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Finally, brethren
WHATEVER THINGS are true
 are noble
 are just
 are pure
 are lovely
 are of good report
 IF THERE IS ANY VIRTURE AND IF THERE IS ANYTHING PRAISEWORTHY –
meditate on these things.

PHILIPPIANS
4:8

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.

"I Was Hungry"

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

The Lord places great emphasis on our individual obligation to help the needy (Acts 20:35; Ephesians 4:28). In fact, those who fail to help their needy brothers and sisters will be condemned on Judgment Day (Matthew 25:31-46). What are our obligations as individuals to help the needy?

Here are some biblical principles that should guide our charity. We have individual benevolent responsibilities we cannot turn over to the church (1 Timothy 5:16) or to others (Matthew 15:1-9). We should expect nothing material in return for our gifts (Luke 6:33-35), nor should we give to be seen of men (Matthew 6:1-4). We should even help our enemies (Matthew 5:43-44), and we should be especially concerned for the helpless (James 1:27).

There are scripturally defined limits to our obligations. We should meet spiritual needs first (Matthew 16:26-27). Benevolence is for needs not wants (Matthew 25:34-36). We must not share in sin (Ephesians 5:11), nor should we encourage laziness (2 Thessalonians 3:10). Our own families are our first responsibility (1 Timothy 5:8), and we must pay our debts before we give to others (Romans 13:8; but Ephesians 4:28). Finally, obligations to other Christians come ahead of those to sinners (Matthew 10:42; Galatians 6:10).

On Judgment Day, will the Lord say to you, "Come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom," or "Depart from me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire"? Are you generous or miserly in helping the poor?

Why People Reject Christ

Jefferson David Tant | Hendersonville, Tennessee, USA

We live in a nation today that is becoming less and less “religious,” which includes an increasing number of those who reject Christ, as they may believe he is a myth, or if a real person, certainly not a divine being. Let us examine what may be behind what is happening in our nation. Is there sufficient evidence for an intelligent person to believe in Christ? There is truly an abundance of evidence, and when we have examined it, I trust that our own faith will be strengthened, and that we will be equipped to help others to have this same faith. A study of the evidence is not the theme for our study, as we are considering why people reject Christ and the principles He taught.

Some People Reject Christ out of Ignorance

Often this is a self-imposed ignorance, which was the basis of the ignorance mentioned in Romans 1:18-23

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“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.”

Sometimes people will say, “I don’t want to hear it,” as a discussion about the Bible takes place. In some way, it is felt that this relieves a person of responsibility if there is no knowledge. Thus, they assume “ignorance is bliss.”

But ignorance doesn’t excuse one of responsibility. Try that with a policeman who stops you for going 70 miles per hour in a 50-mph zone. “Oh, I didn’t see the speed limit sign.”

Others Have a Problem with Pride

This is often the hindrance with those who have “much learning” which has come from some of our institutions of higher (or “lower”) learning. It is simply amazing to see the lengths to which our institutions will go in order to destroy faith in God. One of my professors in college, J. D. Thomas, received his Ph.D. from the University of Chicago some years ago. He was told that he was probably the last person who would receive such a degree from the university who believed in God. In effect, he was told: “We don’t believe a person is a fit candidate for a degree from this institution if he goes through our program and still believes in God.”

It is sad to see so many of our own young people lose their faith when they go to the great universities. A good percentage of believing students do actually lose their faith in these schools. Professors openly state their goal to destroy the faith of believers in their classrooms, and they will openly ridicule such students.

My own children experienced ridicule for their beliefs even in high school. The world looks upon a belief in God as childish and superstitious, and only uneducated simpletons are religious. In truth, it’s the other way around.

*“For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, **“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the cleverness of the clever I will set aside.”** Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom; but we preach*

*Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, so that no man may boast before God. But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, so that, just as it is written, **“Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord”** (1 Corinthians 1:18-31)*

Pride was a great problem with the Jews in Jesus' day. "For this reason they could not believe, for Isaiah said again:

***“He has blinded their eyes and He hardened their heart, so that they would not see with their eyes and perceive with their heart, and be converted and I heal them.”** These things Isaiah said because he saw His glory, and he spoke of Him. Nevertheless many even of the rulers believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they were not confessing Him, for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the approval of men rather than the approval of God” (John 12:39-43).*

A Third Great Hindrance Is a Moral Problem

This is often the problem that may underlie the other excuse. Jesus outlined this problem in John 3:19-20:

“This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.”

