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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  
 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](http://christistheway.com).

"When a man's ways please the LORD, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him" (Proverbs 16:7)

*"In almost all instances, if we handle ourselves appropriately, those who are our declared enemies will learn to live with us amicably, simply because it is our intention to have peace and not to deal with them in a hostile way"*

**(Daniel H. King, Sr., Truth Commentaries: The Book of Proverbs, 508)**

## A Murder of Crows

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

CrowTrax, a website started eight years ago in Vancouver, British Columbia, "has received more than 8,000 reports of crow attacks" in eight years. By the way, a group of crows is called a "murder."

*"They tenaciously hold grudges. When a murder of crows singles out a person as dangerous, its wrath can be alarming, and can be passed along beyond an individual crow's life span of up to a dozen or so years, creating multigenerational grudges"*

(Thomas Fuller, "The New York Times," via "Arkansas Democrat Gazette," November 3, 2024. 3a).

John Marzluff, a professor at the University of Washington in Seattle, has spent his career studying human-crow interaction. Based on his experiments, he believes a murder of crows can hold a grudge for up to 17 years.

Kind of sounds like the Hatfields and McCoys.

The apostle Paul enjoined the Christians in Ephesus:

*“you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart”* (Ephesians 4:17-18).

As disciples of Christ, we must:

*“put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness”*  
(Ephesians 4:22-24).

As part of this holy character reflecting the character of our Master, we must not let “the sun go down on our wrath” (Ephesians 4:26). Did he make you mad? Get over it - NOW!

Put away “all bitterness” (Ephesians 4:31), i.e., “animosity, anger, harshness” (Arndt & Gingrich. 663). Instead, “be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you” (Ephesians 4:32).

For those who cried out to Pilate, “Crucify Him, Crucify Him!” (Luke 23:21), the Master prayed the very same day while on the cross, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do” (Luke 23:34).

“A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher” (Luke 6:40).

#### **Work Cited**

Arndt. W.F. and F.W. Gingrich, **A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament.**

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## **What Is The Preacher's Job?**

Jefferson David Tant | Hendersonville, Tennessee, USA

Well, "Duh," someone might say. “His job is to preach.” Well, that’s right. But just what is involved in all aspects of a preacher’s mission? Let’s give some thought to this important matter

### **Preach**

While there is no disagreement that a “preacher” is to “preach,” but just what is involved in preaching? The well-known preacher, the apostle Paul, had some instructions for his young protégé—Timothy. “preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction” (2 Timothy 4:2).

So, there is more to preaching than just delivering a message. There are some preachers who only deliver positive messages. One well-known denominational preacher spoke about his style of always preaching “positive” sermons. He said “I want my people to feel good.”

Well, I always want my listeners to feel good, but what if my wife and I raised our children that way. That would mean no correction, no discipline, no punishment when they went off track.

The Scriptures mention the benefits of discipline in various passages.

*“It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons”* (Hebrews 12:7-8).

Obviously, all preaching does not need to be corrective in nature, but it may be needed from time to time. Also needed are lessons to the lost, and lessons of thanksgiving and encouragement.

### **Study**

Is there ever an occasion when it is acceptable for a preacher to use another preacher's outline? I would say "Yes." There have been times when I have heard a good sermon, or have read one in some publication that really has a good message. I was glad to be able to share that message with my audience. But there is more to preaching than just using someone else's sermon.

Note Paul's exhortation to the young preacher Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:15: "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth."

"Diligent" is translated as "study" in the King James Version, and is from the Greek "spoudazo – to use speed, i.e. to make effort, be prompt or earnest:--do (give) diligence, be diligent (forward), endeavour, labour, study."

Thus, it's not enough just to preach material from other preachers, as all preachers have the responsibility given to them to study for themselves, rather than always using sermons of others. And the word "diligent" involves putting forth effort and time in studying God's Word.

### **Be an Example**

Paul exhorts two young preachers--Timothy and Titus to be examples.

"Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe" (1 Timothy 4:12). "In all things show yourself to be an example of good deeds, with purity in doctrine, dignified" (Titus 2:7).

Preachers are more "public" than others, thus they should be careful as to how they appear. What they wear, how they communicate with the members, how they show hospitality. Inasmuch as preachers (and members) are in the "public eye," they need to strive to demonstrate how Christ is living in them. One of my friends in a church where I used to preach went back to his hometown for a high school class reunion several years after graduation. One of his classmates remarked to him, "I always knew you were a Christian." Obviously, she was impressed by his example. His light was shining.

I believe Christ's words in Matthew 5:16 are relevant here: "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven."

### **Personal Evangelism**

I hope none of the preachers reading this article have the idea that "My job is in the pulpit, and I don't have time for personal evangelism."

Well, one of the responsibilities of a preacher is to help the church to grow. There are at least four ways for a congregation to grow.

1. For couples to have babies and raise them in the faith.
2. Peter exhorts us to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." (2 Peter 3:18).
3. Members moving into the area. While that church may grow, the kingdom hasn't grown, since the former church has lost members.
4. Personal Evangelism. The preacher's job is not just in the pulpit. He is not only a teacher from the pulpit, and not only an example to others, but he also has an individual responsibility to seek and save the lost.

We would suppose that the apostles were quite busy going here and there proclaiming the gospel. Certainly, we read of crowds of people that were gathered to hear Paul and others. Philip was sent to teach the gospel to just one man—the Ethiopian eunuch.

*“But an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip saying, ‘Get up and go south to the road that descends from Jerusalem to Gaza.’ (This is a desert road.) So he got up and went; and there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure; and he had come to Jerusalem to worship, and he was returning and sitting in his chariot, and was reading the prophet Isaiah. Then the Spirit said to Philip, ‘Go up and join this chariot’” (Acts 8:26-29).*

If that’s not “personal evangelism,” then I don’t know what to call it.

Preachers certainly have the time and knowledge to be involved in this. They don’t have a 9 to 5 job, and they should be well-versed in the Scriptures. Their schedule is often pretty open.

In closing, I will use a phrase found in the Bible – “Go thou and do likewise.” ---

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## What Can "I" Do?

Jim Mickells | Sellersburg, Indiana, USA

The prophet Isaiah reveals a question asked by God and his response, “Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: ‘Whom shall I send, And who will go for Us?; Then I said, ‘Here am I! Send me’” (Isaiah 6:9). This great man of God was willing to serve the Lord. He didn’t suggest that someone else go, let them do it. Nor did he offer an excuse of why he couldn’t go. These are the kinds of servants which Jehovah is pleased with, those willing to work in His kingdom.

I am thankful there are still a good number of gospel meetings which take place in our area. And I am sure you are thankful for those meetings which take place where you live as well. Yet there are some who think the days of successful meetings have long passed. An elder in the body of Christ said that very thing to me a few years ago. I am convinced though the days of having a successful meeting when little or no work is done are indeed gone. The success of which I am referring is having visitors who are not Christians, teaching and leading them to the Lord. Yet much good can still be done if each Christian will fulfill their individual responsibility, using their talents to serve the Lord and their fellow man. Notice the words of Paul:

*“from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love” (Ephesians 4:16; emphasis mine).*

Let me suggest a few things we all can do to help during gospel meeting times but also in helping to evangelize the community where the church you attend meets. I can pray. If the church where you attend is having a gospel meeting one can certainly pray for the one who is to preach, that he might have the strength of body and mind to proclaim the Lord’s truth. Those you invite to attend, pray for them to have open and receptive minds to receive the truth which is taught. We need to pray for each other that we might all be diligent workers in the kingdom. Ask the Lord for strength and wisdom as we strive to do His work day by day. May we all give thanks to the Father for the opportunities He gives to us to work for and worship Him. Here am I send me!

