronouncing ours as faithful and reliable?

Second, Scripture shows that one’s devout faith in his “divine” encounters is not determinant; that is, they do not establish the truthfulness of one’s appeals. (a) Beyond doubt, the prophets of Baal believed their Lord was the true God (1 Kings 18:21-40). Also, beyond doubt, they were wrong! (b) The people of Samaria sincerely felt that Simon was “the great power of God,” but they were in error (Acts 8:9-11). (c) Remember Saul of Tarsus? He believed that he was right in opposing the cause of Christ (Acts 23:1; 26:9-11). His experiences and personal testimony did not justify him. Despite his earnest enthusiasm, he was acting “ignorantly in unbelief” (1 Tim. 1:13). Later, the Lord spoke to him, but not to save him. Ananias was sent to tell him what he must do to be saved (Acts 9:6; 22:16). (d) One can deceive “his own heart” (Jas. 1:26). He may, therefore, deceive himself regarding whether or not God has “touched” his heart. The Holy Spirit verifies this conclusion. “There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death” (Prov. 14:12). “O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps” (Jer. 10:23).

Third, in no New Testament case of conversion did God speak to a man to save him. Neither by direct communication nor by angelic agency did the Lord ever speak to and save anyone. “Faith cometh by hearing,” by hearing “the word of faith” as preached by the apostles; we are brought to belief “through their word” (cf. John 17:20; Rom. 10:8, 14, 17). Though it does not please some men, it has “pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe” (1 Cor. 1:21; 4:15; Jas. 1:18; 1 Pet. 1:23).

Objections:

1. “Didn’t the Holy Spirit fall upon people in Acts 2?” The Spirit came upon the preachers, the apostles, *not* upon the audience (Acts 1:26-2:4, 37). Through the words of the apostles as given by the Spirit, men were led to faith and obedience (Acts 2:37, 40, 41; cf. John 17:20; 2 Cor. 4:7; 5:18-20). It is so with us today. We have the apostolic word in the New Testament. We “hear” the apostles as those in Jesus’ day “heard” Moses and the prophets;

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that is, through their writings (cf. Luke 16:31; Acts 13:27; 15:21; 2 Thess. 2:15).

2. “But what about the Ethiopian eunuch?” In this case, “the angel of the Lord” and “the Spirit” spoke unto the preacher (Acts 8:26, 29). So far as the treasurer knew, no heavenly intercession was involved. The Lord spoke to the eunuch, but he did so through human agency — “Philip preached unto him Jesus” (Acts 8:35).

3. “An angel of God spoke to Cornelius!” Yes, he did, but what did he tell him (Acts 10:3-6; 11:13, 14)? The angel told Cornelius, “Send . . . for Simon, whose surname is Peter; Who shall tell thee words whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved.” Peter, neither the angel or the Lord, spoke the words by which Cornelius was saved. Peter said it was “by my mouth” that Cornelius “should hear the . . . gospel and believe” (Acts 15:7). Cornelius knew he must hear Peter’s words in order to know the commandments of God — “We are all here present before God to hear all things that are commanded thee of God” (Acts 10:33; cf. 10:48).

Conclusion

The consistent pattern of the accounts of conversion in the name of Christ included the preaching of the gospel to the sinner. There is no exception to this rule. “When they heard this, they were pricked in their heart. . . . And with

many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation. Then they that gladly received his word were baptized” (Acts 2:4, 22, 29, 37, 40, 41). “They . . . so spake, that a great multitude . . . believed” (Acts 14:1). “And many of the Corinthians hearing, believed and were baptized” (Acts 18:8).

Note a negative argument to this point. Paul spoke of Jews who had forbidden him “to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved” (1 Thess. 2:16). If he had spoken to them, they could be saved, but since they forbade his preaching, they could not be. “Then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts (Why does he do this? Why does he take the word out of their hearts?) — lest they should believe and be saved” (Luke 8:12).

Before one can trust in Christ and be saved, he must hear the gospel (Eph. 1:13). That faith comes by hearing the word of God as found in the New Testament. It can be received in no other way (1 Cor. 4:6, 15; 15:1-4, 11).

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At Ease In Zion

Mark Mayberry

Many were at ease in the days of Amos (Amos 6:1-8). People of that day had a false sense of security. They didn’t realize the impending danger of God’s judgment. Sadly, many modern-day saints are also at ease in Zion. Lukewarm and lethargic, they also have been lulled asleep by Satan’s siren song. Nevertheless, such calm and sweet repose is wholly unwarranted.

If Christians are at ease today, it isn’t because there is nothing to do. In fact, there is much work to be accomplished (Jer. 48:10; John 4:34-35; 9:4-5; 17:4; 19:28-30; 1 Cor. 15:58; Eph. 2:8-10).

If Christians are at ease today, it isn’t because there is an excess of workers. In fact, there is a shortage of workers (Matt. 9:35-38; Rom. 16:3, 9, 12, 21; Col. 4:10-11; Phile. 1, 23-24; 2 Tim. 4:9-12; 3 John 5-8).

If Christians are at ease today, it isn’t because there is plenty of time. In fact, time and opportunity are limited (Job 7:6; 9:25-26; Ps. 39:4-5; 103:13-16; 2 Cor. 6:1-2; Eph. 5:15-16; Jas. 4:13-17).

Like those of Amos’ day, the church at Laodicea was also at ease in Zion. Despite their complacency, they were facing desperate spiritual straits. God demands that all such individuals be zealous and repent (Rev. 3:14-19)! We must be diligent in the Lord’s service (Tit. 2:11-14).

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“We . . . Are Pretty Much Like the Neighbors”

Jarrold Jacobs

Quoted above is a statement that was made recently by Gary Holloway, head of the Bible department at David Lipscomb University in Nashville, Tennessee. On July 8, a story came out in *The Tennessean* concerning the “Jubilee” that has taken place in the last decade, as well as attitudes among those in churches of Christ whom we would consider “ultra-liberal.” Among the things said by Gary Holloway, head of the Bible department at David Lipscomb University, was:

My guess is, today we fit in very well with the culture.

We have crossed the tracks and are pretty much like the neighbors.

Many in the Churches of Christ today would be embarrassed to claim we’re the “only” Christians.

(All quotes from *The Tennessean*, July 8, 2000, 1B.)

Do these quotes accurately portray what the Bible teaches? God expects his children to be “*a peculiar people, zealous of good works*” (Tit. 2:14). To be “peculiar” is to be special. In fact, the NKJ uses the term “special” rather than peculiar in Titus 2:14. When one is special, is he like everyone else? How can one be like “the neighbors” and still be peculiar? It is not possible!

Further, since when could we consider it a good thing to “fit in” with the culture around us? And why would this be considered a worthwhile accomplishment? If nothing else, the Bible tells Christians to “come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you” (2 Cor. 6:17). Peter said that Christians are “strangers and pilgrims” upon this earth (1 Pet. 2:11).

Again, Gary Holloway, head of the Bible department at

David Lipscomb University said that many in the churches of Christ would be embarrassed to claim we’re the “only” Christians. Is this correct? Would *you* be “embarrassed” if you heard someone say this?

The Bible teaches that there is only one way to be saved — through Christ (John 14:6). Being saved through Christ, means being saved on his terms, and not ours. What are Christ’s terms? Believe in him or die in our sins (John 8:24). We must repent of our sins or perish, the Lord said (Luke 13:3). We must confess him before men in order for Christ to confess us before his Father (Matt. 10:32-33). We must also be baptized for the remission of sins (Mark 16:16). This is what our Lord taught. Therefore, those who follow Christ’s commands can be saved and are rightly called Christians (Acts 11:26).

But, what about those who do *not* follow the Lord’s plan, but some other plan? Could these people rightly be called Christians? If so, how? If there is only one way to enter a building, and we do not enter through that way, how can we be in the building? So also, there is only one way to Christ (Gal. 3:26-27). Therefore, how can one say he will go another way and achieve the same results? Christ said for one to try to enter in another way was to be a “thief and a robber” (John 10:1); and one who does so was intent on doing damage and inflicting harm on his people (John 10:10). From cover to cover, the Bible makes it clear that God has always had one way which pleased him, and if people were going to be his children, they would respect and follow his will. Otherwise, they were not (and are not) his children!