Some years ago, my wife and I went to call on a young wife who had left her husband and was involved in an adulterous relationship. She didn't want anyone to find her, so would only give her phone number out, not her address. We traced the phone number to a location and went to see her. She had been brought up by God-fearing parents, had been a faithful Christian since her baptism into Christ, and had been active in the teaching program of the church. When Flora and I began to talk with her, one of her first statements was "I don't think I believe in the same God you do any more." What was the problem? It was not an intellectual problem, but a moral problem. The only way she could justify her sin was to reject belief in the one who defined her actions as sinful.

So often those who come up with their "intellectual" arguments against the existence of God are only covering for the moral problems in their lives.

Aldous Huxley was a great philosopher and thinker who was an avowed atheist. In his life he had a great influence in turning many away from belief. Near the end of his life, he wrote a revealing confession in one of his books.

“I had motives for not wanting the world to have a meaning. Consequently assumed that it had none and was able without any difficulty to find satisfying reasons for this assumption. The philosopher who finds no meaning in the world is not concerned exclusively with the problem in pure metaphysics, he is also concerned to prove that there is no valid reason why he personally should not do as he wants to or why his friends should not seize political power and govern in a way that they find most advantageous to themselves. For myself the philosophy of meaninglessness was essentially an instrument of liberation, sexual and political.”

What an honest admission! Whatever intellectual problems he had with the existence of God and absolute truth and values were basically a cover-up to excuse his sexual and political practices and views. (Note – This is one lesson from a 26-lesson course I taught some years ago on **Foundations of Our Faith, a Study in Apologetics**)

Two Types Of Mental Divorce (Type 2)

Patrick Donahue | Harvest, Alabama, USA

I received an e-mail on September 27, 2001, where Harry Osborne wrote

"I believe the vast majority would also affirm that an innocent party in a marriage sundered for the cause of fornication has the right to remarry even if the guilty fornicator filed first and secured the civil divorce. ... the vast majority have agreed with me."

As you can see, this quote defends the second type of mental divorce as I classified them in this article's introduction. Both of these types of mental divorce stand or fall together. If you can get a scriptural divorce mentally, why would it make any difference if the fornication occurred before the civil court action? It would only matter if the fornication occurred before the mental divorce/repudiation action, right?

What Constitutes A Divorce Is Not The Critical Issue

Though Harry tried to argue the critical difference between us is "what constitutes a divorce?" (and we will deal with that question momentarily), that is not the real issue. Realize that when a fornicator goes to the trouble of securing a civil divorce against his innocent mate, he almost certainly has, somewhere along the line, mentally and verbally "repudiated" (the mental divorcer's synonym for "put away") his wife. According to the mental divorce position then, that would mean the innocent wife is "put away" even before the legal divorce is secured by either party. Therefore (by that reasoning) the innocent wife would be a "put away" woman even if she ended up securing the legal divorce against her husband for fornication. But Harry would correctly allow that woman to remarry, even though she had been repudiated ("put away" according to Harry's position). This tells us the real issue is not "what constitutes a divorce," but the real issue is, is it possible for a fornicator to unlawfully put away his mate? In effect, Harry's position says no that it is not possible. But Luke 16:18 shows it is very possible (not scriptural) for any man (fornicator or not) to put away his wife in a sinful way.

What Does "Put Away" Mean?

Let me repeat emphatically, the question about what constitutes a "putting away" is not the critical issue in the "mental divorce" controversy. Even if we agreed with the "mental divorce" false teachers on what constitutes a divorce, they would still be wrong in saying that a put away ("repudiated" – their meaning) woman could remarry if her rightful husband has committed adultery. But "what constitutes a divorce?" is a difference between us, so let's examine it. As you might suspect, our English word "divorce" is a good synonym for "apoluo" ("put away" in Matthew 19:9). This can be seen by reading the definitions for "apoluo" in Thayer's, Strong's, Vine's, Berry's, **The Analytical Greek Lexicon**, and Green's Greek Concordance, each of which mentions the English word "divorce" in defining the word. English translations also bear this out as "apoluo" is translated into a form of the word "divorce" in Matthew 5:32 in the **KJV**, and Matthew 5:32 (twice), 19:3, 9, Mark 10:11, 12, and Luke 16:18 in the **NKJV** and **NASV**.