Be present. I remember a few years ago one of the members of the church where I was preaching invited a friend from the community to our gospel meeting, of which they accepted the invitation and came. Yet the member who invited them was not there that night. I could see the shock and disappointment on their face. They never came back. I am also convinced of the fact those who attend very infrequently are those who do little or no work to spread the gospel of Christ. It is amazing how many other functions members can

attend, and never complain, and yet something as important as hearing the preaching of the word of God means so little to some. Here am I send me! I will be there to stir up love and good works (Hebrews 10:24-25).

Invite others. Did someone take time from their schedule to teach you the gospel of Christ? Most likely they did. Are you thankful for their effort? I certainly hope so! It just might be your invitation or your willingness to study with an individual which might make the difference between one being saved or lost. If they reject such an effort their blood will be upon themselves, yet if we keep silent and never warn them the Lord holds us responsible (Ezekiel 3:17-21). The hymn "You Never Mentioned Him To Me" says:

"When in the better land before the bar we stand,  
How deeply grieved our souls may be;  
If any lost one there should cry in deep despair,  
You never mentioned Him to me –  
You met me day by day and knew I was astray,  
Yet never mentioned Him to me."

Here am I send me.

Participation. May we all enter each worship service with joyful and thankful hearts that we have been permitted to gather as the people of God to worship Him in spirit and truth (John 4:23-24; Psalm 122:1). Let us listen attentively, follow along with the lesson carefully with our Bibles opened, and then make the proper application.

May it be said of us just as it was said of the Bereans, "These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so" (Acts 17:11). Join in with the singing, listen to the prayers, on the Lord's Day remember His great sacrifice as we partake of His Supper, and give as we have been prospered by Jehovah. As we grow in our faith sound forth His word throughout the community where we live. Here am I send me.

Follow-up. If an individual has enough interest in the gospel to attend and listen to its message, then we should have enough love in our hearts for them to offer further studies. It seems to me this is an area where many churches fail. It takes time and effort, but a soul is at stake. The wise man said, "The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, And he who wins souls is wise" (Proverbs 11:30). Here am I send me.

Be that joint which supplies and the part which does it share (Ephesians 4:16). Here am I send me!

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## **Does The NKJV Translation "Sexual Immorality" In Matthew 19:9 Mean One Can Divorce For Lust?**

Patrick Donahue | Harvest, Alabama, USA

In the NKJV version, Matthew 19:9a reads this way – "And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery." Some take that to mean a person may divorce their spouse for mental adultery (lust, pornography), since admittedly that is a form of "sexual immorality" in the way we use the phrase today. But I don't think that's what the translators had in mind (intended to communicate).

This phrase is from the Greek word "porneia" which is defined by Thayer's Bible Lexicon as "illicit sexual intercourse." Do you see how "lust" does not really qualify by that definition? Lust is not a form of sexual intercourse. Many other standard versions translate "porneia" as "fornication;" for example, that is how the KJV translates the word in this verse. It is possible to commit fornication in the heart (Matthew 5:28), but Matthew 19:9 is talking about actual fornication – following through on the physical act that one might be lusting for. Consider an analogy. The Old Testament prescribed the death penalty for murder (Genesis 9:6)

but not for hating one's brother – which in principle is the same as murder in the sense I John 3:15 is talking about. Meaning, hating one's brother is “murder in the heart,” just like lusting is “adultery in the heart.” But if we can see that “murder in the heart” was not penalized with death (like actual physical murder was), then I think we can see in the same way “fornication in the heart” is not a scriptural cause for divorce (like actual physical fornication is).

Conclusion: Matthew 19:9 is referring to the actual physical act of fornication (as the only cause for scriptural divorce), not fornication “in the heart” - the latter does not qualify as scriptural grounds.

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## **The 'Big Hammer' Mentality**

Greg Gwin | Columbia, Tennessee, USA

We know a man whose mechanical abilities (by his own admission) lie somewhere between non-existent and totally inept. His wife says that he should have been born “before the industrial revolution”. Ouch! On father's day, his family gave him a new hammer. His happy reaction was: “With a big enough hammer, you can fix anything!” Lots could be said about that, but let me simply say “Please don't let him work on my car!!”

