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questions by Keith Sharp)



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You can download this month's Meditate On These Things as a PDF file by clicking [here](#). Also, an archive of past MOTT issues is available at christistheway.com.

Finally, brethren

**WHATEVER
THINGS**

are true
are noble
are just
are pure
are lovely

**PHILIPPIANS
4:8**

are of good report

IF THERE IS ANY VIRTURE AND IF THERE
IS ANYTHING PRAISEWORTHY –
meditate on these things.

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"Saving belief is the attitude of a lifetime rather than the act of a moment!" (Robert Harkrider, **John "The Gospel of Belief"** 76)

"It is certain that there can be only two choices that we can make concerning Christ: either He is what He claimed to be (John 8:24) or else He must be rejected as the greatest blasphemer, hypocrite, and liar who perpetrated the greatest fraud ever known to mankind" (Ibid. 77)

"*Hope* is a complex emotion of the human mind consisting of a desire for some known object, and an expectation of receiving and enjoying it. The object of the Christian's hope is, of course, eternal life. And the full assurance ... is simply the hope itself so increased and intensified, as to leave in our minds no doubt whatever that by the grace of God we will finally attain to the enjoyment of the object. This is to be reached only through the diligent use of all the means which God has himself ordained for our perfection in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness" (Robert Milligan, **The New Testament Commentary**, Volume 9 - **Epistle to the Hebrews**. 182 [comments on Hebrews 6:11]).

Do All in the Name of the Lord

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

Several times I have heard brethren assert, "We do lots of things without Bible authority." The inspired apostle Paul commands, "And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him" (Colossians 3:17). The phrase "in the name of" means "in recognition of the authority of" (W.E. Vine, *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*. 3:100; cf. Acts 4:18). We must have authority from the Lord Jesus Christ for everything we say and do. The context of the verse does not limit the application of this universal principle. The authority of Jesus Christ applies in the home (Colossians 3:18-21), on the job (Colossians 3:22-4:1), in our community (Colossians 4:5-6), in government affairs (Romans 13:1-7), and in the church (Ephesians 1:22-23).. We must recognize Jesus Christ as Lord of our lives and submit to His rule in every realm and relationship. He has all authority (Matthew 28:18). We must believe what He teaches (2 John 9), speak as He directs (1 Peter 4:11), and act as He demands (James 1:22). We must do everything He commands us to do (Matthew 28:18-20), follow His example in everything (Luke 6:40), and do only what He authorizes (2 John 9). Have you submitted your life to the Lord Jesus Christ?

Question from Nigeria about an Anglican Wedding and Church Discipline

Question

Please can a father who is a minister of the gospel be disciplined on the ground of his grown daughter getting married to a man from Anglican church and conducting her wedding in Anglican church?

Reply

There are three questions that need to be resolved in order to answer your question: (1) Is it a sin for a Christian to marry an unbeliever?, (2) Is it a sin to have an Anglican wedding?, and (3) Did the father condone and lend his support to this marriage and wedding? I will examine each question in order.

Two passages are commonly used to try to prove it is sinful for a Christian to marry an unbeliever: First Corinthians 7:39 and Second Corinthians 6:14.

Let's examine Second Corinthians 6:14 first. "Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?" The passage doesn't mention marriage, nor does its context. Whatever linking of believers to unbelievers is forbidden is true of all relationships. If it's sinful for a believer to marry an unbeliever, it's sinful for a Christian to go into business with a sinner. The passage doesn't just forbid entering a relationship, it forbids being in the relationship. If it means a Christian must not marry a sinner, it means a believer married to an unbeliever must divorce the unbeliever. But the apostle Paul specifically forbids this (1 Corinthians 7:12-13). The immediate context of the verse reveals its meaning and application. "Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh

and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Corinthians 7:1). Christians must not share in the sins of unbelievers.

First Corinthians 7:39 states, "A wife is bound by law as long as her husband lives; but if her husband dies, she is at liberty to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord." The meaning of the phrase "in the Lord" varies depending mainly on its context. It can certainly refer to being a Christian (Romans 16:11). But it can also mean "in harmony with the Lord's will." The apostle Paul commands, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right" (Ephesians 6:1). He does not mean that children should obey their parents only if they are Christians but that children should obey their parents as long as the parents' will does not contradict the Lord's will. If Paul requires that widows marry Christians, he has set a requirement for them that the Lord has not set for other people. I know of no compelling, scriptural reason to take this position. So my position is that he requires widows, along with all, to marry someone whom they have the right to marry, a man who has the scriptural right to marry.

There is often a course that is good and another that is better (1 Corinthians 7:38). It is not a sin for a Christian to marry an unbeliever, but it is better to marry a Christian.

Is it a sin to have an Anglican wedding? Anglicans, like Catholics, view marriage as a sacrament of the church. This, of course, has no support in Scripture. Marriage predates the church by as far as the garden in Eden predates the Pentecost of Acts chapter two.

I have attended an Anglican wedding (Actually, Episcopal, as that denomination is known in America). The Lord's Supper (called in the Anglican Book of Common Prayer "Holy Communion") was served by an officiating priest to the couple getting married, although it was a week day (cf. Acts 20:7). Of course, this is wrong. So, I conclude that participating in such a wedding is sinful.

I do not know whether the father of the bride condoned the wedding or not. I cannot condone an Anglican wedding (I am not saying the couple is not married; they are).

What about a Human Organization to Train Preachers in Place of the Local Church?

Frank Walton | Hartselle, Alabama, USA

I appreciate greatly the desire of zealous brethren to spread the gospel of Christ to a lost and dying world. I have been to over 1 dozen countries to preach the gospel and to encourage faithful gospel preachers and brethren there. I plan to make other trips, Lord willing.

In the New Testament, without centralized organization or universal machinery, the early church preached the gospel and "turned the world upside down" (Acts 17:6). How did they do it? We have the same "pattern of sound words" (2 Timothy 1:13) to use today. God's plan will work if we work God's plan! We can do all things through Christ (Philippians 4:13, John 15:4-5).

With Christ's Word revealed by the apostles and prophets, we read that evangelists, pastors and teachers were given for the equipping of the saints, to speak the truth in love, to protect saints from religious error and mutually edify one another (Ephesians 4:11-16). This happened by individuals working wherever they went, and by the collective unit of the local church, "the churches of Christ" (Romans 16:16).

In the New Testament, there is a clear distinction between individual work and effort, as compared to the local churches work (1 Timothy 5:16; Matthew 18:15-17). The divinely ordained collective unit for worship and spiritual training we read in the New Testament is the local church (Philippians 1:1, 27). The local church is God's collective organization specifically set up to be God's Bible school as "the pillar and support of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:15). In Revelation 2-3, we see 7 churches that were the Lord's lights in the world, and each congregation was autonomous and independent of each other. There was no organizational harness tying churches together, so each acted autonomously and independently under Christ, without centralized human oversight.

