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- unless otherwise noted, answers to questions by Keith Sharp -

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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.

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.

The Danger of Deception

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

From the very beginning people have faced the danger of deception. Eve was deceived by Stan and sinned (Genesis 3:6; 1 Timothy 5:14). We too can be deceived into sinning (2 Corinthians 11:3). Deception led the Gentiles to live in gross sin (Ephesians 4:17-24). But the Jews were also deceived (Titus 3:3). It is not different today than in past centuries (2 Timothy 3:1,13).

How can we keep from being deceived? One attitude is essential to prevent being deceived. You must have "the love of the truth" (Proverbs 23:22; 2 Thessalonians 2:9-10).

Those who are "noble" (Acts 17:11, **King James Version**), i.e., "fair-minded" (**New King James Version**), will listen to those who claim to teach divine truth with an open mind and an open Bible. Be open to learn new truth, but don't let your mind be a spiritual garbage pail to receive whatever slop false teachers throw out. Search "the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things" are "so" (Acts 17:10-12). Never accept uncritically what any man, and that includes me, teaches. Test what is said by the Bible.

"Let no one deceive you with empty words..." (Ephesians 5:6).

Jehovah's Witnesses Failed Prophecies

Jefferson David Tant | Hendersonville, Tennessee, USA

Jehovah's Witnesses are known throughout much of the world. Their zeal in spreading their doctrines by sending out missionaries who go from door to door are well known. While we admire their commitment to their doctrines, we must acknowledge that their faith is not based on a solid foundation. This religion was founded by Charles Taze Russell in 1879, and is led by a body of men known as the Governing Body headquartered in New York. The organization produces the "Watchtower" and "Awake" magazines. They denounce all other "Christian" religious groups as heretical.

Some of their differing beliefs involve the contention that Jesus Christ is not the Son of God, but that he is Michael the archangel. They also deny the personhood of the Holy Spirit. Included in their doctrine is the fact that only 144,000 are the "little flock" that will go to heaven, while the rest of the redeemed will inherit their paradise on a new earth. They also refuse to accept blood transfusions, confusing that with the eating of blood, which is condemned in the Bible.

There are other doctrinal matters which conflict with the Bible, but one of the great problems one would have in accepting the Jehovah's Witness religion as being true is the matter of their many failed prophecies. Let us consider a few of them along with some other problems.

#1 – They prophesied that God would destroy the denominations by 1918. *"...when God destroys the churches wholesale and the church members by millions, it shall be that any that escape shall come to the works of Pastor Russell to learn the meaning of the downfall of Christianity."* A series of books written by Russell entitled "**Studies in the Scripture**" contain that statement in "**The Finished Mystery**" on pages 484-485.

#2 – The Witnesses once believed that the white race was superior to other races. Yet a man's skin color could be changed in answer to prayer. "Though once as black as charcoal, the Rev. Mr. Draper is now white. His people say that his color was changed in answer to prayer." ("Zion's Watchtower," Oct. 1, 1900, p. 296) The same magazine stated "...It is true the white race exhibits some qualities of superiority over any other..." (July 15, p. 216, 1912) While the Witnesses now accept people of all colors, the aforementioned statements were made by a so-called "prophet" of God.

#3. In the early years, some worshipped their founder, Charles Russell. It is now admitted: "the idea adopted by many was that C. T. Russell himself was the 'faithful and wise servant.'" This phrase is from Matthew 24:45 (KJV) "Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season?" In making the claim that this was a prophecy concerning Russell, it led to "creature worship" which we know is forbidden in Scripture. Among the many passages in the Bible that forbids worship to anyone but God is this one in Exodus 34:14: "for you shall not worship any other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God--." Although this is no longer practiced, the fact that it was practiced at all and evidently accepted by Russell clearly shows that this is a false religion.

For information about the foregoing worship of Russell, go to "Zion's Watchtower," April 15, 1904, the Biography of Pastor Russell published in the 1925 edition of **The Divine Plan of the Ages, Studies in the Scriptures**, Vol. 1, p. 7 and 1975 **Yearbook of Jehovah's Witnesses**, p, 88).

#4 – Russell and early Witnesses founded their end-time prophecies upon some calculations based on passages in the Egyptian Great Pyramid of Giza. "For some 35 years, Pastor Russell thought that the Great Pyramid of Gizeh was God's stone witness, corroborating Biblical time periods." The Witnesses continue to emphasize the fact that we are living in the "last days," meaning that they believe the end of the world is coming soon. Then God end all earthly governments and set up a new earthly kingdom. This was supposed to happen in 1914, according to Russell's prophecies, yet today few Witnesses realize that

these calculations were originally derived from his calculations from inscriptions in the Great Pyramid of Giza.