In teaching the gospel, there is nothing to be embarrassed about! The gospel is the most narrow, the most divisive,

the most judgmental, the most perfect book ever seen in the history of man. It is divine in origin and inspiration. I guess, to some, this might make them embarrassed because they are more concerned about people's feelings than their souls. However, Paul said, "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. 1:16-17). Paul, by inspiration, made it clear that there is no other way for man to be saved than through the gospel. No, it is not good that those among us, even the "ultra-liberal" groups, see themselves as no different from any other organization. It is not good that such people as Gary Holloway, head of the Bible department at David Lipscomb University, thinks that "we . . . are pretty much like the neighbors." To me, and others who love the truth, this is a sign of digression, a sign of embarrassment and shame, rather than something in which one could rejoice.

Some may wonder why we would discuss these issues, especially when such attitudes do not necessarily portray our attitude. Nor would we practice what they are practicing, nor say what they are saying. The reason we discuss these issues is because if we are ignorant of what is going on, we are likely to follow in their footsteps. Inevitably, what the denominations and liberal-minded brethren are doing now, "we" will be trying in a few years. The cure for this disease is knowledge and application of God's word to our lives on a daily basis. If we are not schooled and skilled in the Scriptures, we are easy targets for Satan (1 Pet. 5:8).


By the way, does gospel preaching embarrass you? Does firm, solid preaching which specifically condemns error and exhorts men to turn and live for God make you

uncomfortable? Read 2 Timothy 4:2 and see that this type of preaching was demanded of Timothy by Paul: "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine." If we are embarrassed by this, or uncomfortable with this, then we are uncomfortable with the will of God!

It is high time we recognized that we are Christians, separate from this world (2 Cor 6:17). It is high time we recognized that as Christians, we are not to be like this world, but to be like Christ (1 Pet. 2:21-22). It is high time we recognized that since we are "strangers and pilgrims" on this earth (1 Pet. 2:11), we are not trying to win a popularity contest with the world, but are trying to persuade men and women to turn to the Lord before it is too late (2 Cor. 5:11). If there are people who will not submit to the Lord's will, then it is not up to us to change the message to suit them! Our responsibility is to turn to someone else and let them hear the truth that we might all live for Christ and go to heaven one day. Friends, some will be condemned to hell because they refused the will of God (Rev. 21:8; Gal. 5:19-21; 1 Cor. 6:9-10). But, changing the message of God to satisfy others, or to save "embarrassment," and to have us "pretty much like our neighbors" helps no one and condemns all of us to an eternity in hell (Gal. 1:6-9; Rev. 22:18-19). Let us remember who we are!!



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Who Would Have Ever Thought It?

Johnie Edwards

A couple of church bulletins came across my desk that caught my eye. As I read these bulletins, a question came to mind as to who would have ever thought churches of Christ would be engaging in such things? Please note how far some churches of Christ are getting out in left field.

1. Annual Chili Cook-Off. The Bering Drive Church of Christ in Houston, Texas is hosting a “Chili Cook-Off” on March 3. Their bulletin stated that, “The Chili Cook-Off has become one of Bering’s most attended and enjoyed activities.” Looks like, from the announcement, this social affair outstrips worship and other spiritual work of the church! Question: Did you ever read anything in the Bible about the church of the Lord hosting a Chili Cook-Off?

2. Fellowship Hall. An announcement in the Adamsville, Alabama church bulletin says, “Please pick up dishes in the fellowship hall.” Why would the Lord’s church ever need a fellowship hall since we are never told to provide for social activities?

3. City-Wide Prayer Meeting. Another bulletin states, “On Tuesday, February 12, believers in the city will gather for the first city-wide, prayer gathering of 2002. It will be held at Houston’s First Baptist Church at 7 p.m.” Who would have ever thought that we would be reading of the church of Christ joining up with the Baptist Church for such? Ever read Ephesians 5:11?

Conversion

by B.F. Manire

A study of the meaning of “conversion,” cases of conversion recorded in Scripture, and scriptural baptism. #80258.

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4. Community Care Center. The Central Church of Christ bulletin of Bedford, Indiana said, “I consider 2001 a success financially because we supported many benevolent and outreach works. When we include preaching, pre-school, food preparation and flowers, local outreach and outreach for mission works, as well as benevolence for people of the local community, including donations to the Community Care Center . . .” A thing might look financially successful but not touch top, side or bottom scripturally! Is there a passage of Scripture telling the church to support such?

5. A Passover Festival. A Texas church of Christ is joining with the Westminster Methodist Church for a “Passover Festival” in Bering’s fellowship hall. “There will be roast lamb, unleavened bread, ‘bitter herbs’ and wine mixed with water (or grape juice for those who prefer); as they reenact Jesus’ last supper. There will be a remembrance of God delivering Israel from slavery in Egypt. . . .” I thought the Passover belonged to Jewish activities as reported in Exodus 12!

6. Easter Service. I also read where the church of Christ joined with the Methodist Church for a “Good Friday Communion Service to remember the Cross of Christ and celebrate our common faith.” I never knew that we had a “common faith” with the Methodist Church, did you? Then, “on Sunday, March 31, everyone is encouraged to gather in the fellowship hall at 8:45 a.m. to begin the Easter Celebration with a continental breakfast.” Who would have ever thought that we would read of a church of Christ celebrating Easter?

Then this: “The Rejoice Singers will lead the church in a contemporary celebration of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, including a dramatic presentation from the gospels.” “After the morning service, the children will enjoy a traditional Easter Egg Hunt on the church lawn.”

Beats me!

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Seven Fundamental Facts About Hell

Glendol McClure

The subject of *hell* is often considered an unpopular subject with some. The fact that very few preachers of our “wise” society ever discuss the subject, suggests its unpopularity, or the false belief on the part of many that *hell* does not exist. Many people in our society believe, because of their immoral conduct and ungodliness, that *hell* does not exist and would deny that they or anyone else could go there. Yet in a rage or fit of anger, they would tell someone to “*go to hell!*” How many have you ever heard admit that they believe a relative or loved one or they themselves are going there? Please consider with me seven fundamental facts about hell:

First, it is a real place! The same Bible that teaches of heaven, teaches there is a place called *hell*. If the Bible says it is a *real* place, then that settles it! Since God’s “word is truth” (John 17:17), and God “cannot lie” (Tit. 1:2), and the fact is that Jesus warned his disciples of this place (Luke 12:4-5), without a doubt, there is such a place!

Second, it is a horrible place! It is described more in terms of “fire” than any other figure of speech. It is described as an “everlasting fire” (Matt. 25:41); “the fire that shall never be quenched” (Mark 9:43); “a lake of fire” (Rev. 20:15); a place of “everlasting punishment” (Matt. 25:46). It is not surprising that in this place “there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth” (Matt 13:42).

Third, it is a place anyone can go! There are many places I cannot go. I cannot go into a Mormon temple because I am not a Mormon and neither can you if you are not a Mormon. But, anyone can go to the place called *hell!* Because God is a God of *love*, many refuse to believe that he will allow anyone to go there (1 John 4:8). But, God is a God of *wrath* as well. Paul taught of the “goodness and severity of God” (Rom. 11:22). God will deal severely with those who disobey him (Rom. 11:20). Listen to the words of Paul, “And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the

glory of his power” (2 Thess. 1:7-9). All the disobedient *will* go there!

Fourth, it is a place of eternal duration! This place has no end; time stands still in this place. It is difficult for man to fathom eternity. Why? To everything in this life there is an end. Just as heaven is never ending, *hell* is never ending — it is eternal (Mark 3:29; Heb. 6:2; Jude 7)!

Fifth, it is the abode of great classes of people, even angels! The immoral will be there (1 Cor. 6:9-10; Gal. 5:19-21; Rev. 21:8)! Children of God or unfaithful brethren who become “again entangled” in the “pollutions of the world” will be there (2 Pet. 2:20-22; Heb. 6:1-6; 10:23-31)! The “devil and his angels” and all sinners will be there (Matt. 25:41; Rev. 21:8)! Will you or I be there? We make the choice whether to be with God or Satan!

Sixth, it is a place of no escape! In this life, prisoners can escape from a prison to the outside world. But in *hell*, there is no place to escape; the world and all things therein will be burned up (2 Pet 3:9-12). There will be no way to cross “the great gulf fixed” (Luke 16:26). Remember, it is the place of “everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power” (2 Thess. 1:9).

Seventh, it is a place that can be avoided! God is rich in mercy and grace, in that he sent his Son to die for those lost in sin. Since “all have sinned” (Rom. 3:23; 5:12), then all men must believe and obey the saving gospel of Christ to *avoid* this place (Rom. 1:16; Acts 10:35). The Hebrew writer expressed it well when he wrote, “And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him” (Heb. 5:9).

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Renew Promptly!

“Some Of Us Have Found A Way”

Harry Osborne

When one seeks to find a new way, he avoids examination of God’s word and diverts attention from it. The way found in such a search is the broad way which leads to destruction for all those who travel thereon (Matt. 7:13).