I think that too often we may exhibit this ‘big hammer mentality’ when it comes to certain problems in the church. We sometimes think that hitting hard and quick will solve any problem. That's simply not true.

To justify our actions we turn to passages like Galatians 2 where Paul, in dealing with the Judaizing teachers “gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour” (verse 5). Or when he withstood Peter “to the face, because he was to be blamed” (verse 11). Please understand that certain situations demand this kind of quick and decisive action. Paul was clearly in the right when he responded immediately and forcefully in these instances. There are times when we will need to imitate his conduct.

But, do not forget that Paul was also “gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children” (1 Thessalonians 2:7). And he taught us to be “kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you” (Ephesians 4:32).

Sometimes we need to use the “big hammer” approach. But other situations require patience and a longsuffering nature. May God give us wisdom to know the difference. Think!

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## **The Other Lord's Prayer (John 17)**

### **PRAYING LIKE JESUS**

William Stewart | Kingston, Ontario, Canada

Our last article focused on what is typically referred to as “The Lord's Prayer.” Therein, Jesus gave an example of prayer for His disciples (Matthew 6:9-13). Now we turn our attention to John 17, which is a more extensive prayer from our Lord. The prayer breaks down into three sections:

- V 1-5, His prayer regarding Himself, seeking for God to be glorified in Him;
- V 6-19, His prayer for the apostles, and the mission which was ahead of them;
- V 20-26, His prayer for the unity of all believers, including you and me.

### **Praying for Ourselves**

Do you pray for yourself? Jesus prayed concerning Himself (John 17:1-5). Granted, our prayers won't be quite like His. He prayed about the authority given to Him, the eternal life He would offer, and the glory He shared with the Father. It is right that we pray for ourselves, and more than just seeking the forgiveness of sins.

Are you familiar with the prayer of Jabez (1 Chronicles 4:10)? Some have exploited this prayer. Years ago, Bruce Wilkinson had a series of books and related products which billed the prayer as “a prayer that God always answers.” His books treated the prayer as a magic spell or incantation, and he encouraged his readers to cite the prayer regularly.

Jabez was a humble man, concerned with serving God. His is not a self-serving prayer but seeks to bring God’s glory into his life. It is a prayer about growth, about increasing one’s capacity to accomplish God’s will.

It is right for us to pray that God will work through our lives. We should desire God’s blessing upon us; that He would help us to expand our borders (that is, go beyond our comfort zones). We should pray daily to experience the closeness of God in our lives, and that we be sustained by His strength and grace in every trial and challenge.

### **Praying about our Duties**

Jesus made it His aim in life to glorify the name of God. He did this by obeying God’s will, by accomplishing what the Father commanded. We are called to bring glory to God’s name (Matthew 5:16). We need to shine before our fellow man, not doing our own will to impress them and receive glory for ourselves, but doing the will of God to His glory. Paul acknowledged that we belong to the Lord (1 Corinthians 6:20), thus as His possession, we ought to bring glory, not shame to His name.

Finishing the work He was sent to do is how Jesus glorified the Father. It is the same for us. Hear the words of James,

*...he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does. (JAMES 1:25)*

It is right for us to pray for the work we are involved in, that we might have the courage to take advantage of every opportunity; that we might show ourselves as good examples to our brethren, friends, family, coworkers, and community. May our duties as the children of God be on our minds and in our prayers.

### **Praying for Religious Leaders**

Jesus prayed for the apostles, “...I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world” (John 17:6). They were the men He would send into the world to proclaim salvation. He prayed for them yet again in verse 9, and yet once more in verse 11.

We should pray that those charged with stewardship in the local church would cling to God’s word and lead with constancy, courage, and compassion. The writer of Hebrews urged us to,

*Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct. (HEBREWS 13:7)*

Remember their example and follow it, but also remember them in prayer. Lift their names to God; pray for their strength, fortitude, and faithfulness. Again, the Hebrew author wrote,

*Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you. Pray for us; for we are confident that we have a good conscience, in all things desiring to live honourably. (HEBREWS 13:17-18)*

Verse 17 seems to be specifically about those who serve as elders within a local congregation, but verse 18 broadens the scope, “pray for us,” presumably speaking of the writer and his companions and fellow workers in the faith. May we pray for those who labour in the kingdom, watching out for the souls of

others.