#5 – The Watchtower once taught that the reason some people had a strong desire to worship God was “due to the shape of their brain.” “The drawing power of the Almighty exercises over humanity is in different degrees. Some have a strong desire to worship God, others have a weak desire, and others have no desire at all. This difference is due to the shape of the brain...All have unbalanced brains, some in one direction, others in another.” (“The Watchtower,” March 15, 1913, page 84)

#6 – Jehovah’s Witness used to teach that God rules over the universe from the star “Alcyone, the central one of the renowned Pleiades stars.” While Witnesses today would reject the idea that God is sitting on a star and ruling from it, this statement is taken from **Studies in the Scriptures**, Volume 3, page 327. Today’s Witnesses disregard such statements by claiming that God provides “new light” or understanding of truth. Yet Watchtower literature clearly states that “A new view of truth never can contradict a former truth. ‘New Light’ never extinguishes older ‘Light’ but adds to it...So it is with the light of truth; the true increase is by adding to it, not substituting one for another.” (**Zion’s Watch Tower**, February 1881, p. 3)

#7 – Using the Bible as the Standard, Jehovah’s Witnesses are False Prophets. Christ said there would be false prophets coming, and we have seen it happen. “Then if anyone says to you, ‘Behold, here is the Christ,’ or ‘There He is,’ do not believe him. For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect” (Matthew 24:23-24).

For 50 years the Witnesses prophesied about Christ’s coming and the world’s end. Since 1874, the years 1914, 1915, 1918, 1925 and 1975 have all come and gone without the world coming to an end. The Witnesses built a ten-bedroom house in 1929 in San Diego, California named “Beth Sarim” for various Old Testament prophets to live in when the end came and they returned. It was finally sold in 1948, as neither Christ nor Abraham, Moses, David, etc., ever showed up.

In referring to the end of the world, Christ had these words to say: “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away. But of that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone.” (Mark 13:31-32) Note that Jesus said that even he didn’t know when the end would come. One wonders how it is that prophets like Russell and others then claim they know something that even Christ doesn’t know.

#8 – The Watchtower claims that it receives information directly from God through his angel. *“That same holy spirit and angelic direction still affects the preaching activities of Christian ministers...No doubt they first hear the instruction which the Lord issues to his remnant and then those invisible messengers pass such instruction on to the remnant.”*

When they are confronted with their past false prophecies and erroneous teaching, they claim:

“Jehovah’s Witnesses do not claim to be inspired prophets...Matters on which corrections of viewpoint have been needed have been relatively minor when compared with the vital Bible truths that they have discerned and publicized.” (**Reasoning from the Scriptures**, Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1985, pages 136-137)

But this contradicts their claims that they receive information directly from God the same way the ancient Bible prophets did. They claim to be inspired by God in the same way Ezekiel was. (“The Nations Shall Know that I am Jehovah,” Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1985, pages 56-59)

#9 – An interesting fact is that the Jehovah’s Witnesses only partake of the Lord’s Supper once a year. I went to one of their services on a Saturday night to observe their practice. A nice talk was made, and then the emblems passed. Not one soul partook of the emblems. Their teaching is that only the

144,000 (the “elect”) are permitted to partake, and evidently no one of that number was present. This presents another problem for them, as Russell taught that Christ would return before the last of the 144,000 living in 1914 had died. I don’t know of very many people today who are at least 110 years old. Another false prophecy?

The foregoing are but a few of the many teachings, prophecies and practices that do not align with the teaching of the Bible, God’s Word. God has warned us about the coming of false prophets in various passages, including this one in I John 4:1: “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.” And how do we “test” these spirits? Simply by comparing what they teach and practice with what the Word of God teaches.

#10 – It is interesting to note that the Jehovah’s Witnesses administer baptism only two times a year during biannual meetings within a small area, known as “circuit assemblies,” while baptisms take place a third time at large regional conferences.

This is far removed from Biblical examples of baptism administered the moment a person came to understand and accept the teaching of the gospel. Examples of this are seen in Acts 2:37-41, 8:12, 10:47-48, 16:33; 22:16 and other passages. Since baptism is required for the forgiveness of one’s sins, it would be contrary to Biblical teaching for one to wait some months after believing, to be baptized.

These are but a few of the many things taught and practiced by the Jehovah’s Witnesses organization that contradict God’s Word. God’s Word does not change. “For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished.” (Matthew 5:18) That’s God’s Word. The Jehovah’s Witnesses word has had many changes!