A few months ago, several brethren from the area gathered to discuss present differences among brethren regarding the scriptural bounds of fellowship. Some voiced various arguments for having a continuous, on-going fellowship with one teaching doctrinal error — specifically, error justifying unlawful divorce and remarriage. Others responded, citing specific passages which instruct us not to have an on-going and continuous fellowship with one teaching doctrinal error or engaging in sinful practice (Eph. 5:7-11; Rom. 16:17; 2 John 9-11).

After the study, I talked with one brother who had repeatedly affirmed his willingness to have a known teacher of doctrinal error occupy the pulpit where he preaches. When I asked him what passage would authorize us to receive a teacher of doctrinal error into our fellowship, he gave no passage to authorize such, but instead became increasingly agitated and insistent. Trying to focus the discussion on the Scriptures involved, I noted that the practice he suggested was in direct conflict with 2 John 9-11.

At that point, his level of irritation was clearly raised to the point that he cast some personal aspersions, but he still failed to deal with the Scriptures. After again summarizing the basic points taught in the passage, I asked him, “How can the teaching of 2 John 9-11 be harmonized with the practice of receiving a known teacher of doctrinal error into our continuous, on-

going fellowship?” Though several months have passed, I am still utterly amazed at his reply. He said, “*Some of us have found a way.*”

New Found Way of Man vs. Revealed Way of Christ

Yes, some of our brethren have “found a way” to propagate and tolerate practices and teaching contrary to the doctrine of Christ. The fact that recent ones of like mind with this brother “have found a way” suggests that there was another “way” being traveled before this new one was “found.” The purpose of this article is to remind us of that original way of truth revealed and taught by God (Ps. 86:11).

In the book of Acts, first century Christians were said to be of “the Way” as they followed Christ according to the instruction given by the gospel (Acts 19:8-10, 23; 9:1-4; cf. 18:24-26). To find that way, we go to Scripture. When one seeks to find a new way, he avoids examination of God’s word and diverts attention from it. The way found in such a search is the broad way which leads to destruction for all those who travel thereon (Matt. 7:13). The way of Christ is not merely one way among many alternate right ways that may be found by men’s devices today. Jesus said, “I am *the way, the truth, and the life*; no one cometh unto the Father, but by Me” (John 14:6 cf. Gal. 1:6-10).

Truth of Christ Is Our Pattern

The will of Christ as delivered

through the apostles is intended to serve as a pattern for all people to follow. By inspiration of the Spirit, Paul instructed, “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). A little later, Paul emphasized that point with these words:

But as for you, continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Tim. 3:14-17).

Were the words of the apostle intended only for Timothy to use as a pattern? No, for Paul also says, “And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2 Tim. 2:2). What is said of this inspired writing equally holds true for the word of God as a whole. It defines the pattern for our actions in every matter of spiritual concern. Thus, God’s revealed will through the apostles was given so that all men can understand exactly what the Lord expects of us and then act accordingly. This we can and must do (Eph. 3:1-7; 5:17; 2 Pet. 1:3).

Not only does God’s word provide us with a positive pattern showing us what we ought to do, but it also instructs regarding the pattern for corrective measures to be taken when people have violated that will. This is made obvious as the apostle continues on to command,

Remind them of these things, charging them before the Lord not to strive about words to no profit, to

the ruin of the hearers. Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. But shun profane and vain babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness. And their message will spread like cancer. Hymenaeus and Philetus are of this sort, who have strayed concerning the truth, saying that the resurrection is already past; and they overthrow the faith of some (2 Tim. 2:14-18).

How are we to know the difference between the words about which we are “not to strive” and those we must “shun” along with the teacher? The inspired writer defines the dividing line when we must “shun” the teaching and that teacher by noting their effect in these phrases:

- (1) “for they will increase to more ungodliness”
- (2) “their message will spread like cancer”
- (3) “who have strayed concerning the truth”
- (4) “they overthrow the faith of some”

When any teaching and teacher have that effect upon the souls of men, that teaching and teacher must be shunned as God commands! Failure to heed this instruction will put in jeopardy the eternal destiny of those who may hear the error and be persuaded by it. The same point is made by John in clear words.

The Pattern of 2 John 9-11

The apostle John verified the pattern shown above by Paul. He instructs the reader “do not receive” the one:

- (1) who “transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ”
- (2) who “does not bring this doctrine” (i.e. the doctrine of Christ)
- (3) who partakes of “evil deeds”

To “receive” such an one, we would be guilty of sharing and aiding in the

erroneous doctrine and the evil of the teacher. Again, nothing is said by the inspired writer about the honesty of the teacher or the clarity of the doctrine under consideration. If one teaches that which transgresses the doctrine of Christ with entirely pure motives, the teaching will still lead people to leave fellowship with God and participate in sin.

Thus, error destructive to souls must be opposed by all who love the truth of God and the souls of men. Furthermore, John viewed the truth as that which we can know and practice (2 John 6). *Therefore, when it comes to error which transgresses the doctrine of Christ and the one who teaches that error, the inspired apostle tells us that we must “not receive” the teaching or the teacher.* The pattern taught by inspiration is too plain to miss! Those who seek to accommodate the teaching or teacher of error which will destroy men’s souls need to heed that pattern.

Conclusion

The brother and his associates who “have found a way” to have continuous, on-going fellowship with those teaching doctrinal error “have found a way” not according to truth. Sadly, they may be described as “forsaking the right way, they went astray, having followed the way” of evil, whether for material gain as with Balaam or popularity or whatever is desired above truth (2 Pet. 2:15).

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The Bible has
nothing to fear
— except ne-

Where We Have Been — Where Are We Now — Where Are We Going (8)

Bill Cavender

In Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43, there is the record of the “parable of the tares” which our Lord Jesus the Christ taught to his apostles, and to all peoples from henceforth who would ever read and study his word.

The word, “tares,” which Jesus used eight times, is the Greek word, *zizanion*. W.E. Vine, in his *Expository Dictionary Of New Testament Words*, writes that “*zizanion* is a kind of darnel, the commonest of the four species, being the bearded, growing in the grain fields, as tall as wheat and barley, and resembling wheat in appearance. It was credited among the Jews with being degenerate wheat. The rabbis called it ‘bastard.’ The seeds are poisonous to man and herbivorous animals, producing sleepiness, nausea, convulsions and even death (they are harmless to poultry). The plants can be separated out, but the custom, as in the parable, is to leave the cleaning out till near the time of harvest, Matt. 13:25-27, 29, 30, 36, 38, 40. The Lord describes the tares as ‘the sons of the evil one;’ false teachings are indissociable from their propagandists.” Jesus said, “the tares are the sons of the wicked one — the devil” (vv. 38, 39), and “the tares are gathered and burned in the fire . . . that offend, and *those* who practice lawlessness . . . will cast *them* into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth” (vv. 40-42).

W.E. Vine, in his comment above, stated and understood the truth that “false teachings are indissociable from their propagandists.” The teacher and his teaching are “indissociable” (“inseparable,” according to Webster). My brethren

in Christ used to know that. They knew that Baptist preachers and Baptist doctrine go together, are inseparable; that Roman Catholic priests, the Pope of Rome, the worship of Mary, and the sacrifice of the Mass all go together, part and parcel one of another; that Christian Church preachers, missionary societies, mechanical instrumental music in worship, and the social gospel are all in the same package. I lived to learn that the nice, mannerly, kind, well-appearing, sincere Methodist preacher, who sprinkled water on my head on “Easter Sunday” when I was twelve years old and told me I had been baptized, was a false teacher and taught me false doctrine. You don’t separate a Methodist preacher from his sprinkling for baptism or his teachings that you can select and join the church of your choice.

So many, many of my brethren do not seem to understand *that* truth anymore, which W.E. Vine well-stated, that “false teachings are indissociable from their propagandists.” Ever since the extremely erroneous, damaging, divisive and destructive series of seventeen articles by brother David Edwin Harrell in *Christianity Magazine*, 1988-1990, there has been this issue and argument among many brethren as to *who* is a false teacher and *what* is false teaching. The simplicity of the Bible has become complex and the understandable word of the Lord cannot be understood! My brethren used to be able to say, without hesitation, that a man who teaches false doctrine is a false teacher. But not any more! The ideas and principle advanced nowadays are that you fellowship the teacher but reject his false teaching; that a man is not a false teacher just because he teaches false doctrine, but he must also be

immoral, divisive, and have an ugly, mean spirit, otherwise you cannot call him a “false teacher.” And it has come to pass that many brethren are thinking and saying that no one can really determine truth from error, that no one is right all the time in everything which one teaches, and that we ought not to be judgmental! Everything is relative — nothing is absolute. There is really no such thing as *truth*, the whole *truth*, and nothing but the *truth*! (John 8:32; 17:17; 18:37; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:3-4).