In aiming to "speak the truth in love," I do not understand why brethren want local churches to support their humanly-organized and designed Bible school or college or institute that is apart from the local church to work in place of what God gave the local church to do. Again, the local church is God's collective organization specifically set up to be God's Bible school as "the pillar and support of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:15). Nor do I understand why some want to set up a humanly designed school of preaching, in midst of churches that should already be doing this work, and we

do not see such in the New Testament of supplanting of the local church with a human organization.

How were preachers trained in the New Testament? They either worked directly with an individual preacher, as Paul trained Timothy (Acts 16:3) or we see local churches working in truth to edify (build up) itself in the truth by teaching and training (1 Thessalonians 5:11; 2 Thessalonians 2:15-17; Hebrews 10:24-25). We don't see a human organization acting to supplant the local congregation or usurp its divinely assigned function. Again, God's plan will work if we work God's plan! What is it that a human-devised school of preaching (of which we read nothing in the New Testament) is capable of doing that a strong local church is incapable of doing? Do you think man's wisdom is better than God's?

Individuals have more latitude in judgment than what is specifically ordained for the local church (1 Timothy 5:16). Why? Much more instruction in the New Testament is given to us as individuals, and most of what we do for the Lord daily is as an individual Christian. The exception to this is what we do collectively in the local church, which would therefore be more restricted or specialized. A confusion and blurring between the distinction of individual duties and work versus congregational duties and work has led to many problems in church history.

Such confusion led to the unbiblical organizing efforts in first 500 years after the establishment of the church. This corruption of the Lord's simple plan of a plurality of qualified men in a local church as elders (Acts 14:23) went to the acceptance of one bishop over the elders in the congregation, which grew to a diocesan bishop overseeing a group of area churches, to later patriarchal bishops began overseeing a larger area, to finally the Pope in Rome overseeing the universal church in 606 AD. This organizational change didn't happen overnight! Error crept in gradually with small changes to the local church organization, with unintended consequences.

Later, even restorationist preacher Alexander Campbell, who called for a restoration of "the ancient order of things," said the universal church is commanded to preach the gospel to all the world, without a specific organization to do it (Matthew 28:18-20), therefore in his mind there was a need for a Missionary Society (a human organization founded in 1859) to be "a more efficient organization" for churches to contribute to for world evangelism. Error and division resulted in the USA in the 19th century because many conservative brethren insisted that this went beyond what God authorized, that in local congregations each was to teach, develop, and do their own work independently in preaching the gospel. They taught there was no New Testament authority for a human organization for churches to work through, to do their work for them.

How do we know there is a difference between individual responsibility and action vs. collective responsibility and action? Individuals are to work in economic enterprise honestly (Ephesians 4:28), but the local congregation is not authorized to go into economic enterprises to raise money or even provide vocational training. Rather its training is spiritual training of the soul and character. Individuals are to be salt and light in the world (Matthew 5:13-16), and we may exercise political and civil rights (Acts 25:11), whereas the local church as a collectivity (made of those individuals) have no right as a congregation to preach politics or enter the congregation into civil political campaigns. Not everything a Christian may do is the assigned work of the local church.

In the New Testament, the Lord has his school of preaching already set up! It is the framework of the local church "as the pillar and support of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:15). Is teaching and training preachers part of supporting the truth? Yes! Is the local church an "optional" arrangement that may be shunted aside by the wisdom of men for a "more efficient" human scheme? No! Then, it is the work of the local church, with sufficient maturity and personnel, to train gospel preachers.

Timothy was told to work in the local church and teach (1 Timothy 1:3). He was later told by Paul to train preachers and teachers (2 Timothy 2:2). This can be done individually or collectively in the local church, yet we read nowhere that men may set up an organization to act in place of the local church. If local churches are deficient in numbers or competent personnel, then we need to go back to the Bible and build up these churches by teaching truth and urging them to grow up in Christ! This is what was done in the New Testament (Acts 2:42, 6:7, 9:31, 16:5). It is a false dilemma and a form of situation ethics to say that since some churches aren't presently able to train preachers, therefore we must set up a human organization to do it for them. Let's go back to the Bible! Such efforts will equip members of the local church to grow and mature and become more responsible.

Elders are limited in their oversight and work of equipping saints in the local church (Acts 14:23, 1 Pet. 5:1-4, Acts 20:28). This is how "pastors" (elders) equipped the saints and built up the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:11-16). The same would apply for "evangelists" to equip members and prospective preachers in the local church. Evangelist may travel and teach the Bible individually to anyone at anytime, as Paul did with Timothy (Acts 16:3), but we do not read in the New Testament of a local church contributing to a human organization to do its work in place of it doing its own work. Why do some brethren think a local church, with sufficient numbers in members and mature workers and

teachers, is insufficient to train preachers?

In the New Testament, churches sent money directly to preachers and not to an intermediate organization to do its work for in its place (Philippians 4:15-18, 2 Corinthians 11:8). We need to get back to the New Testament pattern of preaching the Bible, converting people with the power of the gospel (not social programs), building up the local church so it can train and equip members and preachers. We also see that the local church was not a world relief program (which is an individual duty, James 1:27).

I saw in Jamaica several years ago, and it can happen in any poorer country, if young men in poverty see that they can get support at a vocational/boarding school to teach the Bible, this is a huge physical temptation to escape poverty and act like you want to be a preacher. (There are reports of the corrupting power of money in similar efforts in the Philippines, India, Peru, etc.) One cup/container churches and liberal churches (pro-instruments of music in worship, women preachers, etc.) offer prospective preachers financial support if they will adopt their respective doctrines. Once a physical conduit of regular American money is in place to a foreign country, history has shown that it tends to have a corrupting influence on those who want to receive it, as well as those who control it.

However, following God's simple plan to teach the Bible to build up local "churches of Christ" (Romans 16:16) has worked in countries like Ethiopia and is also now working well in Mozambique. When I first went to Ethiopia in 2000, the churches were stagnant or declining, laboring under the mission system of centralized oversight and control by sponsoring American churches and human organizational oversight called a mission as an adjunct to the local church. After several "conservative" American preachers started to come to Ethiopia in 1999 to regularly teach the Bible and advocate the simple New Testament pattern to build up local churches, independent of a human organization, several Ethiopian preachers wanted to be free of this unscriptural man-made mission plan in Addis Ababa. The result was very fruitful! After Ethiopian men proved they were trustworthy and reliable as preachers, then they sometimes received some direct financial support (mostly partial not full-time) to preach the gospel. Growth and strong churches were developed. Young preachers were being mentored by older, mature preachers, either individually or in a local church. There are now over 350 conservative, independent churches in Ethiopia striving to follow the New Testament pattern; there have been over 23,000 baptisms in 14 years!! God was causing the growth for doing God's work in God's way!