Jehovah's Witnesses and Blood Transfusions

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

"The modern-day history of Jehovah’s Witnesses began with the forming of a group for Bible study in Allegheny, Pennsylvania, U.S.A, in the early 1870's" (Reasoning. 203). The Jehovah's Witnesses were organized by “Pastor” Charles Taze Russell and were first incorporated in 1884 (Frank S. Mead, **Handbook of Denominations in the United States.** 123).

“The Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania is a nonprofit corporation formed in 1884 under the laws of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, U.S.A. It is used by Jehovah’s Witnesses to support their worldwide work, which includes publishing Bibles and Bible-based literature.

“According to its charter, the corporation’s purposes are “religious, educational, and charitable,” in particular, to “preach and teach the gospel of God’s Kingdom under Christ Jesus.” Membership in the corporation is by invitation only and is not based on how much a person has donated. The corporation members and directors assist the Governing Body of Jehovah’s Witnesses”

(<https://www.jw.org/en/jehovahs-witnesses/faq/watchtower-society/>).

The Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society is an organization begun by men which promulgates human doctrines. Those who follow its teaching worship God in vain (Matthew 15:9). Membership in the Jehovah’s Witnesses is spiritually worthless (Matthew 15:13).

Until recently the Watchtower literature has forbidden blood transfusions but more recently the Watchtower has changed its position on blood transfusions.

“Witnesses believe that blood removed from the body should be disposed of, so they do not accept autotransfusion of predeposited blood. Techniques for intraoperative collection or hemodilution that involve blood storage are objectionable to them

(“How Can Blood Save Your Life? [1990] 27).

Now they allow some use of blood removed from the body.

“... the Center for Bloodless Surgery utilizes alternatives to blood transfusions, including the reinfusion of a patient's own blood—a technique that some Witnesses may find unobjectionable under certain circumstances” (“The Watchtower,” August 1, 1995. 30).

Has the Word of God changed since 1990? (1 Peter 1:22-25)

The Bible **never** forbids “ingesting” blood. It **does** forbid eating blood. It did so under the patriarchs (Genesis 9:3-4) and Moses (Leviticus 3:17; 7:26-27; 17:10-14; 19:26; Deuteronomy 12:15-16,23-25; 15:23; 1 Samuel 14:31-34) and does so under Christ (Acts 15:19-20,28-29; 21:25).

Is blood transfusion eating blood? If one eats blood, the blood cells die, but if blood is transfused into one, the blood cells continue to live, else the patient would die.

Should blood that leaves the body be disposed of? (Cf. Leviticus 17:13; Deuteronomy 12:15-16, 23-24). This is animal blood, not human. It is a dead creature; thus its life (soul) left with its blood (Leviticus 17:13-14). And, it is the Law of Moses (Galatians 5:1-4).

Does “abstain from ... blood” mean it is wrong to have a blood transfusion? (Acts 15:19-20, 28-29) To “abstain from ... what is strangled” is not to eat meat from a strangled animal (cf. Leviticus 19:26). It is wrong to eat meat from a strangled animal because the blood is still in the meat (Ibid).

Is sacrifice the only approved use of blood? The Bible says **nothing** about the use of human blood. Old Testament sacrifices were of animal blood (Hebrews 9:13-14), but the New Testament sacrifice is the blood of Christ (Ibid). Human blood is not equal to animal blood or the blood of Christ. Jesus authorizes saving life by any unforbidden means (Mark 3:1-5).

(I obtained much of this material from Keith Camp when we worked together in Belize in 1998.)

Why Does Remarriage After Divorce Result In Adultery "Against" The Original Spouse?

Patrick Donahue | Harvest, Alabama, USA

Jesus said in Mark 10:11, “Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her.” This article focuses in on the phrase “committeth adultery against her.” How can it be possible for a man to commit adultery “against” a woman he is no longer married to?

The answer lies in the distinction the New Testament makes between the marriage and the marriage bond (obligation). Romans 7:2-3 makes such distinction evident when it talks about a woman being married to a second man while still “bound” (obligated) to her original husband. Read that passage and see for yourself. To her first husband the woman is bound but not necessarily married. To her second husband she is married, but not bound.

And that explains our Mark 10:11 text. If I were to divorce my wife Carol for incompatibility and marry Betty, the unlawful sexual relations in that second marriage are said to be a sin “against” Carol. The reason found in Rom 7:2-3?: Because even though the state of Alabama may have given me legal authority to be married to Betty, God never gave such authority. So according to God, I am still bound/obligated to Carol; meaning I am still supposed to be married to Carol, and therefore whenever I have sex with another woman (within legal marriage or not), I am cheating against Carol.