In effect, our Lord Jesus and the Holy Spirit who guided the apostles were in error regarding this matter of *truth*. The God of heaven, in his infinite wisdom and power, could not devise and reveal a scheme of redemption which could be understood and practiced by his fallen creatures!

Through the years I have used, and have recommended, the commentaries on the New Testament by Albert Barnes as being the most useful, understandable and practical of all the commentaries. Barnes was a Presbyterian, a great scholar. Yet he was an absolute “false teacher” on the Bible doctrines of baptism for the remission of sins, the possibility of apostasy by a child of God, and the wearing of denominational names. I have ever warned brethren who used *Barnes Commentaries* to beware of his false teachings on these Bible doctrines. His Presbyterianism took precedence over his Bible scholarship and belief of the truth. He was mistaken, honestly so. But he was a false teacher nevertheless. Barnes was not a false teacher on each and every Bible doctrine he commented upon but he was a false teacher regarding the three subjects mentioned above.

Brother Homer Hailey was not a false teacher on every Bible doctrine. But he was an absolute false teacher concerning our Lord’s teaching regarding marriage, divorce and remarriage. Misuse of Romans, chapter 14, and brother Harrell’s false teachings regarding that portion of Holy Scripture, and Harrell’s efforts to find lodging in Romans, chapter 14, for brother Hailey’s doctrines and fellowship with brother Hailey in his false teaching, has resonated with many brethren and given them much comfort in embracing error and in minimizing Bible teaching regarding the soul-damning effects of falsehood in doctrine. “Tares” — both the false teacher and error taught — are oftentimes defended with great skill and obtuse argumentation, by gifted, reputable apologists. No movement among men, religious or political, has been advanced by inferior people. Superior people — in knowledge, talent, skill, personal charisma, courage to speak and to lead — have advanced the cause of truth since the days of the inspired apostles. Such types of men also advance the causes of error in this world of easily-led, misguided, untaught people. False teachers still appear as “angels of light” (2 Cor. 11:14). Most people still love darkness rather than light (John 3:19).

“A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land; the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so: and what will ye do in the end thereof?” (Jer. 5:30-31). This is very much descriptive of the conditions found in churches of Christ today, even among brethren” and those who make the claim of “standing for the truth.”

The “tares” — teachers promoting divisions among brethren, and upholding false doctrines of institutionalism, centralized congregational cooperative movements, and the social gospel practices among the churches — were the popular, exalted, publicized, and busy preachers among the great majority of the churches of Christ in the years of 1947-1960. The preachers who endorsed, encouraged, and defended the institutions of men and church-maintenance, church-subsidization of these institutions, were the prominent preachers of “the brotherhood,” the influential leaders, along with elders, editors of papers, college presidents, and superintendants of various institutions. The seeds of division and apostasy were well-sown by able teachers in those days.

A case in point is the church of Christ in Madison, Tennessee (it is one among many, of my personal knowledge, which could be used as an illustration). When we lived in Nashville in 1947-51, and I was a student at Lipscomb and preached for the church in Ashland City, I attended several gospel meetings at Madison. One I remember was the great preaching of the gospel of Christ done by brother Rufus R. Clifford, Sr. in 1948 or 1949. In the course of this meeting he preached on “Institutionalism” and the unscripturalness of a church of Christ transferring monies to a human agency (my guess is that his sermon was possibly the last time that subject was discussed publicly, from a negative viewpoint, in the pulpit of the Madison church). Brother C.J. Garner was the local preacher of the Madison church. He was a good man, a very conservative preacher, and authored one of the outstanding church bulletins of that time. His bulletins were printed on various colors of mimeograph paper, printed with an old “Speed-0-Print” or “A. B. Dick” mimeograph machine, and mailed on a third-class mailing permit (most of us who wrote, printed and mailed



bulletins in those days used the same printing items from Master Products of Chicago, Illinois, for they sold the best paper and ink for the cheapest prices!). Brother Garner was an “expert” church bulletin preacher. He taught truth, used many charts and diagrams, exposed errors, mentioned news items about the members, encouraged people to obey God’s will, and baptized many people. The church grew in numbers and spirituality. I still have some of his church bulletins. He “being dead, yet speaketh.” The present church of Christ in Madison is not a forty-second cousin to the Madison church of the 1940s.

Brother Garner was relieved of his duties. Brother Ira North came as the “pulpit minister” and changes began to take place. Ira was a promoter “par excellence”! If ever there was a preacher who impressed me with more zeal than knowledge, with more desire to promote and build a crowd rather than root and ground people in sound doctrine, it was brother Ira. Very soon there was this “friendly rivalry” begun between the Madison church and the Broadway church in Lubbock, Texas, as to which would have the largest attended “Sunday School” in churches of Christ. After some little while, Madison began to have some three thousand plus people in “Sunday School.” Broadway tried for awhile to keep up but lost the race. Ira had political figures, sports celebrities, singers, movie stars (Pat Boone, etc.) attending “Sunday School.” Folks came to see the famous. Attendance grew. The doctrine of Christ was minimized; the wisdom and folly of men were emphasized. Popularity replaced sound preaching. No bulletins taught sound doctrine or exposed errors of men anymore. This church became a well-known leader among churches of

Christ, an example, of a church “on the march” — away from the Scriptures and into doctrinal compromise and spiritual softness. No longer would there be any enduring hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ (2 Tim. 2:3-4). The seeds of denominationalism, of compromise of truth, of departures from God’s pattern for his church, and of internal divisiveness within the congregation were well-sown during Ira’s tenure and years with that church. They are now reaping what was sown. There must always be a reaping after the sowing!

After some fifty years, the harvest of the seed sown in the North years at Madison is occurring. In my next article, I want to reproduce the writings which appeared in a prominent “brotherhood journal” regarding a major division in this church in 2001, when some eight hundred people left the congregation. I will bring this information to your attention, not because of any delight in doing so nor with an “I told you so” attitude, but with sorrow in my heart for my brethren (Rom. 9:1-2; 10:1-3). If only they had abided in the truth of the New Testament. If only they had wanted and demanded a “thus saith the Lord” for all that they taught and practiced in all those digressive years. “For of all sad words of tongue or pen, the saddest are these: It might have been!” (To be continued)

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“In the beginning God . . .”

Some basic truths from the beginning of the beginning
Valerio Marchi

Introduction

The first book of the Bible is called *Genesis* (“the beginning”) and tells us the very commencement of the story between God and man (see Gen. 1-3). “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). It is worth noting that the only created being made in the image and likeness of God was man: a free creature able to sustain a relationship with the Creator. God created the first couple¹ to populate the earth and take care of it; He also stated what was right or wrong for them to do, warning them about the consequences of their trespasses. Adam and Eve understood fully God’s directions and commandments; but Satan was able to convince them that the Lord was not acting for their good and that they would not die disobeying his laws. They sinned, and their conscience became dirty; so, they tried to hide themselves from the presence of the Lord, but of course they could not. God judged and punished Adam, Eve, and the serpent, and sin entered the world, causing all the tragic effects that we can realize day by day. But God also promised a redemption, gave a hope to human beings, because he had prepared a plan of salvation on their behalf.

This story is our story: God created us innocent, but later we all became sinners; we choose to sin. We often try to flee from God but it is impossible (see the story of Jonah as a memorable example). We have no hope without him but we are separated from him, unless we decide to know, appreciate, love and obey him through the knowledge and the practice of his Word. Let’s consider together some basic principles that we can infer from the “beginning of the beginning.”

God Created Everything

Things do not exist forever — God does. “By faith

we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which are visible” (Heb. 11:3). We can understand many truths about the functioning and development of all that is visible; but, even if we could know what happened just an instant before the very beginning, scientifically we will never be able to know *who or what* gave the first impulse to the universe. We know for sure that something cannot be created from nothing, and so an original, absolute source, not caused by anything, must have been in existence before the beginning of all things. This earliest (not generated) source can’t be derived from nothing: it must be eternal, not influenced by space and time. Bible faith declares that this source is the only, invisible God, who says of himself: “I am the First and I am the Last; besides me there is no God” (Isa. 44:6).

Things can’t be born from nothing. Then, things which are seen neither can be born from other created things, nor can they be self-generated: “By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth . . . For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast” (Ps. 33:6,9). Unfortunately, many people often forget that “by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water” (2 Pet. 3:5).