This is same New Testament pattern being duplicated in Mozambique with over 1,000 baptisms in the past 2 years! However, this was not always the case there. The churches in Mozambique had been in decline, going from a peak of 300 churches of Christ to about 80 three years ago. Why the decline? American money had stopped coming in to fund benevolence programs, etc. Yet, preachers that had gone to Ethiopia started going to Mozambique about 3 years ago, simply teaching the Bible, building up local churches to do their own work, and the Lord's wisdom in building up the kingdom is being vindicated before our eyes again. There have been over 1,000 baptisms in the last 2 years!! God's plan works, brethren!

I humbly ask, "Where is the scripture that authorizes a man-made school of preaching for local churches to support?" _____ (please fill in the blank if you can). Again I ask, What is it that a humanly designed school of preaching can do that a strong local church is incapable of doing?? I believe nothing! So, why not work to follow the New Testament pattern of teaching the Bible to build up local churches (Acts 2:42, 6:7, 16:3-5), to equip them to do their work of spiritual work of teaching members, and teaching in local churches to develop preachers?

Be very careful brethren about thinking our human schemes and organization can improve upon the Lord's New Testament pattern. I realize many such efforts are well-intentioned in theory to help advance the kingdom. Yet, let's not supplant the Lord's way with a human scheme. God's ways are superior to man's ways (Isaiah 55:8-9). Let's do Bible things in Bible ways. Back to the Bible is always right. The Lord has promised to bless such scriptural efforts (1 Corinthians 3:6).

In brotherly love and love for truth,
Frank Walton

Notes on the Great Commission

Jefferson David Tant | Roswell, Georgia, USA

The various texts containing what is called "The Great Commission" are some of the most familiar texts in the New Testament. These words were Christ's final charge to his disciples before he ascended to sit on his throne and rule over his spiritual kingdom—the church. Many can recite the texts from memory, and we appreciate the instruction given that the disciples were to take the gospel message "unto all the world." Indeed, this was done within that

first generation. Paul wrote to the Colossian brethren urging them to “continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister” (Colossians 1:23).

Indeed, the gospel had spread to the known world in one generation. Documents tell of trade routes by sea and land to India, China, Arabia, Africa and Europe in the first century that enabled the disciples to go. We know that on Pentecost people were there from 16 different regions, and by Acts 8, owing to the persecution, they went home, and would have helped spread the gospel just by that means, irrespective of the preachers that would have been the first “missionaries.”

But there are other noteworthy things about The Great Commission that we should consider.

Matthew’s record.

“Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you: and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world” (Matthew 28:19-20).

(1) “Into the name...” “Into” in the Greek (eis) carries with it the idea of a motion. “a primary preposition; to or into {indicating the point reached or entered}” (Strong’s Greek Dictionary). Thus as one comes into the possession of, or under the authority of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, it is obvious that this change of relationship takes place at the point of baptism, not before. Therefore, the denominational teaching that salvation takes place before baptism does not agree with what the Bible says. We are “baptized into,” rather than being “in,” and then baptized.

(2) If Christ is not divine, as many claim, how does he have the audacity to put himself on the same level as God? The Jews more than once sought to stone him to death for that very concept. (cf. John 8:58-59, 10:30-33). The Jews clearly understood the implications of the things Jesus was saying. So, in this passage, as well as others, Jesus clearly states his divinity. As C. S. Lewis said, Christ is either a lunatic, liar or Lord. All the evidence supports the latter choice.

(3) The definite article “the” precedes all three individuals in verse 19. In checking some 19 different translations in four different languages, all translators understood the article belonged there. This is a clear indication that there are three distinct beings represented, as opposed to some who claim that there is only one being in the Godhead who wears different names.

(4) The baptism in Matthew is done or administered by a human. Christ told the disciples to do the baptizing. Thus this is not Holy Spirit baptism, as some claim. Only Christ administered Holy Spirit baptism. John the Baptist said of Christ: “I did not recognize Him, but He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, ‘He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.’” (John 1:33). Just minutes before his ascension, Christ told the disciples: “for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now” (Acts 1:8). In Matthew 3:11, John himself revealed this: “As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.” This came to pass in Acts 2:4 on the Day of Pentecost. “And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance.”

Many are confused about baptism, thinking there are two baptisms in force today—Holy Spirit baptism and water baptism. As a matter of fact, there are some seven baptisms mentioned in the New Testament. They are baptism in the Holy Spirit (Act 1:8); John’s baptism (John 3:23); baptism unto Moses (1 Corinthians 10:2); the baptism of (Christ’s) suffering (Matthew 20:22); the baptism of fire—hell (Matthew 3:11); Christ’s own baptism (Matthew 3:16); and baptism into Christ for the remission of sins (Mark 16:16; Galatians 3:27, etc.).

By the time Paul’s letter to Ephesus was written, there was only one baptism in force. The other six had either passed away, or were yet to come. The one to come would certainly be the baptism of fire—hell. Note Paul’s words to Ephesus.

“There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all” (Ephesians 4:4-6).

What was that “one baptism?” It was the baptism Christ told his disciples to administer in the Great Commission. Notice Mark’s rendition of Christ’s charge. “He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who

has disbelieved shall be condemned” (Mark 16:16).

As Matthew’s record states that baptism is “towards” or “into” the name or possession of Christ, so Mark writes that both belief and baptism precede salvation. This is contrary to what many believe, as they believe faith and salvation come before baptism. Thus “He that believes shall be saved, and then shall be baptized.” But that’s not what the text says.

There is at least one solution to the problem. My father, Yater Tant (1908-1997) was having a discussion with a woman who claimed that Mark 16:16 was not in her Bible. My father protested, insisting it was. Whereupon the woman opened her Bible to the passage. Sure enough, it was not in her Bible. She had taken scissors and cut it out! Problem solved! Or so she thought. I remember Christ saying, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away” (Matthew 24:35). Christ’s word is more powerful than any pair of scissors.

(5) Christ urged his disciples to make disciples, baptize them, and then “teach them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20). The only way Christ would be with his disciples and those who have been taught the message through the ages is for them all to “observe” what he taught.

The baptism Jesus taught was an immersion in water. One obvious evidence of this is the actual meaning of the word “baptism” in the language of the New Testament—Greek.