### **Praying for Protection from the Evil One**

Jesus spoke to the Father,

*...I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one... (JOHN 17:15)*

Rather than remove His people from the world, Jesus prayed that they be kept safe. In John 17:14, 17-19, His prayer focused on the word of God, a message which will sanctify those who follow it and equip them to overcome the evil one. He exemplified them for us in Matthew 4 and Luke 4, answering each of the devil's temptations with "It is written," followed by the direction of God's word.

Why not just remove His people? Why keep them in the world? Because we are called to be salt and light (Matthew 5:13-16), to influence those around us for the gospel's sake. We cannot do such if we are not in the world. Though we must be in the world, we cannot be of the world. Thus, the Lord's prayer to the Father in Matthew 6:13 parallels the thought of John 17:15, as Jesus declared, "...do not let us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

### **Praying for Unity**

Friend, do you realize Jesus prayed for you? He prayed for all who would believe the message of the gospel. He prayed for our unity. Notice:

*I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me. (JOHN 17:20-23)*

God's people are called to be united (1 Corinthians 1:10; 12:12), the Lord prayed for our unity, and He has provided for our unity in His word (Ephesians 1:1-16). The unity of the Father and Son is used as an example. They are entirely in agreement. We may have distinct personalities, but our character is to be the same (an imitation of Christ). We are to share the same morality and the same focus on truth.

Have you ever considered why there is so much unbelief in the world? There are certainly many reasons from apathy to atheism. Jesus identified religious division as a contributing factor to the problem of unbelief. There are seemingly thousands of different groups calling themselves "Christian," and yet they cannot agree on some of the basic teachings of Scripture. There is not much we can do about the religious world in general but within our local congregations let us strive to attain and maintain unity. Our unity in doctrine, practice, and morality, founded and grounded in God's word, will help people to develop faith in Jehovah God.

### **Praying for Heaven**

Having His disciples with Him in heaven was important to Jesus (John 17:24-26). Indeed, He wants you and me there too. He wants all to be there, else He wouldn't have gone to Calvary.

Here's the question – do we want to be there? How great is our desire to be with the Lord? Is the hope of heaven and the pursuit of this eternal home by God's mercy enter our prayers with frequency? Do we thank the Lord for the hope set before us? Do we express our appreciation for His grace and mercy whereby the heavenly inheritance is possible? Do we anticipate the Lord's return and the glory of God's presence? Is heaven in our prayers?



## Conclusion

Consider a quote from Matilda E. Andross on the importance of prayer.

*There is no other activity in life so important as that of prayer. Every other activity depends upon prayer for its best efficiency.*

There are a lot of important things to do in life. If we pray as we ought it will touch all of them: family relationships, our workplace, community, and brethren. We'll ask for safe travels, we'll express thanksgiving for blessings, we'll pray for national leaders and open doors for the gospel. Prayer should intersect every aspect of life.

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## "They Think It Strange"

Michael D. Hickox | Mattoon, Illinois, USA

1 Peter 4:3-4, *"For the time past may suffice to have wrought the desire of the Gentiles, and to have walked in lasciviousness, lusts, winebibbings, revellings, carousings, and abominable idolatries: wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them into the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you."*

First Peter teaches that the Christian walk involves being "a people for God's own possession" (1 Peter 2:9) and living as "sojourners and pilgrims" (1 Peter 2:11) who are set apart from this world.

As God's holy people who are set apart for His glory, Christians are different from the majority of people.

A person who's put off the old life of sin (1 Peter 4:1-2) no longer fills his or her time with things like lewdness, lusts, and drunkenness, but with preparedness, soberness, and prayer (verse 7), fervent love (verse 8), hospitality (verse 9), and service to God and others (verses 10-11). Living this life is not "normal." People "think it strange" when a man and woman wait until marriage for sexual contact. "They think it strange" when one refuses to tell a lie, no matter how "small" the lie seems.