God is God — creation is creation. “The fool has said in his heart: “There is no God” (Ps. 53:1); the Bible judges as a fool the man who does not realize that “the heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork” (Ps. 19:1); “For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse”; all those who deny his existence and all those who “exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen” (Rom. 1:20, 25). God produced everything, but he is not within any of the created things: all depends on him, and

¹ Adam, the man, and Eve, the woman: male and female. Adam, in Hebrew, means [*hu*]man, taken from *adamàh*, “the earth”, while Eve (Hebrew: *hawwàh*, related to *hayyà*, “to live”) is the mother of all living: Genesis 3:20.

nothing and no one can take his place or be put on his same level, unless we commit a lethal sin of idolatry. We must worship God, and God only, according to his will.

Mankind: The Crown of Creation

We received a soul from God. “Thus says the Lord, who stretches out the heavens, lays the foundation of the earth, and forms the spirit of man within him” (Zech. 12:1). We are not made of flesh and blood only, but we also possess a spirit, an invisible and eternal life within ourselves, making us similar to God, because “God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:24). If you really desire to abide in God’s love, you are required to “glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s” (1 Cor. 6:20). We are like stewards of our spirit and quite responsible for how we nourish it. In other words, it is decisive to see how we treat our deepest, inner life, before giving it back to God, in order to be submissive to his judgment. Let’s remember what Jesus said, just before dying on the cross: “Father, into your hands I commit My spirit” (Luke 23:46).

We can have a relationship with him. Man is completely different from all the other living beings, since he can communicate with God, knowing and loving him or rejecting and ignoring him. God’s earnest desire is to have fellowship with man; the Bible is God’s revelation but it also is a dialogue between God and man: “Come now and let us reason together, says the Lord” (Isa. 1:18). God exhorts: “Give ear, my people, to my law; incline your ears to the words of my mouth” (Ps. 78:1); and the man who is looking for God says: “I cried out to God with my voice, and He gave ear to me” (Ps. 77:1). God’s word can answer our most vital questions, leading us on the divine path of love and justice, into a full communion with our Creator.

We are stewards on this earth. God stated that all created things were *good*, but only after he made man he said that everything was *very good*. Being the best and highest part of creation, man was given the task of taking care of this earth. We can fill and subdue the earth; exactly for this very reason, we are once responsible for whatever God gives us, both for our personal talents and the things we own, as his stewards: “As each one received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (1Pet. 4:10). And let’s always remember that, according to Revelation 11:18, God will “destroy those who

destroy the earth.”

Human Beings Are Male and Female

Marriage: the first, divine institution. When someone asked Jesus: “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?”, the Master answered: “Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning, made them male and female?”; then, keeping on quoting the book of Genesis, he said: “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh”; and then he added: “So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate” (Matt. 19:3-6). Marriage is the very first and divine earthly institution, and it must be always laid as the foundation of any human society. Without solid and sound marriages (in which men and women can join together in order to constitute a compact and faithful nucleus, united by a life-long covenant and by deep and lasting feelings) there is no future for mankind; what is left is only immorality and corruption.

Man and woman are complementary to each other. Man and woman were created in order to complete, balance and help each other. In addition to this, they are also the source of the natural perpetuation of life. Very significant is what Adam exclaimed looking at Eve, just after she was generated: “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh!” (Gen. 2:23). The marriage bond is the divine habitat for living a total love between two human beings and for generating and lovingly bringing up other human beings: “Neither is man independent of woman, nor woman independent of man, in the Lord. For as woman came from man, even so man also comes through woman; but all things are from God” (1 Cor. 11:11-12). It is only within the pure and genuine institution of marriage that one can declare: “Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb is a reward” (Ps. 127:3).

Homosexuality is not provided. God created them “male and female” (Gen. 1:27). Homosexual relationships have always been considered unlawful by God. *The actual physical complexion of both man and woman helps us to understand their compatability*, while this certainly cannot be stated as a fact for two women or two men. Bible condemnation of homosexuality is without appeal; consequently, today’s world ought to consider God’s position very carefully, since the world itself is too prone to judge as normal what

is instead against nature. This trend, unfortunately, can be observed too often in the history of mankind. As Paul acutely declares in Romans 1:25-27, men “exchanged the truth of God for the lie and for this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust of one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due.”

God's Laws Are Clear

They are set for our benefit. “And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments of the Lord and His statutes which I command you today for your good?” (Deut. 10:12-13). What God said to Israel in the Old Testament regarding love and obedience is still valid for each of us today: God still requires us to love and serve him, observe his commandments, and he tells us that this is for our good. If God's laws are set for our benefit, we need them in order to understand how to live, to purify ourselves, to be happy and to achieve eternal life with him. Whenever a father counsels his son for his good, first of all it is in the son's interest to listen and obey; and our heavenly Father can't fail. Then, for our good, let's not be rebels and let's try to follow God, considering deeply how much suffering entered this world as a consequence of the first transgression and of all the following ones.

We can't change God's laws. They are *laws*. We are acquainted with the force of gravity, and with the fact that we can't hope to jump from the fifth floor and remain uninjured — this is a natural law. Going into the spiritual realm, we ought to realize what God has established. He advised Adam and Eve, who understood very well what he said, but decided to forget the consequences and did not resist temptation. Jesus said: “Heaven and earth will pass

away, but My words will by no means pass away” (Matt. 24:35); and also: “He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him — the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day” (John 12:48). This world passes away, but God's will stands, and we must not be deceived by the many changes that occurred, in the spiritual and moral field, building upon one another through the centuries. In the last day, we will neither be judged by human religions, traditions or philosophies, nor will we be able to assert our opinions. What God established is established and cannot be changed, as Adam and Eve had to learn tragically, and we with them.

We have free will and bear our responsibility. As we noticed, Adam and Eve understood what God told them, and they were free to choose to obey or not. They chose, as human beings often do, to neglect the divine will, and they had to suffer the penalty. Because of that sin, and of all the others that followed, Jesus Christ had to die on the cross, giving us hope again, offering us the forgiveness of our sins, and overcoming death. And he also did it in full liberty, because he loves us. Let's use our free will to our best, which always involves a great responsibility. In fact, God, as the Apostle Paul wrote, “will render to each one according to his deeds: eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness — indignation and wrath” (Rom. 2:6-8).

Satan and Sin Are Real and Separate Us from God

Satan exists. Both God and Satan exist. You can't believe in the God of the Bible without believing in Satan and demons: angels too can be rebels, choosing whether or not to love and obey God. In the judgment day, Jesus will say to those who are damned: “Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matt. 25:41). The Apostle Paul wrote that Christians fight a spiritual struggle “against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Eph. 6:12). As he did with Jesus, so Satan tempts us also, because his earnest desire is to rule over our minds and his joy consists of seeing believers giving up hope and faith in God. We know from the Scriptures that Satan is lost; sadly, he does not like to be by himself and consequently wants us to join him in his disgrace. In this regard he constantly tries to instill into our hearts many doubts and mistrusts about the Creator. Since men usually confer upon Satan a great power, he really is “the ruler of this world,” as Jesus said in John 12:31. Nevertheless we can choose to let God possess our lives. It is good to know that the Bible can lead us in this good purpose. We are not left alone in the struggle against the devil. Our solemn aspiration is to leave Satan



alone in his ruin: Satan is bad company.

Sin is the transgression of God's law. "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 6:23). God gave an order to Adam and Eve, and yet they decided to disobey. God also said that the consequence for disobeying would be death, and so it was. Not only is the sinner destined to physically die in the midst of anguish and pain, but he also must be separated from God, cast away from his presence; spiritual death is no hope, no light, no life. "Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness" (1 John 3:4). Even though we can deny that sin and its consequences are real, they still are real and affect our existence; we become, whether we realize it or not, a property of Satan. We can presumptuously decide to establish what is wrong and what is right on our own, but God's word remains valid and judges us.

We can't redeem ourselves — only God can. Jesus stated: "Therefore I said that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins" (John 8:24). Unless we believe in God and in his Son Jesus the Christ, there is no real hope for us. God said about men: "None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him" (Ps. 49:7). We can't escape by ourselves from this "black hole"; only God can free us: "But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave, for he shall receive me" (Ps. 49:15). If we want to come back to God, to have our sins forgiven, to have hope of eternal life with him, we must turn to him through Jesus, who paid the price for us and redeemed us. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). Let's listen to Jesus again: "Without Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5).