“baptidzo -- from a derivative of 911; to immerse, submerge; to makewhelmed (i.e. fully wet); used only (in the New Testament) of ceremonial ablution, especially (technically) of the ordinance of Christian baptism: --Baptist, baptize, wash” (Strong’s Greek Dictionary).

All scholars from different backgrounds admit this is the meaning of the word, and have confirmed that history records this as the practice of the early church.

Notice the texts that confirm this. “After being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water...” (Matthew 3:16). “And John also was baptizing in Aenon near to Salim, because there was much water there: and they came, and were baptized” (John 3:23). With respect to Philip teaching the Ethiopian, the record states: “As they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch said, ‘Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?’ And Philip said, ‘If you believe with all your heart, you may.’ And he answered and said, ‘I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.’ And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; and the eunuch no longer saw him, but went on his way rejoicing” (Acts 8:36-39).

We further note the comparison of baptism to the death, burial and resurrection of Christ.

“Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection” (Romans 6:3-5).

In considering the preceding passages, why did John need “much water,” and why did both Philip and the eunuch “go down into” and then “came up out of the water” if all that had to be done was sprinkle a few drops of water? Then in Romans Paul likened baptism to the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. He said we are buried and then raised to a new life. Does that look like “sprinkling” or “pouring” water, or can we see that the text demands a “burial?”

The truth is, it was hundreds of years after that first century that men changed the practice from immersion in water to sprinkling or pouring.

A little known (yet documented) fact of history is that the Church of England (1534), the Presbyterian (c.1540), and the Congregational (soon after) churches all practiced immersion for about 100 years, or until the Westminster assembly in 1643. At that time, a number of bishops, seeing how much more convenient sprinkling was, came before Parliament insisting that “the devil of immersion ought to be legislated out of the realm it is so troublesome.”

“The Westminster assembly convened July 1, 1643. Very naturally the question was brought before this august body of divines, ‘Shall we continue the practice

of immersion or shall we adopt sprinkling instead?’ When it came to a vote, twenty-four voted to continue the ancient and apostolic practice, and twenty-four voted in favor of sprinkling. Dr. Lightfoot was chairman, and it was his duty to give the deciding vote. He cast his vote in favor of sprinkling”
(Edinburgh Encyclopaedia. 3. 236.)

In 1644, Parliament acted upon this, repealing the laws enjoining immersion, enacting in their place laws enjoining sprinkling. Those who were not sprinkled were to be treated as outlaws.

Mark’s Account

“He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned” (Mark 16:16).

The wording is so simple and clear that one needs help to misunderstand it. But in spite of its clear statement, men have sought to mitigate its meaning through the years. In primary school, we were taught the basics of math—addition and subtraction. We can apply the principle to Mark’s record and see how simple and clear it is.
 $2+2 = 4$ – Likewise belief + baptism = salvation.

In my English class I was taught that “and” is a coordinate conjunction, joining words, phrases or clauses of equal rank. So, 2 and 2 equal 4. Each 2 is equal to the other. In the same way, belief and baptism are of equal rank. Belief and baptism are equal components in salvation.

Some try to get around the simplicity of this by saying that since the passage does not say “he who has disbelieved and has not been baptized shall be condemned.” Therefore, they claim that baptism is not necessary. But if the passage said that, it would put a person in limbo—hanging in the balance with neither salvation nor condemnation.

Suppose the passage reads: “He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved and has not been baptized shall be condemned.” Here are the possibilities. Joe believes but is not baptized, thus he cannot be saved. Garfield does not believe, but is baptized just to play it safe. Now, he cannot be saved, because he does not believe, but cannot be condemned because he has been baptized. It takes both components to be saved, and takes both components to be lost. We can obviously see the fallacy of such reasoning.

Let’s consider an illustration. He that buys a ticket and gets on the train shall reach his destination, but he that does not buy a ticket shall be left behind. We don’t have to say, “but he that does not buy a ticket and does not get on the train...” If he doesn’t buy a ticket, it would seem obvious that he is not going to get on the train. Likewise, if a man does not believe in Christ, he isn’t going to be baptized.

Some will argue that baptism is a work, and we are saved without works. Thus many denominational creed books state that we are saved by “faith only.” One serious problem with this belief is that the Bible says it isn’t so. “You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone” (James 2:24). The context in James shows that the only kind of faith that is effective is an obedient faith. Not that any good works we can do can merit our salvation, but James says in verse 26: “For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.”

Allow me to elaborate on that just a bit. Verily, if we are saved without works, then we are saved without faith. How is that so? Jesus said that faith is a work. In a conversation with the people one day, Jesus was asked a question, and he then answered. “Therefore they said to Him, ‘What shall we do, so that we may work the works of God?’ Jesus answered and said to them, ‘This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent’” (John 6:28-29).

Consider this. Joe is a carpenter. Does he work? We would all agree that he is engaged in manual labor, working with his hands. Andy is an accountant. Does he work? Certainly he does. He may not be engaged in manual labor, but he works with his brain. He analyzes figures, draws conclusions, and makes a determination with the results of his mental activity.

What is faith? Faith examines evidence, draws conclusions based on the evidence, and then decides on a course of action. That is something we do! Jesus said it is a work, a work approved by God. So, if we are saved without works, then we are saved without faith. Who can believe it?

Luke’s account.

“and He said to them, ‘Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem’”

(Luke 24:46-47).

It is worth noting that in this passage, “repentance” is mentioned before “forgiveness of sins.” Many claim that we are saved by “faith only,” and thus the moment we come to belief, we are saved. As noted earlier, Mark’s account puts faith and baptism before salvation. And now Luke completes the picture. This repentance is a change of direction rather than simply saying “I’m sorry.” **Strong’s Greek Dictionary** describes *“metanoia”* as...(subjectively) compunction (for guilt, including reformation); by implication, reversal (of (another’s) decision):--repentance.”

From what we have seen in the Biblical record, faith without repentance is worthless, as well as faith without baptism.

In conclusion.

Many want to camp on John 3:16 and claim that belief is the only condition for our salvation. Many have memorized that beloved passage, which says “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”

Yes, faith or belief is mentioned there. But what kind of faith? Only a mental assent, or a working/obedient faith? James has given us the answer. The Great Commission gives us the total picture. When we want to know the will of God, we don’t take just one verse and camp on it. We take all of what God has said about the subject. After all, isn’t that what Jesus told Satan? “It is written, **“Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God”**” (Matthew 4:4).

If those who love John 3:16 will read just a bit further in the chapter, they will see the kind of faith Christ means, an obedient faith: “He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him” (John 3:36).

Paul, To The Ephesians | Ephesians 1:5-6

Predestined for Adoption

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“In love he predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved” (Ephesians 1:5, 6, **English Standard Version**).