It's really very simple when you think about it. Mark 10:11 then is another passage that proves there can be a difference in marriage (partnership for life) and bound (scriptural obligation)

Repentance

Jim Mickells | Sellersburg, Indiana, USA

The word "repent" is found approximately 111 times in the Bible in some form (repent, repented, repentance, etc.). One definition given for the word is:

“a change of mind: especially the change of mind of those who have begun to abhor their errors and misdeeds, and have determined to enter upon a better course of life, so that it embraces both a recognition of sin and sorrow for it and hearty amendment, the tokens and effects of which are good deeds” (**Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament**, 405-406).

The message delivered to the people throughout history has been repentance, both Old and New Testament. When Israel sinned and was taken captive by their enemy, Solomon asked that God hear their prayers when they repented (2 Kings. 8:46-53). Job after falsely charging God repented in dust and ashes (Job 42:5-6). The New Testament is filled with examples of people being told to repent or else perish. John the Baptist told those coming out to him while preaching in the wilderness to repent (Matthew 4:17). Our Lord after being tempted by Satan, His message was one of repentance (Matthew 4:17). Peter’s sermon on Pentecost to those who were guilty of crucifying Jesus was to repent (Acts 2:38). The apostle Paul often taught those to whom he wrote of the need for repentance (2 Corinthians 12:21; 2 Timothy. 2:25. etc.).

Why was this sermon topic such a prominent part of preaching and teaching of those servant of God? Because of sin! When one violates the law of God, he must repent of the iniquity committed. All have sinned and need forgiveness, which only comes through the sacrificial gift of God’s Son on the cross as one turns from his evil ways.

There are at least two things revealed in the Oracles of God which will lead one to repentance. Paul said, “For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death” (2 Corinthians 7:10). Those who really love the Lord, when made aware of their sins, hearts will be filled with sorrow causing them to turn from their iniquities to the Father in humble obedience. Disciples of Christ do not want to do anything contrary to His will. In the book of Romans, this same apostle said, “Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?” (Romans 2:4). Stop for just a moment and consider! Think of how good our Heavenly Father is to each of us. He is kind, loving, forbearing, and longsuffering with all. We have so many blessings that one could not begin to list all of them. Why would we want to sin against our Creator, Sustainer, and Savior knowing how we are blessed by Him? If we are guilty of wrongdoing just the thought of how good He is to us should lead to our repentance.

If we truly repent the fruit of such an effort will be evident. John the Baptist told his audience, “Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance” (Mat. 3:8). Paul, when he was still referred to as Saul, showed signs of his change of mind. He no longer persecuted the church of our Lord.

Instead, he became one of its most able defenders. He became the persecuted rather than the persecutor. When Luke reveals the story of this man’s conversion, he tells of Saul going three days without anything to eat or drink (Acts 9:9). All such action on the part of this man was fruits of his genuine repentance. It is not just a matter of confessing a wrong but of turning from a course of conduct and living to please Jehovah every day. If I have wronged someone, then I need to make it right with them as well.

Do you need to repent? God certainly wants those on the wrong side of His law to seek His forgiveness. Notice this passage in the book of Peter, “The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). Our Heavenly Father is willing to save all those who manifest a contrite heart in obeying His will.

It Needs No Change

Greg Gwin | Columbia, Tennessee, USA

The men who wrote the Constitution of the United States have long been praised for their wisdom and foresight. The words they penned have served as the basis for the laws of this land for almost 250 years and have needed relatively few changes or additions. This is indeed remarkable when we view the governments and laws of most other nations in a constant state of change.

Far more amazing than this, is the law of Christ. Written nearly 2000 years ago, it continues today to provide us with "all things that pertain unto life and godliness" (2 Peter 1:3). It is a "perfect law of liberty" (James 1:25). No change has ever been, or ever will be needed in it. Its own pages contain warnings to those who would attempt to alter its commands (Galatians 1:8,9; 2 John 9,10; Revelation 22:18,19). Let us learn to appreciate the beauty and perfection of God's word and strive to live and worship according to its precepts.

What To Pray For

PRAYING LIKE JESUS

William Stewart | Kingston, Ontario, Canada

The disciples requested of Jesus, "Lord, teach us to pray" (Luke 11:1). Among the things Jesus taught about prayer is what we should pray for. Let's learn from the Lord.

Pray For Your Enemies

In Matthew 5:44, Jesus said,

"...love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you."