Knowing that our English word "divorce" is a good synonym for "apoluo," it would make sense to define "divorce" from an English dictionary. (for the same reason we might use a Bible dictionary to define "baptizo" as "immerse" and then use our English dictionary to find out that "immerse" means "to cover completely in a liquid; submerge.") Here are some ways "divorce" is defined by English dictionaries at www.dictionary.com (my emphasis):

The legal dissolution of a marriage

To end marriage with (one's spouse) by way of legal divorce

To dissolve the marriage contract

A legal dissolution of the marriage contract by a court or other body having competent authority.

This is properly a divorce, and called, technically, divorce

the legal dissolution of a marriage

get a divorce; formally terminate a marriage

Admittedly the above method for determining the meaning for "apoluo" is not intended to be complete, because I did not exhaust all the given definitions, and because some English dictionaries give modern

definitions for words (like “sprinkle, pour, or immerse” for “baptize”). But I did want the reader to see those definitions, as they have a bearing on this issue. It seems in our society, divorce involves a legal procedure, doesn't it? Indeed, isn't that the way we've always understood the word, until the recent attempts to justify these types of unlawful re-marriages?

What Is The Procedure For “Putting Away”

So how do we know that in the United States, a legal procedure must be followed to divorce a spouse? Because God teaches in passages like Romans 13:1 and I Peter 2:13 we must follow the laws of the land. Since the laws of the U.S. require a legal procedure be followed in getting a divorce, then we must follow/obey that. I am confident the reader will agree with this when it comes to getting married. Who among us thinks a young couple can avoid fornication together by simply asserting to the elders that they are married, without actually doing what State law prescribes (marriage license, etc)? So if you don't believe in “mental” marriages, then why would you believe in “mental” divorces? We are bound by the law of our society in other areas too. The speed limit is one example that all would agree with.

Conclusion: It Matters Who Gets The Divorce

One preacher said, “I never really thought it made any difference who got the divorce.” Well, Luke 16:18 forever shows it does matter who gets the divorce. If it didn't matter, the put away woman of the ‘b’ part of this verse would be allowed to remarry, since her husband had committed adultery against her. But even though he had committed adultery, the verse says her remarriage would result in adultery. The reason is because she did not secure the divorce from her husband. She had the grounds, but she couldn't take advantage of those grounds because her husband had already divorced her. The marriage was no longer in existence. The marital bond still existed, but not the marriage. So there was nothing left to divorce (put away).

Because of passages like Philippians 1:17, Acts 15:2,7, 17:17, 19:8-9, Matthew 22:15-46, John 3:19-21, and Jude 3, I asked all three of the men named/quoted in this article in years gone by to defend what they believe in public (oral) debate against either me or another capable man (their choice). But sadly, all three refused.

"No One Cares For My Soul"

Jim Mickells | Sellersburg, Indiana, USA

"Look on my right hand and see, for there is no one who acknowledges me; refuge has failed me; no one cares for my soul" (Psalm 142:4)

In the heading of this Psalm in my Bible, it says, “A Contemplation of David. A Prayer when he was in the cave.” There are at least two instances where we find David in a cave. One is in 1 Samuel 22:1 (cave of Adullam) and the other is in 1 Samuel 24:1-3 (a cave in the wilderness of En Gedi). These were times when he was fleeing from Saul who was trying to kill him. This seems to be an extremely low point in the life of one who would become the great king of Israel. Where were his friends when he needed them the most, nowhere to be found. He was not even safe in the cave where he sought refuge. Is there anyone who really cares for my soul? How thought provoking is such a consideration.

Do you think we are truly concerned about the souls of others like we should be? Are those we encounter, maybe even on a daily basis, aware we are concerned? Or do our actions or our lack of effort say to them “I don't care about your soul”? Let us explore some reasons why such might be the case.

It could be because of our lack of love for the souls of others. I'm reminded of a question the disciples asked Jesus, who was sleeping during a windstorm while crossing the sea, “Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?” (Mark 4:38). Sure, He cared! He calmed the sea. But do we care that souls of men and women are perishing (dying lost) every single day? The wise man said, “The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, And he who wins souls is wise” (Proverbs 11:30). Show your love by trying to teach the lost about

Jesus, "The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

Could it be one does not realize the value of a soul? Do you consider your soul valuable? Jesus plainly taught us of the immense worth of the soul of every person. "For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matthew 16:26). The souls of men were so treasured by God He gave His Son to die so all could be saved (John 3:16-17). The apostle Peter tells of the longsuffering of God, "not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). If our Lord so adores the spirit of man, going to such lengths to redeem, should we not highly prize their souls as well?