God Punishes

His justice can't allow transgression to remain unpunished. "God is a just judge, and God is angry with the wicked every day" (Ps. 7:11). For instance, speaking about the sanctity of marriage, the Bible says: "Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge" (Heb. 13:4). As God punished Adam and Eve, the same he does with all sinners, both in heaven and on earth, and we are all sinners: "It shall come to pass in that day that the Lord will punish on high the host of exalted ones, and on earth the kings of the earth" (Isa. 24:21). God is impartial: therefore, the God who can save us is the same God who will punish us if we do not turn back to him, regardless of who we are. God is just; a good judge must punish transgressions, and God's judgments are perfect.

The Bible is full of God's judgments. We find many

examples of God's judgments in the Bible, both against nations or groups and individuals. A complete list would be too long to be offered here. At this point it is adequate to remember the total destruction of the sinful cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the fact that God has always punished his own people (the nation of Israel), when they were rebellious. And he punishes his church whenever the church is unfaithful, according to the principle: "For we know Him who said: 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord. And again, 'The Lord will judge his people'" (Heb. 10:30). During a very hard and sad period of Israel's story, God said through the prophet Jeremiah: "For I will punish those who dwell in the land of Egypt, as I have punished Jerusalem, by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence" (Jer. 44:13).

God's judgments are also seen in man's history. Very often, men wonder why the story of this world is so full of suffering and tragedy, but we must remember that this situation is the result of men's attitudes and choices; moreover, we ought to notice how God can abandon men to their obstinate self-will, punishing them in this way: "For this reason God gave them up to vile passions" (Rom. 1:26). From this point of view, we may say that God is actually punishing men, and all the suffering of this world is but an anticipation of the last judgment, when God will finally divide good and bad, light and darkness — the saved ones from the damned ones. As the Apostle John said in the last book of the Bible: "Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, 'Go and pour out the bowls of the wrath of God on the earth...'" (Rev. 16:1).

God Saves: He Planned a Redemption

The Bible describes it. Preaching in Athens, the Apostle Paul said that God "now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead" (Acts 17:30-31), and this Man is his Son Jesus, the Christ. In Genesis 3:15, God foretold that someone, someday, born of a woman, would be able to fight against the serpent (Satan), bruising his head, defeating him, and being wounded by him. The Son of God was born from the virgin Mary and was the man capable to freely face the pains of the cross, lay down his life and take it again, being raised from the dead. The whole Bible is the description of God's plan of redemption, from the first sin to the coming of our Savior and Redeemer. Studying the Bible, we can understand what was by God "foreordained before the foundation of the world" but is now "manifest in these last times" (1Pet. 1:20): the sacrifice and victory of Christ, who came to "destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage" (Heb. 2:14-15).

An Enlargement

Olen Holderby

“I am the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6). In this familiar statement is a treasure-house of knowledge. Comments which I have heard appear to be far too simplistic. Perhaps assumptions have placed unwarranted limitations on these simple facts. I have never ceased to wonder how Jesus could take such simple words and say so much. A few observations may lead us to a deeper appreciation of these familiar facts. Perhaps we can, at least, scratch the surface a bit.

“I Am The Way”

I am aware of the context here; but, I am convinced that it is a mistake to limit Jesus to simply saying, “I am the way to heaven. He is every bit of that; but, is that the only

consideration? There are so many Scriptures leading us to further thought, that it is not easy to select the ones that would be the most helpful; but let us listen to a few.

“All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made” (John 1:3). Enlarging upon this fact, Hebrews 1:2-3 informs us that the worlds were made by him and that he is upholding all things by the word of his power. James tells us that we ought to say, “If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that” (Jas. 4:15). “The Lord hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet” (Nah. 1:3). Can we not see the far-reaching impact of these statements? And, can we not see that Jesus is “the way every day and

God is merciful and offers us eternal life with him. God punishes, but he is also merciful and ready to forgive and forget all our sins if we just turn to him, follow him, and live with him. We can change our earthly life and our eternal destiny, attaining everlasting life with him! Jesus said: “I have come that they (his disciples) may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly . . . and I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish” (John 10:10, 28). And again: “Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life” (John 4:14). This is the offering of God, valid for every man. Let’s take the chance, until we are in time! The Word of God also exhorts: “Behold, this is the accepted time: behold, now is the day of salvation!” (2 Cor. 6:2).

It is up to us to take the chance. Paul, as an Apostle, wrote: “Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God” (2 Cor. 5:20). We are given the greatest opportunity: to be reconciled with our Creator; and it is up to us to decide whether or not to accept it. And if we ask, like some people did in the book

of Acts: “What shall we do?”, we can listen to the same answer that the Apostle Peter gave to those men: “Repent and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:37-38). In converting to Jesus Christ we can give birth to a new inner man, clean and pure, and start a new life in him: a life of purity, love, and obedience to the one who really knows what our good is. And this new life will not only be something individual, but will be spent in communion with the other believers who are making the same choice. This choice is within the church of Christ, his spiritual family, the true church taking the New Testament church as the only pattern to follow. Becoming Christians according to the New Testament, we consent to start again with God, to be spiritually created again by him in order not to be separated from his love again. Last, but not least, we become members of his family: “And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47).

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in all things”?

The Psalmist cried out, “Teach me thy way, O Lord” (Ps. 27:11). Solomon demands modification of all the ways of a man when he said, “In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths” (Prov. 3:6). In Isaiah 55:8-9, God tells us that our ways are not his ways. Notice that the word “way” is plural in these verses. The Jews were said to defile Israel in choosing their own way (Ezek. 36:17). Paul said that God would provide a way of escape from temptations (1 Cor. 10:13). Have you ever thought on why so many yield to temptations? Could it be that they are choosing their own way of escape?

Truly following Jesus affects all areas of our lives. In business it is, “Provide things honest in the sight of all men” (Rom. 12:17). In the home, “He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me” (Matt. 10:37). Morally it is, “Whosoever abideth in me sinneth not” (1 John 3:6). When we really survey all areas of our lives, we shall reach the conclusion, truly, without *the way* there is no going!

“I Am The Truth”

“Truth” is defined as, “That which is opposed to falsehood, lie or deceit”; truth also is opposed to hypocrisy. We must understand, then, that Jesus is the embodiment of all that is opposed to falsehood, lies, deceit, or hypocrisy. This fact, alone, spreads him into every facet of our lives. Moses tells us that God is the God of truth (Deut. 2:4), and Paul tells us, “In him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily” (Col. 2:3). Is it any wonder that we are told that God would have all men to “come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4)? Paul was willing to suffer the loss of all things for the “knowledge of Christ” (Phil. 3:8).

What should be our attitude toward this truth? “His truth shall be thy shield and buckler” (Ps. 91:4). “Buy the truth and sell it not” (Prov. 23:23). In Galatians 3:1, the word of truth is used in reference to the gospel; all the New Testament focuses on Christ. We are told to grow in the “knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 3:18). We must move with caution lest we function, “not according to knowledge” (Rom. 10:1-2). Realizing these things should cause us to see, in a better light, what “loving the truth” means in 2 Thessalonians 2:10. Now, let us read 1 John 2:3-4, “And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.” Remove “truth” and you remove Christ! What did Jesus really say when he said, “I am the truth”? Indeed, without *the truth* there is no knowing.

“I Am The Life”

“For in him we live, and move, and have our being”

(Acts 17:28). “He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it” (Matt. 10:39). When Jesus said, “I am the life,” did he merely mean that he was our example, our pattern of life? Read carefully Acts 11:23 and notice the word “cleave.” This word originally meant to “join fast together, to glue, to cement.” Here it means “to abide with.” To use the original meaning of the word “cleave,” these people “glued” or “cemented” themselves to the Lord. They did not try to get as close to the devil as they could, but as close to the Lord as possible. Are we beginning to see what Paul meant in Galatians 3:27 when he said of those being baptized that they “put on Christ”? They clothed themselves, wrapped themselves up in the Son of God! Their lives were lost in his life. “For to me to live is Christ” (Phil. 1:21) and “that he died for all, that they which live should not live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again” (2 Cor. 5:15). Do not both these passages set forth the idea that “I am the life”?

Right here is a good place to stop and read Romans 6:13 and get the expression, “Alive from the dead.” When you began your life as a Christian, you were not merely “dead to sin,” but it was as if you were beginning your life all over, a clean slate, and Satan is kept completely out, while you yield only to the Lord! This must be the determination of every Christian, for every moment of his life. Is there not a difference in *existing* and *living*; especially for those who have been clothed from on high? Without “the life” there is no living. “The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple” (Ps. 119:130).

Conclusion

Without the way there is no going; without the truth there is no knowing; and, without the life there is no living. Yes, verily!

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What Did Jesus Teach?