The Lord expects us to treat our enemies with respect. To bless them ("*...to speak well of ... thank or invoke a benediction upon, prosper...*", Strong's), to do good to them (treat them well, to be honest and upright), and to pray for them (to bring their names before our Father in heaven). Such things are a lot easier said than done. The carnal mind tends toward vengeance and payback; but we are called to be imitators of God, who does good to those who are evil (Matthew 5:45-48).

How likely are we to bless and do good for those who mistreat us if we are not praying for them? Praying for our enemies is beneficial for both them and us. Perhaps, through our prayers and goodness to them, they might be encouraged to change. How wonderful if those who once did us harm were to change their way, to repent and turn to the Lord. We should pray for our enemies. But even if they do not repent, it will provide perspective and healing and closure for us. For our own peace of mind, for our spiritual walk, we need to pray for our enemies. We don't need the wickedness of our enemies to become a constant distraction from our service to God.

Our focus in this series is for the Lord to teach us about prayer, so we can pray like Jesus. He prayed for His enemies. In Luke 23:34, Jesus spoke, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do." He did not curse them; He didn't lash out at them with angry words. He went to the Father in prayer on their behalf. Earlier that night, Jesus did good for His enemy - restoring Malchus' ear. We must learn to pray for those who seek to harm us or who have harmed us - not for their destruction, but for their salvation.

Pray For Evangelistic Work

We ought to be concerned with opportunities to spread God's word. In Matthew 9:36-38, "...when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them..." And thus, He spoke to His disciples, "The

harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of harvest to send out laborers into His harvest." He urged His disciples to pray for the lost, but more than that, to pray for the work of teaching them God's way. The world is still filled with weary and scattered souls. The harvest is still plentiful, but the laborers are still few. We need to pray for the work, and then get to work.

In Paul's letter to the Colossian brethren, he urged them to pray. More specifically, he urged them to pray for him, and for his work in the gospel. Notice:

"Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving; 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, that I may make manifest, as I ought to speak."
(Colossians 4:2-4)

It is right to pray for open doors and opportunities. It is important to pray for clarity of speech as we or others speak to people about Christ. When we go into the community, do we pray beforehand? Do we ask God to bless us with opportunities, to open doors and hearts? The Lord will answer such prayers (Philippians 1:12-14; 1 Corinthians 16:9; 2 Corinthians 2:12).

Pray for Preparedness

We do not know when the Lord will return. But regardless of whether he comes in our lifetime or not, we need to prepare ourselves. Eventually, He will come and all will stand before Him in judgment, the living and the dead. It is essential that we watch our conduct, lest we be ensnared by the devil. To help with this, we ought to be diligent students of the Bible. But Jesus also emphasized prayer - we ought to always pray. In Luke 21, we read:

"...take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighted down with carousing, drunkenness, and care of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly. For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man." (Luke 21:34-36).

It is important that we petition the Lord for His mercy and grace. If we have sinned, let us repent and seek forgiveness. Do we have eternity in our prayers? Do we pray in expectation of eternal life? Do we thank God for His eternal provision for us in Christ Jesus? His return is delayed (2 Peter 3:3-10), but He will return. Thus, we must pray and prepare ourselves.

There are certainly more things we ought to pray for, but these three are specifically stressed by the Lord in the days of His earthly ministry. May we pray for our enemies, for evangelistic effort, and concerning our preparedness before the Lord.

Edward M. Bounds is credited with saying:

"No learning can make up for the failure to pray. No earnestness, no diligence, no study, no gifts will supply its lack."

Friends, let us be people of prayer.

- all texts from New King James Version unless otherwise noted -

"Restore"

Michael Hickox | Mattoon, Illinois, USA

At the time 1 Corinthians was written, the church at Corinth was filled with carnality. One way this was

manifested was through their approach to church discipline. The fifth chapter of the epistle focuses on corrective action needed from them on this subject. It seems likely that much of 2 Corinthians 2 and 7 focus on the response of the Corinthians to this instruction, further underscoring its importance.

Additional passages stress the significance of church discipline and the steps that precede it (cf. Matthew 18:15-17; Romans 16:17-18; Galatians 6:1; 2 Thessalonians 3:6,14-15). There are often judgment calls brethren must make in determining the specifics of how to apply these teachings to a situation. God leaves no doubt, though, that it is a good work for us to do the best we can to carry out this responsibility as He authorizes.

Despite this, human wisdom has corrupted the views many brethren have toward church discipline. It's not uncommon to hear the reasoning that withdrawing from someone will hurt them and make it less likely for them to ever be faithful, or complaints about how withdrawing causes numbers to decline.

It's one thing for brethren to disagree on how quickly to move in a church discipline situation, or such like. It's quite another to question the very practice of ever withdrawing from someone, as if we know better than God. Even if God had given us no explanation for His purpose for church discipline and the steps preceding it, the faithful Christian would conclude that God said it and that settles it.