One thing lacking among so many, it seems to me, is the courage to speak to others about their salvation. Some are afraid of rejection. Others might fear being asked a question they cannot answer. In a world where evil is looked upon as good and good as evil there is concern one might be ridiculed or even persecuted because of his effort to share the gospel with those who are lost. Paul, after telling those at Ephesus to put on the whole armor of God, said, "and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel" (Ephesians 6:19). God told Joshua, as he was to take the place of Moses, "be strong and of good courage" (Joshua 1:6). May the God of Abraham give us the courage and boldness to speak to others about His truly amazing grace.

It might be we lack opportunity. Should we not follow the example of Paul? Listen to his request of the brethren at Colosse, "meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in chains" (Colossians 4:3). Each time you pray to God, ask for opportunities to share His message with the lost. What Jesus told His disciples might be the only thing we need, "Do you not say, 'There are still four months and then comes the harvest'? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest!" (John 4:35). Let us not only pray for open doors, but also ask that we may see those standing wide-open.

Are you glad someone cared enough for your soul to teach you the gospel? I'm convinced you are! But do you care enough about the souls of others to teach them? If your spouse is not a Christian, are you trying to lead them to the Lord? What about your children? It could be a mother or father, a friend or neighbor, a co-worker or someone you are attending school with, etc. Not only teach them the gospel, which is God's power to save, let it be the guiding force in your life, so they can see Christ living in you. May it never be said of us, "They do not care for my soul."

The Power of Prayer

PRAYING LIKE JESUS

William Stewart | Kingston, Ontario, Canada

We continue our series looking at Jesus' example of and teachings about prayer. Today we'll focus on the power of prayer. Our Lord emphasized the need for us to pray in faith, the importance of prayer as we endeavour to overcome temptation and sin, and the value of prayer as we seek to not lose heart amidst trials and troubles in life. Let's learn from the Lord.

Prayer and Faith

In Matthew 17:14-21 a man brought his demon-possessed son to Jesus' disciples, however, they were unable to cast the demon out. When the Lord came upon the situation, He rebuked the demon (v 19), but He also rebuked the weary father and His disciples (v 17, 20). The man had come with faith seeking a miracle for his son, but sadly his confidence in Jesus disappeared. He was reduced to wondering about the Lord, "...if you can do anything..." (Mark 9:22). The apostles seemingly took a nonchalant approach to the situation at first and were baffled they could not cast out the demon. What was the problem? Was this some kind of "super-demon"? No, the issue was not the demon; it was their faith. They came to the situation unprepared quite simply, they were unprepared. Hear the Lord:

Because of your unbelief; for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you. However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.
(Matthew 17:20-21)

Friend, spiritual failures do not happen because the challenges and issues are too big; it is because we try to face them on our own, without God's help. How often do we, like the apostles, try to battle the wicked one from a place of unbelief, deficient in our faith? The solution is to seek the Lord, to spend time in prayer and fasting, to place our confidence in Him and not ourselves. We will find that our faith will be proportionate to our focus on prayer. The mountains of life can be moved and overcome by great faith (Matthew 21:19-21), for prayer removes anxieties and focuses us on the One who has power to save (Philippians 4:6-8).

James focused heavily on the power of prayer in the final chapter of his epistle. Notice:

*Is anyone among you suffering? **Let him pray.** Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms. Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and **let them pray** over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord., And **the prayer of faith** will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Confess your trespasses to one another, and **pray for one another**, that you may be healed. The **effective fervent prayer** of a righteous man avails much.*
(James 5:13-16)

Are you suffering? Pray. Are you sick? Pray. Are you tempted? Pray. Prayer opens the door to spiritual engagement; it is an appeal for God's involvement; it invites and seeks God's participation in the outcome of the situations we face in life, whatever they are. The objection might come - but we're not Jesus, we're not the apostles, we're not the prophets. That's OK. James continues:

*Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and **he prayed earnestly** that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. And **he prayed again**, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit.* (James 5:17-18)

Elijah didn't have some special "prophet" gene; he was human, as we are human. He believed God and sought God's participation and involvement in the issues he faced. Jesus presented Himself as an example of prayer to the apostles, not just in frequency or longevity or content, but also in power.

Prayer and Overcoming Sin

On the night Jesus was betrayed and arrested we see the Lord's focus on prayer.

*Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to the disciples, 'Sit here while I go and **pray** over there.' And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and He began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed. then He said to them, 'My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and **watch with Me.**' He went a little farther and fell on His face, and **prayed**, saying, 'O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.' Then He came to the disciples and found them asleep, and said to Peter, 'What? **Could you not watch with Me** one hour? **Watch and pray**, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.' Again, a second time, He went away and **prayed**, saying, 'O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done.' And He came and found them asleep again, for their eyes were heavy. So He left them, went away again, and **prayed** the third time, saying the same words. (Matthew 26:36-44)*

There was a variation between the Lord's will and the Father's will. Understandably, Jesus did not want to

go to the cross; there was a temptation to seek a different way. He asked the Father, *"Take this cup away from Me"* (Mark 14:36). And yet, being in prayer and seeking the aid of His Father, Jesus concluded, *"not what I will, but what You will"* (ibid). Prayer is a powerful tool in the midst of temptation. Jesus prayed, not once, not twice, but at least three times after leaving the upper room and the coming of the mob led by Judas Iscariot. Prayer gave Him comfort and strength to persevere and overcome temptation.

He wanted the same for all of His apostles, but that night He specifically focused on Peter.

Simon, are you sleeping? Could you not watch one hour? Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. (Mark 14:37-38)

Prayer was needful and would be helpful for them all, but notice what Jesus had said earlier that night to Peter:

Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren. (Luke 22:31-32)

Peter didn't heed Jesus' warning. Instead, he confidently declared, *"Lord, I am ready to go with You, both to prison and to death."* (Luke 22:33). Oh, that it were so. The spirit was willing but the flesh was weak. Over the course of that night, Peter would sleep, he would draw a sword, he would follow Jesus at a distance, and then he would deny three times that he even knew the Lord. Peter did not pray, leaving himself completely open to attack by the enemy.

Do Not Lose Heart

In Luke 18, Jesus gave the parable of the persistent widow which emphasizes the need to be constant in prayer. Notice:

*...He spoke a parable to them, that men **always ought to pray** and not lose heart, saying: There was in a certain city a judge who did not fear God nor regard man. Now there was a widow in that city; and she came to him saying, 'Get justice for me from my adversary.' And he would not for a while; but afterward he said within himself, 'Though I do not fear God nor regard man, yet because this widow troubles me I will avenge her, lest by her **continual coming** she weary me.' Then the Lord said, 'Hear what the unjust judge said. And shall not God avenge His own elect who **cry out day and night** to Him though He bears long with them? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?' (Luke 18:1-8)*

We need to pray always (1 Thessalonians 5:17) and not lose heart. Jesus illustrated this through this parable about a widow who sought justice from a self-centered judge. At first he would not listen to her, but finally, because of her persistence, he did as she requested. If an unrighteous judge, who has no respect for God or man, will hear and answer the request of an unrelenting widow, how much more will God, who loves us, hear and answer the cries of His people? God is focused upon our good, ergo, we should diligently pray to Him with confidence (1 John 5:14-15).

But Jesus posed an eye-opening question in verse 8, *"...when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?"* There should be no question whether God will answer or not. Sometimes He will answer right away, other times we may need to wait; sometimes the answer may be yes, other times it may be now. But we can have surety that God answers His people. However, the concern is whether men will persevere? Will we continue steadfast in faith? Will we be constant in prayer? Albert Barnes commented:

...there is more danger that his people would grow weary, than that God would be found unfaithful and fail to avenge his elect. (Albert Barnes' NT Commentary)

May we not lose heart - God is faithful; He will hear and He will answer. Will we be praying in faith?

Camouflage

Greg Gwin | Columbia, Tennessee, USA

We are all familiar with camouflage, or 'camo' as we like to call it. We most commonly see it when hunters are preparing to hit the field in search of game. But this special clothing was originally perfected by the military. The main idea, of course, is to blend in with your surroundings so that you are not so easily detected by the enemy. More recently, since our army has been fighting wars in the desert, the patterns have been modified to help hide soldiers in that environment. There are even special camo types for arctic or snowy conditions.

This effort to disguise oneself to avoid detection by enemies is a good thing in the armies of men. But a problem arises when soldiers in God's army (2 Timothy 2:3) try to do the same. Remember, 'camo' is designed to make one 'blend in' to the surroundings. But Christian soldiers should make no effort to do so. Unfortunately, many do. We see too many who want to talk, dress, and act like the worldly folks around them. They want to go to the same places and do the same things. In short, they want to hide their real identity and avoid detection as true disciples.