Joe R. Price



When Moses rehearsed the law God had delivered to Israel through him, he told of a prophet whom God would raise up to speak to the people (Deut. 18:15-18). While all of the Old Testament prophets could fit the context of that prediction, its ultimate fulfillment is found in The Prophet, Jesus Christ (John 1:21; 12:49; Acts 3:22-23).

Among other things, his gospel is described as the “new covenant” (Heb. 9:15).

The prophets spoke of this new covenant. Jeremiah said it would be different from the covenant God made at Mt. Sinai — it would be written upon the hearts of men and would provide the means of forgiveness of sins (Jer. 31:31-34). Ezekiel called it a “covenant of peace” (Ezek. 37:26). Isaiah and Jeremiah described it as an “everlasting covenant” (Isa. 55:3; Jer. 32:40). The approaching covenant would “not be according to the covenant that I made with their fathers” — it would be “new.”

When Jesus came “preaching the gospel of the kingdom” throughout all of Galilee (Matt. 4:23), do you suppose he came preaching the Law of Moses (the old covenant)? Is it consistent with the aforementioned prophecies to believe that the Savior was merely calling the Jews back to faithful obedience to the covenant made at Sinai? In other words, did Jesus come preaching the old covenant or the new covenant? Obviously, he preached the new covenant, his gospel (John 1:17). Yet, brethren are accepting the notion that Jesus was teaching the Law of Moses to the Jews during his earthly ministry.

Of course Jesus urged those who lived under Moses to obey Moses (Matt. 8:4; 23:1-3). But, ever since the days of Jeremiah (which included the days Christ was on the earth) the Law of Moses was “becoming obsolete,” “growing old” and was “ready to vanish away” (Jer. 31:31; Heb. 8:13). The Jews (and Gentiles, too) needed to learn how to live so as to enter the eternal kingdom, and this is what Jesus

taught while he walked the earth (Luke 13:22-24). Jesus came to light the way of salvation with gospel truth (John 1:14, 17; 8:12; 14:6; Matt. 7:21-24). Moses spoke of Jesus, not the other way around (John 5:45-47).

Brethren should abandon their futile effort to make Jesus’ personal teaching non-binding upon people today. Such a belief is not in harmony with the gospel of Christ. All men are to hear and heed his word, including those he taught while he was yet with his apostles (Matt. 17:5; John 16:12-13; 14:26; Heb. 1:1-2). Those who reject his words fall under condemnation (Acts 3:22-23).

The old covenant pointed forward to the new covenant of Christ (Gal. 3:24-25). By giving a knowledge of sin, the law of Moses also taught man of his need for forgiveness (something the law could not accomplish, Rom. 3:20-26). While the Law of Moses taught that the shedding of blood was necessary for the remission of sins, the animal blood it provided sinners could never accomplish that remission (Heb. 9:22; 10:1-4). Sinaitic Law could never provide justification from sins. Man’s justification comes through faith in Jesus Christ and not through the Law of Moses (Acts 13:38-39; Rom. 3:21-30; Gal. 2:16; 3:10-14). If Jesus came preaching the way of salvation (and he did, John 1:14, 17; 14:6), then he was not preaching the Law of Moses. He was preaching the gospel of the kingdom.

It is the gospel, the new covenant of Christ, which provides redemption and an eternal inheritance (Heb. 9:15-17). That is what Jesus taught while he walked among men!

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We can only change the
world by changing men.

Russell C. Everson

Brother Russell passed from this life December 26, 2001, at home after a lengthy battle with Parkinson's Disease, which was complicated by injuries received in a coal mine accident 51 years ago. Russell was born January 21, 1921, in Belington, West Virginia and lived to be 80 years old. Russell was born again into Christ November 14, 1942, by Adolph (Dolph) Dadisman, one of the members at Independence, West Virginia, in a nearby creek on that snowy cold day. Russell's baptism took place during a gospel meeting with a brother Wright speaking at the school house in Independence. Old brother Wright was not able to do the baptizing because of his age. It was this elderly preacher, brother Wright, who first encouraged Russell to preach.

Brother Russell was a devoted man, first to the Lord Jesus Christ, then to his wife, Delta, his job as one who labored in the gospel, and to his children. Russell, who was a hard and honest worker, was a coal miner, a farmer, a carpenter, an iron worker, and more importantly a Christian, which lead him to be a preacher of the gospel of Christ. Russell worked through very hard times. Russell worked hard even when he was not able to work! He plowed the fields using an old horse and a hillside plow at eight years old, because his father was physically unable. Russell was crushed in a coal mine accident near Philippi, West Virginia in 1950, which left him permanently handicapped even after a series of corrective surgeries. And yet, after his year-long recuperation from the accident and the surgeries, he still worked to provide for his family.

Russell was encouraged to preach the gospel of Christ, which he did for nearly 20 years by appointment, then full time for another 18 years, until poor health took over his body and forced him to retire. As a gospel preacher, he stood against ignorance, liberalism, centralization, and institutionalism, even as his many brothers and sisters (Russell was the eldest living son of 17 children) who were Christians stood against him because of their opposing views. Some churches, where he had grown up and formerly preached, also stood against sound doctrine, as well

as him. Russell taught the pure word of God, and he did not compromise sound doctrine, even when so many who were near and dear to him wanted to believe, teach, and practice a different doctrine. In his labors in West Virginia, it has been widely reported that he went the extra mile to try to have a class with a person; he walked the hills to invite people to services; he was a personal worker.

As a Christian, Russell served as one of the elders at the Brown Street congregation in Akron, Ohio for 7-8 years in the 1950s. Brother Cecil Willis, like old brother Wright years before, recognized Russell's talents and encouraged him to labor in the gospel on a full-time basis. Russell primarily preached the gospel of Christ in parts of north-eastern West Virginia, northern Ohio, and central Indiana. He did local work in Wooster, Ohio for six years; Middletown, Indiana for three years; Petersburg, West Virginia for three years; and then in Gladesville, West Virginia for over six years. Since his last local work at Gladesville ended in 1988, he and Delta were members of the Glen Oaks church of Christ in Morgantown, West Virginia.

Brother Russell is survived by Delta, his wife of 59 years, a son and two daughters and their families. It was Delta who diligently cared for Russell in their home for fourteen years during his illnesses up to his last breath, and she never gave up. After several months of very little communication, Russell's last clearly spoken words were spoken to Delta, about a week before his passing. He said, smiling, "Just Over The River." Sister Delta Everson resides at 86 Brytes Way, Morgantown, West Virginia 26508.

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“Some Things” continued from front page

forthright in correcting our misdeeds. She also expected us to cultivate the discipline of doing our best in school, Bible studies, and whatever else we were interested in doing.

3. Industry — Mom was not lazy. She was always busy because there was plenty to do as a wife and mother. Anyone who does not think that it is a full-time job is greatly mistaken. Such a noble and godly work is ignored and devalued by today’s society. Mom also worked outside the home. When I was a young child, she took me with her to the school cafeteria where I would sit beside her as she took the lunch money from the school children. In all her work, her husband and children came first, as it always should be.

4. Bible Knowledge — I would not know the books of the Bible, or many of the grand stories of the Bible unless Mom had taken the time to teach me as a young child. Being the last of five children, and several years younger than my brothers and sister, I eventually was left as the only child at home. Mom used those hours to help me learn the Bible through Bible storybooks and other helps. It gave me a good foundation to build on (consider Timothy, 2 Tim. 1:5). Parents are the first line of teaching when it comes to God and his word (Deut. 6:6-7). We need teaching homes more than ever!

5. Selflessness — Any good mother gives of herself completely for her children. She is there when they are sick, have a boo-boo, need some help on homework, or advice in dating. We sometimes don’t realize this until we are parents ourselves. Mom helped Dad for many years with his respiratory problems, and then her youngest child developed asthma early in childhood. Mom gave a lot of time to help a whiny, uncomfortable child breathe better. I still cannot sing “Love Lifted Me” without hearing my mother singing that song to me as she rocked me when I had trouble breathing and couldn’t sleep. As God gives all for His children, a mother will give everything she has for her children. I am sure my brothers and sister could add their own memories of learning these same things, and more, from Mom.

Don’t get me wrong, Mom is not perfect. She has her faults as we all do. All parents make mistakes and errors in judgment. We all learn, grow, adjust, and correct our errors. Yet we should honor those around us who have made an excellent impression on our lives. And even after all the good that Mom and Dad did while I was growing up, it was still my choice to be faithful to God or not. Our parents may, or may not, show us the way, but we must choose which way we go in life. We will be judged on our own choices. I am happy to say that my own children have a mother whom I love and adore who strives to exhibit the same qualities I grew to love in Mom. No one is perfect or

does things in the same way as another. But in spite of our personal differences and imperfections, there is one thing we should all do to our best ability in love and patience. “Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man” (Eccl. 12:13).