People "think it strange" when one avoids gossip and murmuring, or when one is asked what plans the person has for the evening and replies, "I have an hour set aside to pray," "I'm studying Colossians this evening," or something similar.

Telling people we're Christians doesn't necessarily change this perception. Our society sees Christianity as a belief that Jesus is the Son of God (which is good) and a choice to assemble with saints (which is also good), but New Testament Christianity is a lifestyle of commitment to God (Romans 12:1; 2 Corinthians 5:9; Galatians 2:20), and many find this depth of commitment strange.

God's people have long been tempted to "fit in" with the world (cf. 1 Samuel 8:20) and avoid this strangeness, but God exhorts otherwise (James 4:4). We might fit in with most people on things God is indifferent about (i.e., favorite food or sports team), but when it comes to spiritual matters, we must not be "conformed to this world" (Romans 12:2).

Though the world's opinions of those who don't conform to worldliness can be discouraging, God's Word shows us that this world is not our permanent home.

On Judgment Day, we will either be glad or wish we had taken the narrow path that leads to life (Matthew 7:14) ...the path just a few seemingly "strange" people take.

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## If I Want To Know...

If I want to know the ingredients for potato soup, I don't go to a recipe for glazed ham. I go to a recipe for potato soup!

If I want to know how to put a bookshelf together, I don't open up a Word Search book. I go to the instruction manual!

If I want to know what vitamins I have in the cabinet, I don't open the sock drawer. I go to the vitamin cabinet!

If I want to know what kind of fruit is on sale at the store, I don't open a Driver's Manual. I go to grocery ads and apps that will tell me!

If I want to know the purpose of Baptism, I don't go to Bible verses that mention everything else except Baptism. I go to the verses that talk about Baptism!

So what does the Bible say about Baptism?

"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:16, KJV).

"Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 2:38, KJV).

"The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 3:21, KJV).

"And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (Acts 22:16, KJV).

Baptism saves!

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## Just A Christian

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

When people ask me what I am religiously, I reply, "a Christian." If they want to know what kind, I reply, "I try to be a good one."

Christians are disciples of Christ (Acts 11:25-26), followers and learners of Jesus Christ. Christians are "in Christ." (2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 1:3-12; 2 Timothy 2:10) To get into Christ, one must be "buried with Him through baptism into death" (Romans 6:3-4) "from the heart" (Romans 6:17-18), i.e., with sincerity and understanding (Ephesians 6:5-8; Matthew 13:15-16). Baptism is unto the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). Thus, those and only those people who have with sincerity and understanding been immersed unto the remission of sins are Christians.

The word "denomination" is not found in the Bible. However, the New Testament mentions denominations a number of times under a different name. The Jews in the days of the Lord and His apostles were divided into "sects" (Acts 5:17; 15:5). A "sect" is "a division or group based upon different doctrinal opinions and/or loyalties" (Louw & Nida. 11.50). The sects of the Jews believed and taught doctrines at variance with each other and wore party names as an indication of sectarian loyalty (Acts 23:6-8). The Jews even considered Christians to be a sect of Judaism (Acts 24:5; 28:22) and derisively called them "Nazarenes" (Acts 24:5). Paul implied Christians were not a sect (Acts 24:14).

The same Greek word rendered “sect” is also translated “factions” (1 Corinthians 11:19) and “heresies” (Galatians 5:20; 2 Peter 2:1). The word primarily means

*“a choosing, choice...; then, that which is chosen, and hence, an opinion, especially a self-willed opinion, which is substituted for submission to the power of truth, and leads to division and the formation of sects...”. (Vine. 2:217).*

Everyone has opinions, things he thinks are true but cannot prove by the Bible. If he treats his opinions as if they were divine revelation, by teaching them as divine truth and/or insisting that others follow them, he becomes an heretic (Titus 3:10-11, King James Version) or divisive man (New King James Version), and must be rejected (Ibid). Heresies (sectarianism) is a work of the flesh that will keep one from inheriting the kingdom of heaven (Galatians 5:19-21).