Why would a Christian do this? Jesus targeted the problem when He said:

"Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels" (Mark 8:38).

Sadly many are "ashamed" to show their attachment to the cause of Christ. The outcome for them, as Jesus warned, will be eternal loss.

May we all develop the unwavering devotion of the apostle Paul, who boldly said: "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ" (Romans 1:16). May we, like him, be able to say in the end: "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith" (2 Timothy 4:7).

Singing "to the Lord"

Michael Hickox | Mattoon, Illinois, USA

Ephesians 5:19, "speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs; singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord"; Colossians 3:16: "Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly; in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your heart to the Lord."

These two verses teach the truth about how we must worship God through music. Notice toward the beginning of both verses that the phrases "speaking to one another" and "teaching and admonishing one another" are used. An important purpose of congregational singing is to edify one another.

This does not mean though that the purpose of such worship is to please ourselves. Notice the ending of both verses says "to the Lord."

It is God whom we must please. It is God who has the right to determine what is and is not acceptable in our worship. We must therefore follow His commands.

The New Testament commands He's given concerning worship in song all reference singing (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16; James 5:13). The examples He's given concerning New Testament worship in song also reference singing (cf. Acts 16:25; 1 Corinthians 14:15).

In the Old Testament, worshiping God with mechanical instruments of music was acceptable (cf. Psalm 33:2), as was offering animal sacrifices. The fact that animal sacrifices were willed by God under the Old Law does not make it so under the Law of Christ. Likewise, the presence of mechanical music in the Old Testament does not make it God's will for worship today (cf. Colossians 2:14-17).

Some question how worshiping with mechanical instruments of music can be wrong if God has not directly forbidden it.

Consider an illustration. If we are asked to paint someone's kitchen white, we would recognize that it needs to be painted white. The person asking doesn't have to say not to paint it green, blue, or any other color. The understanding is that white means white alone.

When God asked Noah to make an ark of gopher wood, God did not have to list hundreds of woods that could not be used (Genesis 6:14). The command necessarily inferred that gopher wood was the only kind of wood that was acceptable.

In the New Testament, God commands making melody in our heart by singing. Making melody in worship with a piano or other mechanical instrument is worshiping God differently than He authorizes.

Having said all of this, it's important to note that the need for obeying God's command to sing is not fulfilled only by ensuring our outward actions follow His pattern of "singing."

Our singing must be sincere, as indicated by the phrase "making melody in your heart to the Lord." Our hearts should be moved as we worship in song. Those who are afraid their singing is not up to par should remember that God listens to our hearts.

We must also sing with thanksgiving, as Colossians 3:16 says. A thankful heart that means the words being sung please God.

This should be the goal of our worship to God. Mankind can devise numerous ways to worship that seem good. Yet, only those who follow God's commands are showing the love for Him He desires (1 John 5:3).

May we sing with grace while making melody in our hearts, and thereby make a sound that is beautiful to God and edifies others.

A Forerunner

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"Forerunner" is a word we don't use much in our society. A forerunner is someone who prepares the way for someone else. John the Baptist is described as a forerunner. In Luke 1:17, the angel told John's father, Zacharias, "It is he who will go as a forerunner before Him in spirit and in power..." We see this was to fulfill the prophecy in Malachi 3:1. "Behold, I am going to send my messenger, and he will clear the way before me." John the Baptist fulfilled the prophecy. Zacharias would use similar verbiage in the prophecy concerning his son in Luke 1:76, "And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; For you will go on before the Lord to prepare His ways."

Similarly, Jesus was a forerunner by preparing the way for us. In Hebrews 6:19-20, it tells us:

"This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil, where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek."

In other words, Christ entered Heaven so that we might be able to go there as well. In John 14:2, He told His disciples, "I go to prepare a place for you." When He died, was resurrected, and ascended to the right hand of God, He prepared the way for us so that we might enter Heaven.

We can be forerunners as well. Since a forerunner prepares the way for another, we can “prepare the way” for the next generation. How can we do this? Parents can do this by teaching their children (Ephesians 6:4, cf. Proverbs 22:6). Members of the church can do this by teaching Bible classes where the next generation of Christians are present (1 Timothy 4:10-11). Those who preach can do this by giving sermons instructing and teaching the next generation (1 Timothy 4:10-11). We can “prepare the way” by preparing the next generation with the Bible knowledge they will need as they grow in their walk with God. Will you be someone’s forerunner?