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“Worship Services” continued from page 2

Worship itself is frequently referred to as a “celebration,” which is another way of saying, “We had a grand party down at church yesterday.” Worship is measured as successful or unsuccessful based on: (a) Did it draw a crowd? (b) Did it evoke an emotional response? (c) Did it hold the audience’s attention? (d) Would visitors want to come back as a result of the service?

The one question that never is asked is this: “Is this kind of worship authorized by the word of God?” What God speaks in his word is much less important than how this worship service makes a person feel. American religion has shifted from the quest for absolute truth, to a quest for one’s personal truth, to a quest for emotional satisfaction.

Jesus On Worship

Jesus spoke on the subject of worship on several occasions. Those who worship Jesus should care about what he had to say on the subject. Consider some of his teaching on worship:

1. Matthew 15:8-9. Jesus said, “This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men” (Matt. 15:8-9). Jesus speaks of a “vain” worship — a worship that does not accomplish the purpose one intends because it is not authorized by God. When men teach for their doctrines the “commandments of men,” their worship is vain.

2. Matthew 21:24-25. After Jesus cleansed the Temple, the Jewish authorities challenged him for what he did. He responded to their challenge saying, “I also will ask you one thing, which if ye tell me, I in like wise will tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John, whence was it? From heaven, or of men?” (Matt. 21:24-25). Those things that are not authorized by the God of heaven are not fitted for divine worship.

3. John 4:19-24. When Jesus had his conversation with the Samaritan woman, she sought to shift the subject from

her immoral conduct to the religious differences between Samaritans and Jews. John records the incident as follows:

The woman saith unto him, Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet. Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth (John 4:19-24).

Notice that Jesus described the worship of the Samaritans as “ye worship ye know not what” and affirmed that salvation could not come from Samaritan worship because “salvation is of the Jews.” Clearly the unauthorized worship conducted by the Samaritans on Mount Gerizim was worship that Jesus rejected and directed this woman to offer “true worship.”

Criticisms of Modern Worship

1. It shifts the focus from God to man. The modern movement in worship has shifted the focus from worship that pleases God to worship that entertains men. In so doing, the object of worship has shifted — from God to men. Modern denominationalism is presenting as worship that which draws the best crowd, entertains men, and makes them feel good about themselves. Jeremiah described the attitude of those in his day saying, “The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and *my people love to have it so*. . .” (5:31). That was the kind of worship that the people wanted, so they gave it to them. This led to the destruction of the nation.

If worship at the Temple under the Old Testament had become boring to a third or fourth generation of Jews (“we always do the same things: we offer a one-year lamb, we light the lamps in the Holy Place and offer burnt incense on the altar of incense, etc. . . . We do the same things every day. It is so boring!”), what would have been the appropriate response from the leaders? Should they have departed from the worship pattern given by God or tried to address the hearts of those who thought such worship was boring? We do not have to wonder about the answer to this question. Malachi described those who thought worship at the temple was boring: “Ye said also, Behold, what a weariness is it! and ye have snuffed at it, saith the Lord of hosts” (1:13). Malachi could have said, “You priests of the Lord must sit down and come up with some more innovative worship that will keep the attention of the people and make them *want* to come to worship. You are going to have to get out of your traditional rut and be creative.” But, he didn’t! Rather, he

rebuked the attitude of those people who had grown tired of the Lord’s worship saying, “Who is there even among you that would shut the doors for nought? Neither do ye kindle fire on mine altar for nought. I have no pleasure in you, saith the Lord of hosts, neither will I accept an offering at your hand” (Mal. 1:10).

2. It cannot adequately convey the gospel message.

The gospel addresses many important theological questions, such as:

- The atonement: Why did Jesus die on the cross?
- Theodicy: Why do men suffer?
- The Godhead: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- Free-will
- Faith and Works
- The work of the Holy Spirit

How can one address these deep theological themes in a 10-15 minute sermon that entertains those present? The fact is that these themes and many other doctrinal themes are not presented in modern Protestant denominations.

3. It diminishes reverence for God. Some of the things done in worship are absolutely irreverent, such as kissing a pig when 500 are present, having gospel magicians to perform, having gymnasts perform, shaving one’s head when an attendance goal is met, etc. Contrast the atmosphere created in this worship with God’s words to Moses: “Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground” (Exod. 3:5). Habakkuk said, “But the Lord is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him” (2:20).

4. It bribes people to worship God. The attitude is, “If you will come to worship, we will make worship entertaining for you.” For example, some denominations advertise that they will have a big-screen TV set up to watch the Super Bowl game and the half-time will be used for worshipping God. Now a person can *feel* reverent for having watched the Super Bowl! What a capitulation to the world’s values.

Conclusion

An alert observer of Protestant denominationalism’s effort to allure unspiritual men through these changes in worship will see how this trend is changing worship among us. Although it is more apparent among institutional churches (some offer traditional services and contemporary services), the change in worship is also present among those non-institutional churches who want a 10-20 minute sermon on some devotional or motivational subject, rather than a “boring” doctrinal lesson that drags out 30-45 minutes! Criticism is frequently offered of “three songs and a prayer”! While not arguing for a divinely revealed order for worship (three songs, a prayer, Scripture reading, Lord’s

supper, etc.), one certainly should not ignore that what is motivating the bucking of traditional worship is the spill over from denominational worship trends. Lessons that address specific subjects needing repentance are criticized as being too negative and judgmental. And certainly, lessons that criticize a denomination by name are unwelcome. Indeed, the influence of the world is spilling over into the Lord's church. Paul exhortation is just as needed today as

ever, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. *And be not conformed to this world:* but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" (Rom.

12:1-2)
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Access Into Grace

David Dann

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age (Tit. 2:11-12).

Nothing could be more central to the hope of the Christian than the fact that God's grace has become apparent to all of mankind. Grace is defined simply as "good-will, loving-kindness, or unmerited favor." Man does not deserve to be exposed to the grace of God. However, man has been exposed to it anyway, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). The unconditional nature of God's attitude of grace is seen in that Christ died, "that he, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone" (Heb. 2:9). While God displayed unconditional grace in sending Christ to die on the cross, only those who obey the gospel will benefit from this great and graceful sacrifice (Heb. 5:9). This is due to the fact that one must gain access into the grace of God in order to become a beneficiary of his grace.

The Grace of God as a State, or Condition

In the New Testament, the term "grace" often refers to the spiritual state of those who have received the benefits of the loving sacrifice of Christ. In other words, God's grace is a condition into which one may enter and remain. In this sense, God's grace is conditional.

1. We can have access into the grace of God. Paul writes, "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God" (Rom. 5:1-2). Paul makes clear that our access into God's grace is "by faith" in Jesus Christ.

2. We can leave the grace of God. To the Galatians,

Paul writes, "You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace" (Gal. 5:4). It is clear that by binding principles of the Old Law these Christians had actually removed themselves from God's grace.

Bible Examples of Access Into God's Grace

1. Noah. "By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith" (Heb. 11:7). Noah found access into God's grace when he obeyed God in faith and prepared the ark. As a result, "a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water" (1 Pet. 3:20). Had he not faithfully entered the ark, Noah would not have found access into the grace of God.

2. Israel in the wilderness. God struck the Israelites with venomous serpents as punishment for their constant complaining (Num. 21:5-6). "Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live.' So Moses made a bronze serpent, and put it on a pole; and so it was, if a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived" (Num. 21:8-9). The snake-bitten Israelites had access into God's grace by faith when they met the conditions God prescribed.

3. The Jews on Pentecost. Those Jews who realized their guilt in response to the preaching of Peter "were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Men and brethren, what shall we do?'" (Acts 2:37). These people wanted access into the grace of God. "Then Peter said to them, 'Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit'" (v. 38). That day three thousand souls had access by faith into God's

grace when they met the conditions set by God (v. 41).

Two Observations Concerning Access Into God's Grace

1. Man has the ability to enter into God's grace. In every Bible example we read that access into God's grace involves man, by faith, meeting certain conditions that are well within his ability to meet. God never sets conditions for access into his grace that man cannot meet. For this reason Peter could urge those on Pentecost to, "Be saved from this perverse generation" (Acts 2:40).

2. The work of man is not the cause of God's grace. Man cannot perform work that will cause him to earn or deserve access into God's grace. In this sense it is true indeed that "by grace you have been saved through faith, and

that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast" (Eph. 2:8-9). All man can do is work in such a way so as to meet the conditions God has set in order to enter into his grace by faith.

Conclusion

Jesus said, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:16). Have you met the conditions our Lord has set so that you might have access into God's grace?

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