To predestine is to foreordain, predetermine. The predestination of the Father is in the same manner as His election: in the election he “chose us in him” so the adoption is, as He purposed, “in the Beloved.”

God’s will was, those who are in Jesus Christ will be adopted; just as those “in him” are chosen (:3). He predestined us and we will therefore praise “his glorious grace.” By this marvelous gift we are brought into His family.

Children become members of an earthly family in one of two ways. Either they are brought in by natural birth; or they are brought in by adoption.

The Christian is both the product of birth (John 3:3-6), and of adoption (Romans 8:15). The child who emerges from his mother’s womb partakes of the features of his parents, in appearance and genetic factors; the adopted child, lacking these, is nonetheless given full membership and participation in the estate and name of his family.

The Christian, therefore, is to partake of his Father’s features (Matthew 5:43-45; 1 Peter 1:17-19) with the understanding that he is an heir (Galatians 4:7) of an “inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled and unfading kept in heaven for you who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 Peter 1:4-5).

The **English Standard Version** introduces verse 5 by borrowing two words from verse 4, so the passage reads “In love he predestined us ...”. This has the sound of John 3:16, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” This verse is a good working definition of “love,” as the provision of a needed thing: God saw the world as in need of salvation; and he gave his only Son. So: love God (1 John 5:3); love the Lord (John 14:15, 21); love your wife, one another, your neighbor, your enemy, and the brothers (1 Corinthians 16:14).

We are blessed with the grace of God, in the Beloved.

When Children Go Astray

Mike Thomas | Beaver Dam, Kentucky, USA

Some of the godliest people in the Bible had ungodly children. Eli was a priest who served at the tabernacle and instructed the Israelites in God's law. Yet "the sons of Eli were corrupt; they did not know the Lord" (1 Samuel 2:12). They were engaged in everything from eating foods God forbade (verses 13-17) to committing fornication with women at the tabernacle (verse 22). They had no respect for God and His word, or the godly character of their father. The sons of Samuel were not much better. Though he too was a faithful servant of God, his "sons did not walk in his ways; they turned aside after dishonest gain, took bribes, and perverted justice" (1 Samuel 8:3). These examples show that it is possible for godly people to have ungodly children.

Children go astray for various reasons. Influence and peer pressure have a lot to do with it. The Bible warns, "Do not be deceived: Bad company ruins good morals" (1 Corinthians 15:33, **English Standard Version**). This was the case with King Solomon, of whom the Bible says, "Yet among many nations there was no king like him, who was beloved of his God; and God made him king over all Israel. Nevertheless pagan women caused even him to sin" (Nehemiah 13:26, **New King James Version**). That sounds as if God is emphasizing the fact that even Solomon (who had been so blessed by God) could be lured away from godliness because of the influences in his life. The implication, of course, is if it can happen to him it can happen to anyone. Good people can be corrupted by morally-weak peers, who either do not know God's word or do not care to know it. This is why God warns, "The righteous should choose his friends carefully, for the way of the wicked leads them astray" (Proverbs 12:26). The people we keep close company with and place a lot of confidence in will either make us more like God or make us more like the world. Hence, let us choose our mate and friends with divine wisdom.

Other children leave the path of righteousness because they were not properly trained. This occurs because guardians either fail to teach God's word (2 Timothy 3:15) or fail to consistently enforce it. This was Eli's mistake. When he learned of his sons' wickedness, he "did not restrain them" (1 Samuel 3:13). Perhaps this was his pattern in life; to ignore his sons' behavior or to be too afraid to take a stand against them. This is not good because, "Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; the rod of correction will drive it far from him" (Proverbs 22:15). Then, when they are old, we should continue to oppose any wickedness they engage in — instead of ignoring, defending, or trying to rewrite God's will to make exceptions for them. This does not mean we preach to them every second, lest we drive them further away through poor communication. (We must show patience and humility at all times, 2 Timothy 2:24-25.) But it does mean we do not compromise God's will to justify their sin. It is a sad scene when older Christians change their convictions on marriage and divorce, salvation, the work of the church, or now homosexuality to justify the sins of their children and grandchildren. This only leads to further compromises with evil (1 Corinthians 5:6).

I once asked a godly man how he and his godly wife approached childrearing. He offered various suggestions then summarized his thoughts with a tearful conclusion, "We pray for them every night." That man was Keith Sharp and I have thought about that advice for nearly every day since the twenty years of my receiving it. We can never spend too much time praying for our family or for asking God for wisdom in knowing how to interact with them. He promises to help us through prayer (James 1:5; 5:16). However, if we have done all we can to lead them to the Lord and they still go astray, or seemingly never cared for Him, we must set the right example by keeping our own faith in God and praying for opportunities to influence them for good. If we abandon God to reach our children or grandchildren, we are no better off than those who never obeyed God. When Jesus said, "Remember Lot's wife" (Luke 17:32), He was referring to people who violate God's will because of their love for the world. We must not do this for our family. Losing our hope of heaven saves no one. Thus, like Abraham, we love the Lord first and foremost, and sacrifice our devotion to family if necessary to obey God's word. We must never hate or mistreat our family, obviously, but we never choose their will over God's, either. We do as Jesus said and bear the heavy burden of righteousness in that, "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me" (Matthew 10:37-38).

How People React To The Word Of God

Jim Mickells | Lewisburg, Tennessee, USA

In Acts 17, the apostle Paul came to the city of Athens, this would have been on his second preaching journey. His inward spirit was stirred because of what he saw, a city "given over to idols" (verse 16). As he passed through the city, considering the objects of their worship, there was one altar which really caught his attention because of the inscription written on it. Notice carefully what he said, "**I even** (emphasis mine) found an altar with this inscription: to the **unknown God**" (v. 23). The message which he wanted to deliver to them was about this unknown God whom

they worshiped without knowing.

Paul preached a message about the superiority of the God of heaven versus the idols which they served. His God made the world and everything in it, yet their gods had been crafted by the hands of some man (verse 24). The gods they served were confined to the temples made with hands, but this unknown God could not be so confined and He dwelled in the temple made without hands (verse 24). The God of heaven is not depended upon man to supply any of His needs; rather He is the One who gives “life, breath and all things” to man (verse 25). “The pagans thought that the gods consumed and were sustained by the sacrifices they offered to them” (Johnny Stringer, **Truth Commentary, Acts**. 361). Paul’s God was not the God of one nation, but of every nation even determining the “boundaries of their dwellings” (verse 26). Because of these facts the Lord expected them to seek after Him (verse 27). It is because of this God that “we live and move and have our being” (verse 28). One of our popular hymns sums it up best “How Great Thou Art.”