The Fundamental Fallacy of a False System

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The theology that forms the foundation of Protestant thought is popularly known as "Calvinism." Although popular views among our Evangelical friends today are far removed from Puritan forefathers, who were thoroughgoing Calvinists, Calvinism still lies at the heart of the creeds of most Protestant churches.

If, in your investigation, you probe into the history and influence of Calvinism, you will discover that its doctrines have been incorporated into the majority of the great creeds of the Protestant churches. (Five Points. 61)

The heart of Calvinism is the philosophy that the sovereignty of God (His absolute rule), His glory as Savior and salvation by His grace all rule out man doing anything at all in order to be saved.

For to Calvinism there is really only one point to be made ... the point that God saves sinners. Saves - does everything, first to last, that is involved in bringing man from death in sin to life in glory.... Sinners - men as God finds them, guilty, vile, helpless, powerless, unable to lift a finger to do God's will or better their spiritual lot. God saves sinners.... sinners do not save themselves in any sense at all, but that salvation, first and last, whole and entire, past, present and future, is of the Lord, to whom be glory for ever; amen. (Packer. 6)

This notion that man does nothing whatsoever in his own salvation, else God is not sovereign, God is not glorified, and salvation is not of grace, is the fundamental fallacy of “Calvinism.” Is our justification “first and last, whole and entire, past, present and future” of God, or must we do something to be saved?

Bible Examples

Noah was saved from the Flood and justified before God by grace through faith (Genesis 6:8; Hebrews 11:7). But both Noah’s salvation and righteousness were the result of his obedience.

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. (Hebrews 11:7; cf. Genesis 6:22; 7:1)

Israel was saved by faith when they obeyed God and marched through the Red Sea (Hebrews 11:26). But, though Israel had to obey to be saved, the Lord saved Israel (Exodus 14:13-14,30). Their salvation was His work (Exodus 14:31), the expression of His mercy (Exodus 15:13). Israel gave the Lord the glory, praise, and credit for their salvation (Exodus 15:1-21), and the sovereignty of God was vindicated (Exodus 14:1-4; 15:14-18).

Israel received the city of Jericho by faith (Hebrews 11:30). God gave them the city (Joshua 6:2). But to receive the city they had to march around it once each day for six days, and on the seventh day they had to march around it seven times, the priests had to blow a long blast on the rams’ horns, and the people had to “shout with a great shout” (Joshua 6:3-5). Although they had to obey all these commands, the city was a gift by faith. They had not earned it. After all, what military commander would advise such a strategy for conquering a walled city? It wasn’t their marching, blowing, or shouting that caused the walls to fall. The

Lord caused the walls of Jericho to fall, but the people had to obey by faith before the Lord would deliver the city.

Application

The apostle Paul fought relentlessly against Jewish attempts to bind observance of the law of Moses for justification (Acts 15:1-31; Romans 3:20; Galatians 3:11,16-17). The animal sacrifices of the law could not cleanse the heart of sin (Hebrews 10:1-4). Thus, justification by the law would demand that we live sinlessly perfect lives (Romans 10:5; Galatians 3:10). But the once for all time sacrifice of Jesus Christ does cleanse the soul of guilt (Hebrews 9:13-15, 24-28; 10:5-14). Thus, the works that Paul taught could not save us, the works that lead to boasting (Romans 3:27-28; Ephesians 2:8-9), the works that negate grace and faith (Romans 3:27-28; 4:4-5; 11:5-6), are the works of the law of Moses. But we are justified by the law of Christ (Romans 8:2), and works of obedience to Christ, the obedience of faith (Romans 1:5; 16:25-27), are necessary to salvation and justification (James 2:14-26).

Conclusion

Several yers ago the State of New Hampshire decided to assess the cost of rescue to outdoorsmen who ignore warnings by rangers not to climb Mt Washington during severe weather and subsequently have to be saved by the same rangers due to the climbers' own folly. Now if a foolhardy hiker, who has been duly warned not to climb the mountain, falls over a precipice and has to be rescued, has he earned his salvation if the ranger requires that he grab a rope? Should the knuckleheaded climber or the ranger be credited with the rescue? If the state assesses a payment to the climber, and a bleeding heart pays the fine for him, has the sovereign law of the state been upheld? If we can see this with a foolish climber, why not with a foolish sinner?

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