What's more remarkable though is that God has pulled back the curtain for us on this topic and shared His aims. God shows us that when sin is in the Christian's life, shame and godly sorrow is the appropriate response. When the erring Christian has no shame, he needs help developing it. 2 Thessalonians 3:14 shows us this is part of the purpose of church discipline. 1 Corinthians 5:5 is highly figurative, but makes clear that the end goal of proper church discipline is "that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." Thus, it is better for an unrepentant Christian to be withdrawn from than for the church he is part of to do nothing.

Galatians 6:1 gives instruction that precedes what is typically referred to as church discipline. The word "restore" is used to describe the approach we should have to the erring brother. This word shows us that the goal of this initial outreach is not to lose someone, but to gain a precious soul back. This continues to be the goal if the situation reaches the point of withdrawing.

When done scripturally, church discipline is not a work that will decrease the number of the faithful; it will be the best influence towards achieving the opposite. Someone who is choosing to live in unrepentant sin is not an obedient member of the Lord's family, regardless of how that person is impacting a church's attendance records. Even if a brother is withdrawn from and never returns to the Lord, that doesn't mean it would have been better for the church to have used man's approach instead of God's. The Lord knows best what will help an erring Christian repent.

This is to say nothing of how rejecting church discipline affects a church's purity (1 Corinthians 5:6) and hurts others (Romans 16:17-18). If the concern really is pleasing God and benefiting others, one is left with no doubt as to whether scriptural church discipline is a good idea.

What is needed by those in sin is not encouragement to sin, but help being restored.

Worship That God Hates

Ethan Jennings | Olney, Illinois, USA

In Amos 5:21-23, God said to the Israelites:

"I hate, I reject your festivals, Nor do I delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer up to Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept them; And I will not even look at the peace offerings of your fatlings. Take away from Me the noise of your songs; I will not even listen to the sound of your harps."

The first question that comes to mind is, what had Israel done to cause the Lord to hate their worship of Him? The Lord continued in verse 24, "But let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream." Something had happened that restrained justice and righteousness.

Let's look earlier in Amos 5 and examine verses 10-13 which describe what caused Israel to restrain righteousness and justice. God said:

"They hate him who reproves in the gate, and they abhor him who speaks with integrity. Therefore, because you impose heavy rent on the poor and exact a tribute of grain from them, though you have built houses of well-hewn stone, yet you will not live in them; You have planted pleasant vineyards, yet you will not drink their wine. For I know your transgressions are many and your sins are great, you who distress the righteous and accept bribes and turn aside the poor in the gate. Therefore, at such a time the prudent person keeps silent, for it is an evil time."

Notice what's happening. Folks are in sin and hate those who are reproving them for it. They are oppressing the poor and taking bribes. Then these same people with wicked and cruel hearts think they can turn around and offer worship that is pleasing to God.

These folks didn't have a proper attitude toward God or their brethren! By this, they showed hatred for God and their neighbor. In Matthew 22:37-40, a lawyer asked, "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" And He said to him:

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets."

Jesus pointed out that folks needed to love God and their neighbor. This was the same law in effect during the time of Amos. Yet, we see Israel greatly lacked these two loves. They may have offered sacrifices the way God commanded, they may have played the instrument God commanded in the Old Testament, they may have even obeyed the commands concerning festivals (e.g., Amos 5:21-23), yet God hated it all because they behaved wickedly. Their heart was not right before their Creator.

Now we must look at ourselves. Does God hate our worship? We may not do everything on this list God mentioned in Amos 5, but when we're in error, and a brother points it out and reproves us, how do we react? How do we feel about that brother afterward? Are we angry with him? Are we continuing in our sin? Where is our heart in all of this?

Our worship can be vain if we remain in sin after it's been pointed out to us in our lives and condemned. Hebrews 12:28 (ESV) says, "Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe." Does continuing in sin show an attitude of gratefulness, reverence, and awe to God? Obviously not. It shows the exact opposite.

Let's remember to have the proper attitude toward God and our brethren. Otherwise, God will not accept our worship, and eventually, we'll have to pay the ultimate price for our sins (Revelation 21:8).

The Nature of Authority

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Introduction

Two extremes in practice are found among brethren. The great majority of those who call themselves members of the church of Christ engage in activities unauthorized by Christ. A small minority refuse to engage in practices the Lord permits. Both extremes are caused by the same misunderstanding of the nature of divine authority.