As the apostle continued his sermon about this unknown God to the Athenians, they were told they must repent of their sins (verse 30). Inspiration for repentance was because Jehovah had appointed a day which all the world will be judged in righteousness by Jesus Christ (verse 31). They were assured of these truths by the fact that God had raised His Son from the dead. Once Paul mentioned the resurrection the attitude of this audience changed. Notice what is said:

“And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, while others said, ‘We will hear you again on this matter.’ So Paul departed from among them. However, some men joined him and believed, among them Dionysius the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris, and others with them” (verses 32-34).

There were three types of listeners in this crowd of people.

Those who mocked. The word “mock” is defined as “to jest, joke, scoff; to jeer at” (Bullinger, **A Critical Lexicon & Concordance**. 504). These philosophers ridiculed Paul and his message about rising from the dead. It is amazing how some will listen up to a point and then their ears are closed. No opportunity was given for this man of God to prove that the dead do rise. Like his message to the Corinthians, ample proof of over five hundred witnesses could have been supplied, if only they would have had a desire to know. There are still those today who mock the word of God. One simple illustration will suffice. Think of those who ridicule the idea of having to be baptized in water in order to receive the remission of their sins. Yet this is exactly what the Bible says (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 22:16; 1 Peter 3:21).

Others wanted to hear again. This could be a good or bad thing. Was it just a polite way to procrastinate or did they truly want to consider what was said and give it more thought? Many people are not converted the first time they hear the gospel. Great effort may need to be put forth to convince someone of their need to obey the Lord. Though we don’t know their motive, the text is plain; “we will hear you again on this matter” (v. 32). It seems to me that Paul was going to be given another opportunity to speak to them about the resurrection. There is a danger in delay yet one must be certain that the truth is taught and believed.

Some men believed. Part of this audience was convinced of the truth which the apostle had taught. Peter has similar success on the day of Pentecost, when he told his audience they had crucified the Lord. Their response, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” (Acts 2:37). They were told to repent and be baptized (verse 38). Verse 41 says, “Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them.”

Same words different response. What made the difference? The heart in which the seed was sown! How do you respond to the truth when it is preached to you? Do you mock, want to hear again on this matter, or do you believe to the saving of your soul? It is your decision.

Who or what controls you?

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Questions are not always asked for information, sometimes they are asked to stimulate thought, to cause one to reevaluate self, or something done, or about to be done. Such is the title question. In service to God, does the environment in which you live control your faithfulness to God? Some have suggested that they would be more faithful if they lived under a better environment. But, is this so? Do the things around you control your life, or do you take control of the things around you? In other words, what causes you to do the things you do? Think with me.

Does a good environment control one's behavior? Most people agree the prodigal son of Luke 15 had what many consider a good environment. He was living in a good home and the best of circumstances. He had a loving father, money, and servants. Yet, this "good home" did not keep him faithful and away from sin (Luke 15:11-13).

What about riches? If you had more of this world's good, would you be more faithful? One of the most materially blessed men in the Old Testament was King Solomon. He had great wisdom, immense power, and enormous riches. He took in 666 talents of gold in tribute each year (in today's monetary standards over 3 billion dollars, 1 Kings 10:14). But all of the things he possessed did not make him faithful to God (1 Kings 11:4-10).

Some long for the Garden of Eden. What better situation could one hope to live under? Surely, such a perfect place with the presence of God, the tree of life, and every necessity provided for, that should serve to keep one faithful. Yet, this beautiful Garden did not prevent man and woman from becoming unfaithful to God.

Maybe the environment of heaven and the presence of God might be the place that would keep one faithful. Yet in spite of such an environment we learn there were angels who sinned and were cast out of heaven as a result (2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6).

What do we learn from these examples? We learn that a "good environment" is not the solution to keeping one faithful to God. Under the best of circumstances, both men and angels sinned. The best of surroundings is no guarantee of faithfulness. When one feels these things are not satisfying, he allows temptation and sin to control his situations in life, and he chooses to become unfaithful. Now, notice the other side.

Does a bad environment cause one to be unfaithful? Just as a good environment does not guarantee faithfulness, we can also learn that bad circumstances do not cause one to be unfaithful and sin against God. Adverse conditions may influence a person, but they cannot control a person's behavior. The Bible gives examples of some who under the worst of situations remained faithful to God.

Would slavery cause one to be unfaithful? Joseph, living as his father's favorite son had his life suddenly turned upside down at the age of 17 when his jealous brothers sold him into slavery Genesis 37:18-28. In the years that followed, he faced tremendous burdens and temptations. He was falsely accused of rape and thrown into prison for 7 years Genesis 39:11-20. Yet under all these circumstances he remained faithful to God. He controlled the environment under which he lived. He was in control of his actions during the various situations he faced, rather than letting them control him.

Maybe the loss of everything would cause unfaithfulness. But a study of Job shows this doesn't have to be the case. Job had everything one might desire, a big family, wealth, fame, wisdom and good health. But he suddenly lost everything including his health (Job 1 and 2). Yet Job did not sin in this, lose faith, or blame God. He said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job 1:21-22; 2:10).

Suppose you are persecuted? Wouldn't that excuse you from being faithful? No! One can still be faithful in spite of such suffering. The apostle Paul is a monument to us that beatings, stonings and false imprisonment are not enough to cause one to lose faith (Acts 14:19; 2 Corinthians 11:23-33). Living under such circumstances did not cause Paul to sin and lose faith (2 Timothy 2:12; 3:12). Paul could not control his circumstances, but he could control himself and how he acted during such trying times (Philippians 4:11-13; 2 Timothy 1:12).

No, bad circumstances do not cause one to sin. Neither do good circumstances keep one from sinning. Don't use a good or bad environment as an excuse to sin against God and be unfaithful to Him. The above examples show us that something else is involved.

What makes the difference? It is not the situation in which one lives that produces faithfulness or unfaithfulness. Rather, it is the attitude of heart. The controlling factor in both types of situations is not the outward circumstances but the inward state of heart.

Unfaithfulness is caused by rebellion. Those who are defiant and rebellious against God will sin, regardless of the environment. The Jews are good examples. They were God's chosen people in the Old Testament days, yet they refused to be faithful to God. Jeremiah wrote "But this people have a defiant and rebellious heart. They have revolted and departed" (Jeremiah 5:32).