The brethren at Corinth were dividing into factions (1 Corinthians 1:11). This was a reflection of carnality (1 Corinthians 3:1-3), which will cause one to be lost (Romans 8:5-8). They had sectarian loyalties demonstrated by their sectarian names (1 Corinthians 1:12). The apostle rebuked their sectarianism (1 Corinthians 1:13). He urged them:

*“Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Corinthians 1:10).*

This verse contains the keys to being just a Christian. We must speak the same thing, have no divisions, and have the same mind and judgment. Doctrine does matter. Those who go beyond the doctrine of Christ lose fellowship with God and His people (2 John 9-11). The “doctrine of Christ” is not limited to the truth about the nature of Christ Jesus (verse 7). It includes all divine truth (verse 4). To truly be disciples of Christ, our faith, teaching and practice must be limited to those things clearly authorized by the Lord Jesus Christ (Colossians 3:17).

If we believe, practice and teach things unauthorized by the New Testament, we are sectarian (denominational). If we make our opinions, whether formalized as creeds or catechisms or unwritten, the standard by which we determine fellowship, we are sectarian.

Furthermore, we must not be guilty of sectarian loyalty as reflected by party names (1 Corinthians 1:12). As individuals, we may be called “believers” (Acts 5:14), “disciples” (Acts 9:1), “saints” (Acts 9:13), “Christians” (Acts 11:25-26) or “members” (1 Corinthians 11:27). As a group, whether local or universal, we may be called “the church” (Acts 8:3), “the Way” (Acts 9:1-2), the church of Christ (Romans 16:16), “the church of God” (1 Corinthians 1:2), “the church of the living God” (1 Timothy 3:14-15), or “the general assembly and church of the firstborn” (Hebrews 12:23-24, plural, indicating membership). All these names are used to include all scripturally baptized believers in their relationship to Christ and God.

If we have loyalty to a religious party, a group larger than a local church and smaller than the universal body of the saved, we are denominational. This party loyalty is reflected by party names. Sectarian names include the various denominational names (Catholic, Episcopal, Presbyterian, etc.) but also names of less formal parties (Conservative, Liberal, etc.). We can also show sectarianism by insisting on only one divinely authorized name for God’s people, whether as individuals or as a group, to the exclusion of others. Those who claimed, “I am of Christ,” were also a party (1 Corinthians 1:12).

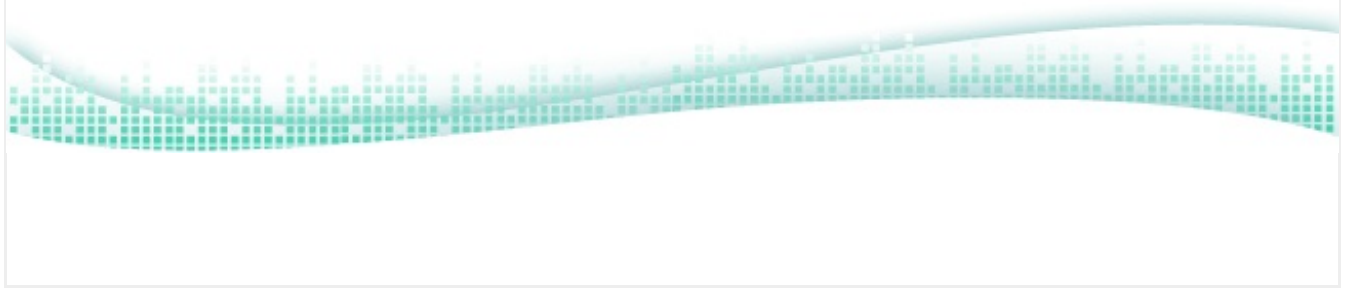
I’m just a Christian (believer, disciple, saint, member). I’m striving to be a good one. What about you?

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