Brethren who practice institutionalism think a practice is unauthorized unless it is specifically mentioned in Scripture. They correctly assert we engage in many practices not specifically mentioned in the Bible, such as the use of church buildings and song books. Thus, they argue, "We do lots of things without Bible authority."

There are some brethren who oppose the church using the class arrangement for teaching the Bible. They also think something must be expressly mentioned to be authorized. They argue:

"There is not one verse in all the Bible that says one word about dividing an assembly into two or more classes with teachers teaching at the same time."

Therefore, they conclude the class arrangement of teaching is unscriptural.

Both groups misunderstand the nature of scriptural authority. This nature may be stated as a proposition: **Divine authority is both exclusive and inclusive.** In this lesson we will define, illustrate, prove, and apply this proposition.

Definitions

When I say divine authority is exclusive, I simply mean whatever the Lord has not authorized is excluded. If this is so, we cannot practice anything unless we can prove it is divinely authorized. It is not enough to ask, "Where does the Bible condemn it?" We must be able to prove the New Testament authorizes it.

By inclusive, I mean that whatever the Lord authorizes includes those things that are incidental to accomplishing what He authorizes. Thus, though a specific item may not be mentioned in Scripture, if it is necessary or aids what God requires or permits, and by using it we do nothing in addition to that which He authorized, the specific item is itself authorized.

If these principles are true, two important conclusions follow. Some things are sinful although not specifically condemned in Scripture. This is because they are unauthorized and thus excluded. On the other hand, it means some things are authorized and therefore pleasing to God, although not specifically mentioned. This is because they are incidental to accomplishing an authorized action.

Illustrations

Suppose a dad gives his teenage son a twenty dollar bill (first mistake) and tells him, "Son, go get a loaf of bread." Suppose the son stays gone three hours and comes home with the loaf of bread but no change from the twenty dollars. The father indignantly inquires, "Where have you been and where is my change?" The son replies, "Dad, I got the bread, but you didn't say not to go to the movies, so I used the change to go to a movie. And, of course, while I was there, I got popcorn, a soft drink, a hot dog and a candy bar." Would the dad be impressed with his son's logic? Or would he respond, "I didn't give you permission to use my money for anything but a loaf of bread. You're grounded!" That's the exclusive nature of authority.

Now, let's try another scene. The dad gives his son a twenty dollar bill (slow learner) and again says, "Son, go get a loaf of bread." This time the son returns in ten minutes with \$16 change and a loaf of bread. The father inquires, "Son, how did you get back so fast?" His son replies, "Dad, it's just three blocks to the store. It doesn't take long to drive there." To which the dad replies, "Son, who told you to take the car? Why didn't you just walk?" To which Jr. replies, "Dad, you just told me to go get a loaf of bread; you didn't say how to go." This time the son was right. This is the inclusive nature of authority.

Proof

Is divine authority exclusive? We must "do all in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Colossians 3:17), i.e., by His authority. To do or teach those things unauthorized by the Lord is to leave God and be without Him (2 John 9-11). Yes, divine authority is exclusive. We must have divine authority for all we do.

But is divine authority also inclusive? The Lord commands, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to

every creature” (Mark 16:15). He didn’t say how to go; He just said “go.” We have approved examples in the New Testament of a man walking and riding in a chariot to preach the gospel (Acts 8:29-31) and of men sailing in a ship to preach the gospel (Acts 13:1-4). The Lord said nothing about running, riding in a chariot, or sailing in a ship, but these are just means of going. In using these methods of transportation, the preachers did nothing in addition to “go preach the gospel.” So today, if I drive a car or fly in an airplane to a preaching engagement, I’m just doing what the Lord authorized in Mark 16:15. If I buy a passport to go to a foreign country to preach, that is incidental to the command, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.” Yes, divine authority is inclusive.

Application

Ark

The Lord told Noah to build an ark of gopherwood (Genesis 6:14-16). Although the Lord did not mention tools such as a hammer or saw, such tools were incidentally authorized in the command to “Make yourself an ark.” But Noah could not have used any wood other than gopherwood and pleased the Lord. Though God did not say “Thou shalt not” make the ark of any other wood, when He specified gopherwood as the material for the ark, all other kinds of wood were excluded.

Pattern - Ark, Genesis 6:14-16

Included - hammer, nails, boards

Excluded - any other kind of wood

Music in Worship

The Lord has also told us the kind of music he wants Christians to use in worship in the New Testament age. He commands us to sing (Ephesians 5:18-19). This authorized action includes everything necessary and incidental to carrying it out. Thus, although the Bible does not mention them, we are authorized to use song books, a song leader, four-part harmony, and a pitch pipe. When we use these aids, we do nothing in addition to what the Lord has authorized – sing. But, instrumental music, another kind of music than that which the Lord authorizes, is excluded. This is not because the Lord forbade instrumental music in worship. He simply did not authorize its use in worship in this age.