On the other hand those who trust in God will rise above any situation in which they find themselves, and be

obedient to Him in spite of circumstances (Romans 6:17; Daniel 3:17-18). They will be steadfast in resolve and not let circumstances control their behavior. They put their trust in God, completely, fully confident He will stand with His people and do just as He promises. They then, are able to say "What shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?" "Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us" Romans 8:31, 37). Read Proverbs 3:5-6; Hebrews 13:5-6. Choose to be in control of yourself, don't let others or things control you.

from the e-book, "And They Shall Become One Flesh"

Concerning Communications

William J. Stewart | Kingston, Ontario, Canada

A man's stomach shall be satisfied from the fruit of his mouth, from the produce of his lips shall be filled. Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit. He who finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains favor from the LORD.
(Ecclesiastes 4:9-12)

Thoughts On Communications

Communication is the root of all relationships; whether it is between friends, business associates, or spouses. If there is no communication, there is no relationship.

However, it is important to realize that the nature of our communication will determine the nature of the relationship. Poor interaction will result in an unhappy marriage. Effective speech will open doors for us to enhance our relationship and enable us to grow together as a couple. Note some communication blunders we need to be careful not to slip into:

- Assumption (a.k.a. conversational guesswork)
- Sarcasm (makes another feel foolish)
- Intimidation (threats, sulking, etc.)
- Generalization ("...you always do...")
- Facial expression (uninterested, annoyed, etc.)
- Lack of clarity (say what you mean)

Our speech tendencies are directly linked to our personality. For instance, one who is shy may tend towards silence. One who is outgoing may be prone to be boisterous. One who is arrogant is likely to speak down to those who are around him. Thus, in considering effective speech in our marriages, we must first look at our character - who we are - and make any appropriate changes, not for our spouse, per se, but for ourselves and for the good of every relationship, including our relationship to God.

Those who are quiet must learn to participate in intimate communication to build stronger relationships. We must be willing to share our thoughts and feelings. At the opposite extreme are those who are so open, they say everything that is on their mind. This can be as harmful as the one who doesn't converse enough. For it to be a conversation, BOTH PARTIES are to participate. This cannot occur if one will not talk, or if the other will not stop talking.

For any conversation to be productive, there are some keys to keep in mind:

- Listen. It is impossible to converse if we will not listen. When our spouse is speaking, we should be hearing, not thinking about what we're going to say next. It is important that we are interested in what one another has to say.
- Be constructive. Someone once said, "if you ain't got nothing nice to say, then don't say nothing at all." That doesn't necessitate that every conversation be sunshine and lollipops; there are serious issues and concerns that need to be addressed in our relationships, but we need to be careful how we speak, having the right attitude and one another's best interest in mind.
- Have fun, but don't make fun. A good sense of humour is important; some have it, some don't. There is nothing wrong with playful speech, but make sure that it is jovial for both participants. Speech that results in a laugh at another's expense is not profitable.
- Be clear. Ambiguity is an enemy of effective communication. As one has said, "say what you mean, and mean what you say." We need to approach conversations with honesty and openness.

Advice From The Proverbs

Solomon had much to say in his writing about communication. Let us consider just a bit of his wisdom, and make application of it in our conversations, and especially with regard to our spouse, so that we might build our relationships.

Let our speech be helpful:

There is one who speaks like the piercing of a sword, but the tongue of the wise promotes health. (Proverbs 12:18)

A soft word turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. The tongue of the wise uses knowledge rightly, but the mouth of fools pour forth foolishness. (Proverbs 15:2)

Pleasant words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the bones. (Proverbs 16:24)

Think before we speak:

In the multitude of words sin is not lacking, but he who restrains his lips is wise. (Proverbs 10:19)

He who guards his mouth preserves his life, but he who opens wide his lips shall have destruction. (Proverbs 13:3)

A man has joy by the answer of his mouth, and a word spoken in due season, how good it is! ...The heart of the righteous studies how to answer, but the mouth of the wicked pours forth evil. (Proverbs 15:23, 28)

He who answers a matter before he hears it, it is folly and shame to him. (Proverbs 18:13)

Whoever guards his mouth and tongue keeps his soul from trouble. (Proverbs 21:23)

Do you see a man hasty in his words; there is more hope for a fool than for him. (Proverbs 29:20)

Our speech reveals our character:

The words of a man's mouth are deep waters; the wellspring of wisdom is a flowing brook. (Proverbs 18:4)

Let another man praise you, and not your own mouth; a stranger, and not your own lips. (Proverbs 27:2)

She opens her mouth with wisdom, and on her tongue is the law of kindness. (Proverbs 31:26)

God Shall Redeem

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One of the most beautiful psalms recorded for us is Psalm 130. It contains within it the great themes of God's love, mercy, forgiveness and redemption. It teaches us the proper response to how we are to approach God when seeking His compassion.

1 Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O LORD.

2 Lord, hear my voice: Let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications.

3 If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?

4 But there is forgiveness with thee, That thou mayest be feared.

5 I wait for the LORD, my soul doth wait, And in his word do I hope.

6 My soul waiteth for the Lord More than they that watch for the morning:

I say, more than they that watch for the morning.

7 Let Israel hope in the LORD: For with the LORD there is mercy,

And with him is plenteous redemption.

8 And he shall redeem Israel From all his iniquities.

First, it is quite plain to see the psalmist's desire for the Lord. He cries unto the Lord, desiring for the Lord to hear him (Psalm 130:1-2). We must cultivate the same desire for the Lord to hear us and be merciful towards us. We ought to be on a search for the Lord. We should look for Him at all opportunities.

The apostle Paul preached to the Athenians, "That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after Him, and find Him, though He be not far from every one of us" (Acts 17:27). We should be diligently seeking after God; He is not far from us. He is not difficult to find. He wants us to search for Him – to feel for Him. The Lord's desire is that we come to Him, seeking His mercy. We must be willing to search for Him through faith! "But without faith it is impossible to please Him: for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6).

Second, the 130th psalm pictures someone who is not only seeking after God, but He is seeking God's forgiveness. The psalmist pens, "But there is forgiveness with thee..." (Psalm 130:4). Many people say they want a relationship with God, or they want to grow closer to the Almighty, but they will not abandon their own self-righteousness, nor will they turn away from sin. Too often we allow pride to prevent us from seeking God's forgiveness. We do not want to confess sin, much less repent from sins.

Verse three is interesting due to the rhetorical question the psalmist poses. "If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?" The question relates to if the Lord were keeping tally of the sins and iniquities that we might commit, then how will we be able to stand confidently before Him? The obvious answer is that there would be no way possible for us to have boldness before God. We would fall well below the standard.

The New Testament teaches that man has sinned and is in need of the grace of God. "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). We should be thankful that God is a forgiving God! He is compassionate, merciful and gracious. He is willing to not impute our sins against our account, releasing us from the guilt of our wrongdoing (Psalm 32:1-2).