Pattern - Sing, Ephesians 5:18-19

Included - song books, song leader, four-part harmony, pitch pipe

Excluded - instrumental music

Marriage

The Master set the divine pattern for marriage in this age in Matthew 19:4-5, when, looking back to Genesis 2:24, He answered the Pharisees:

“Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘for this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’?”

Marriage is a life long covenant between one man and one woman. It doesn’t matter whether a preacher, justice of the peace, or ship’s captain performs the ceremony. But polygamy and homosexuality are sinful, though the New Testament never expressly condemns polygamy.

Pattern - Marriage, Matthew 19:4-6; 1 Corinthians 7:2

Included - Preacher, Justice of the Peace, Ship Captain

Excluded - Polygamy, Homosexuality

The Lord’s Supper

We also have a divine pattern for the Lord’s Supper. In 1 Corinthians 10:16-17, the apostle Paul observes:

*The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ?
The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we,*

though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread.

The authorized elements we are to partake are unleavened bread, representing the sinless body of Christ (Matthew 26:26; cf. 1 Corinthians 5:6-8), and the cup (fruit of the vine), representing His blood (Matthew 26:27-29). The number of loaves and drinking vessels (literal cups) is irrelevant, since the brethren in Corinth ate the same bread and drank the same cup as the saints in Ephesus (1 Corinthians 10:16-17; 16:8). However, any elements other than unleavened bread and grape juice are sinful because unauthorized.

Pattern - Lord's Supper, Matthew 26:26-29; 1 Corinthians 10:16-17

Included - Number of cups and loaves of bread

Excluded - Cake, Leavened bread, Soft drinks

Organization of the Church

The Lord Jesus has specified the organization of His church. The only organization on the earth associated with His church is the autonomous local congregation (1 Corinthians 1:2). Each local church, when mature, has its own elders and deacons (Philippians 1:1; Titus 1:5), and the local elders decide all the details of the work and worship of the congregation where they are members (1 Peter 5:1-2).

Bible classes are simply an arrangement for the local church to teach and are authorized although not mentioned in the New Testament.

There is no authority for an "overseeing eldership" to make decisions for the work of a multiplicity of congregations nor to decide the work of "missionaries" or a "mission" in far off places. There is no authority for local churches to donate to human corporations, such as colleges or orphanages, whose boards of directors decide what work those corporations will do and how it will be carried out.

Pattern - Church Organization; 1 Corinthians 1:2; Titus 1:5; Philemon 1:1; 1 Peter 5:1-2

Included - Bible class arrangement

Excluded - Church Orphanages and Colleges, Sponsoring Church

Work of the Church

The work of the church reflects the nature of the church. The church is a spiritual relationship. Every spiritual blessing is in Christ (Ephesians 1:3). Since the church is "the fullness" of Christ (Ephesians 1:22-23), we receive those spiritual blessings through our relationship with Christ in His church.

The work the Lord has assigned His church is in keeping with its spiritual nature. The church is "the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:14-15). Thus the primary work of the local church is preaching and teaching the word of God, including preaching the gospel to the lost (Mark 16:15), and edifying Christians (Matthew 28:19).

Even the benevolent work of the local church is spiritual. Since the church is limited to assisting needy saints (Christians), this is an expression of fellowship in Christ (2 Corinthians 8:1-4).

Pattern - Ephesians 1:3, 22-23; 1 Timothy 3:14-15; Mark 16:15; Matthew 28:19; 2 Corinthians 8:1-4

Included - Gospel Meetings, Radio, TV, Paper

Excluded - Social Meals, Recreation, General Benevolence

Many churches of Christ are following the denominations into unauthorized activities that lead to the social gospel. There is no scriptural authority for a local churches to come together for a common meal, thus, so called church "fellowship dinners" are unauthorized and sinful. The same is true of church sponsored recreational activities, such as camps. And, whereas individual Christians may offer benevolent aid to sinners (Romans 12:20), the local church is to render benevolence to Christians.

Conclusion

Thus, divine authority is both exclusive and inclusive. This answers the two common fallacies concerning the authority of the Scriptures. Just because a practice is not specifically condemned does not necessarily mean God approves it. It must be authorized. On the other hand, just because a practice is not specifically mentioned in Scripture does not mean it is wrong. It may be incidental to an authorized activity. If we will apply these principles in faith and love to the issues that divide churches of Christ, we will be able to resolve them and be one in Christ.

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