Finally, the psalmist teaches us that hope is found in the very word of God (Psalm 130:5). We must put our trust in the will of God. The Lord extends His grace and mercy to us, especially in the revelation of His word.

The apostle Paul spoke concerning the revelation of God's will in this way:
"In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard, the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise... That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him: The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of His calling, and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints..."
(Ephesians 1:13, 17-18)

In the gospel, we have the word of truth, the spirit of wisdom and revelation from God. We have been given the "knowledge of Him" so that we may be enlightened. By the instruction of the Spirit, the One who has revealed all truth (cf. John 16:13), we have been sealed, or given affirmation, that salvation is offered for all that will come to understand God's word.

We cannot seek God, nor can we seek His forgiveness apart from the very word of God! The way to learn of God and the path toward salvation is through His gospel. "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Romans 1:16). Without God's word then there can be no forgiveness of sins.

We must cultivate a desire to seek God and we must realize the need for the forgiveness of our sins, then we must turn to God's word for instruction of how we may attain that salvation. We must believe in God's Son, Jesus Christ (Acts 16:31), change from our life of sin (Acts 2:38), confess our faith in Jesus Christ (Romans 10:9-10) and be baptized in water for the remission of our sins (1 Peter 3:21).

When we obey the gospel, then we have the hope of eternal life. We can trust that God shall redeem.

The Great Supper

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Background

Among the Jews of the first century, “It was a common belief, that in the day of Messiah redeemed Israel would be gathered to a great feast, together with the patriarchs and heroes of the Jewish faith” (Edersheim. 1:549). “Gentiles could have no part in that feast” (Edersheim. 1:550). This belief sets the background for a figure of speech the Master commonly employed.

The lessons the Master taught in Luke chapter fourteen are in the context of a Sabbath meal He ate in the house of a ruler from among the Pharisees (verse 1). The other guests were watching Jesus closely to see if He would violate their traditions concerning the Sabbath (cf. Mark 3:2; Luke 6:7). So Jesus healed “a man whose body was swollen with fluid” (verse 2, ISV) and challenged them to find fault with His work (verses 3-5). They were unable to answer His challenge but were seemingly unimpressed by the miracle (verse 6).

But as they had watched Christ, He was likewise watching them as they jockeyed for the more prestigious places at the table of this important host (verse 7). So He taught them a great lesson on humility (verses 8-11). Then He proceeded to teach His host proper hospitality as well (verses 12-14).

One of the guests, perhaps simply wanting to relieve the tension, stated the common Jewish sentiment, “Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!” (Verse 15). So the Master built upon this the “Parable of the Great Supper” (verses 16-24).

The Parable

A man made a great feast and invited many guests. As was customary among the wealthy at least as far back as Queen Esther (Esther 5:8; 6:14), the invitations went out early enough for the guests to clear their calendars for this important social event, and then the master of the house sent a servant at the proper time to inform his invited guests that supper was ready. Incredibly, those who were invited acted with one accord by insulting their host with excuses why they wouldn’t come. One had to go look at land he had bought, still another had to try out five pairs of oxen he had purchased, and yet another bluntly refused saying, “I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come” (Verses 19-20; cf. Deuteronomy 24:5). It really doesn’t matter whether the three rejections were for serious or flimsy reasons; they had all shown contempt for the host by refusing to come at the appointed time, and they had shown that their personal affairs were more important to them than was the host of the supper.

But this was a great supper, and the master determined it would have its guests. So, again incredibly to this elite audience, Jesus announced that the master then commanded his servant to go to the wide streets and narrow lanes of the city and “bring in here the poor and the maimed and the lame and the blind” (verse 21).

But the servant reported to his master that he had done as commanded, and there was still room for more guests. So the master commanded his servant to go out to the highways and the farms enclosed by hedges, go everywhere, and compel them to come in. He was determined his house would be filled for his great supper, but none of those who had spurned His invitation would eat.

Meaning

Isaiah prophesied that the Lord would prepare a great feast “for all peoples” (Isaiah 25:6). The Jews had made the feast literal in their traditions but had overlooked the “for all peoples” part. The feast of the kingdom of Christ is spiritual (Romans 14:17), “every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 1:3), but it is indeed “for all peoples.”

The Lord had invited the Jews to this feast through His prophets for hundreds of years (cf. Isaiah 55:1-3), and now He had sent John the Baptist and His Son Christ Jesus to announce the time had come and the feast of the kingdom was arriving (Matthew 3:1-2; 4:17; Mark 1:14-15), but, the Jewish leaders rejected both the messengers and the message (Luke 7:29-30, 33-34; John 7:46-49). Regardless of the platitude, “Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God,” when the king came, the Jewish religious leaders, who considered themselves “sons of the kingdom” (Matthew 8:12), rejected Him.

So the Lord invited into His kingdom the common people, the riff raff whom the Pharisees viewed with contempt, and they would enter the kingdom (cf. Matthew 21:31; Mark 12:37).

But still there was room for many more in the Lord's kingdom, so He sent the invitation to the Gentiles, even to all the people of every nation, to come to the great spiritual supper of the Lord (Mark 16:15; Matthew 28:19). Believing Gentiles will sit down at feast with the patriarchs in the kingdom, but unbelieving Jews will be excluded (Matthew 8:11-12).

Application

The time is now, and the feast of the kingdom is prepared (2 Corinthians 6:2). "All things are ready; come to the feast!" Many whose family are Christians have heard the great invitation their entire lives. But you may allow finances, business, or family considerations to stand in the way. Regardless of whether your excuse for not accepting the invitation is serious or flimsy, real or insincere, it means your personal, worldly considerations are more important to you than the Lord and the rich, spiritual blessings in Him. There is no valid reason to refuse to come to the Great Supper.

The Lord sends His invitation to all. The religious leaders of the world will by and large reject it, and so will most of the wealthy and highly educated (1 Corinthians 1:26). Today as in every generation most who come to Christ are "the poor and the maimed and the lame and the blind," the riff raff of the world who are precious to God.

As others have commented, God in His infinite love and grace can no more accept emptiness in His kingdom than nature can endure a vacuum. The invitation is to all, to those in "the streets and the lanes" as well as the ones in "the highways and the hedges," to Jew and Gentile, rich and poor, male and female, all of every nation, tongue, and race. There is still room in the kingdom.

The Lord through the gospel compels all to come in to His great supper. That which compels is not force, whether physical force of armed might or spiritual force of direct operation of the Spirit, but the moral persuasion of the Savior's invitation. "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). "And the Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' And let him who hears say, 'Come!' And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely" (Revelation 22:17).

But none who reject this gracious invitation will taste the sumptuous supper of the Lord.

Work Cited

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