

THE BIBLE TEACHER

Pleading for the Restoration of Pure New Testament Christianity

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EDITORIAL

Silver Jubilee Year Of The Bible Teacher

Beginning with the present issue of The Bible Teacher we have entered into twenty-fifth year of its publication. We are grateful to God for helping and enabling us to publish The Bible Teacher and to send to our readers all over the country each month without interruption. Also, we are thankful to our thousands of readers who have written us, from time to time, many letters of encouragement, and have appreciated receiving the magazine each month.

The purpose of The Bible Teacher has been, and is, and will be to teach God's word, as it is found in His book, the Bible, without adulteration or mixing with man-made doctrine. When we read and hear so much diversely taught in the name of the Bible, which is the cause of division, friction, denominationalism and sectarianism; and which the Bible itself condemns, (Rom. 16:17, 18; 1 Corinthians 1:10-13; 2 John 9-11), we need someone to lead and guide us and to explain the way of God more accurately. This is exactly what is being done through the pages of The Bible Teacher.

What Paul wrote Timothy almost nineteen hundred years ago is true even today. In his second letter to Timothy he wrote him: "I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with

all long suffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry." (2 Timothy 4:1-5).

In the parable of the seed and the sower, Christ had declared that "the seed is the word of God." (Luke 8:11). Peter, the inspired writer, said, at 1 Peter 1:23: "Having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever." The nature of the seed is such that it produces after its own kind always anywhere. Wheat produces wheat; rice produces rice; corn produces corn.

The word of God, the spiritual seed of God's spiritual kingdom, will produce Christians only and members of the church which Christ had established and to which He adds all those who are saved everywhere by obeying that which He has commanded one must do to be saved. (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:37-38, 47). The pure word of God will never produce anything but a Christian only. Thus, the word of God, if preached in its pristine purity anywhere will make people Christians only. The Bible knows nothing of different kinds of Christians. It takes more than the Bible to make or produce different kinds of Christians!

God has not left us without a guide. He does not will that any of us should live in spiritual darkness. He has revealed His plan of salvation for all mankind in the same way. He want us all to worship Him and to follow His will in the same way; and finally get to heaven to live with Him forevermore. We should let His word to be a lamp to our feet and a light to our paths to guide us on this earth and to lead us into eternity. The Bible Teacher serves as an expounder of God's word. There are many who have, in the past, written us to let us know that they preserve each issue of The Bible Teacher each month and have them bound in volume each year for their future use. Such a practice is commendable. If you haven't been doing that then may be you can begin doing this from now. Because the power of the printed page will continue to live and teach, even after we have gone to our reward. May God bless us all as we continue to read and study the things he has revealed for us all and as we meditate and do His will.

Should We Practice Feet Washing Today?

J.C. CHOATE

A card has come from a reader of our magazine wanting to know if we practice what Jesus taught in John 13:1-17. This is where Jesus washed the disciples' feet. Here we have Jesus and the Apostles at the feast of the passover, and the record says, "He riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself. After that he poureth water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded. Then cometh he to Simon Peter: and Peter saith unto him, Lord, dost thou wash my feet? Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter. Peter saith unto him, Thou shalt never wash my feet. Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me. Simon Peter saith unto him, Lord not my feet only, but also my hands and my head. Jesus saith to him, He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all. For he knew who should betray him; therefore said he, Ye are not all clean. So after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and was set down again, he said unto them, Know ye what I have done to you? Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him. If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them." (John 13:4-17).

The individual who wrote this card evidently was asking if we practiced what Jesus taught in John 13, which means in all probability that he and his associates believe that feet washing should be done as a public act of worship to the Lord. If this is what he is referring to, then I would have to tell him that we do not practice feet washing as an act of worship. Those who do that make a public spectacle of themselves and make mockery of what the Lord was teaching here. Furthermore, as far as I know, none of those who teach and practice feet washing as an act of worship do that each first day of the week. Rather, they do it only once a year, or on special occasions, and turn it into a big event, attracting people to observe this unusual ritual. Instead of honoring the

Lord, it degrades him and brings shame to his name.

In John 13 Jesus was not teaching feet washing as an act of worship, and no where in the New Testament can you find a record of a group of Christians gathered to engage in such a practice as worship to God. Rather, Jesus was teaching the lesson of humility here. He was showing that even he as their Lord and Master could humble himself and wash their feet. He then said that if he could do that then they should be willing to wash one another's feet.

Of course, in the part of the world where Jesus lived it was a common practice to wash the feet of those who came in off of a journey or on return home after being out on various missions. This was a courtesy extended to welcome them to their home. Feet washing was also practiced in visiting the sick. Paul, in speaking of a worthy widow, describes her as being, "Well reported of for good works; if she has brought up children, if she has lodged strangers, if she has washed the saints' feet, if she has relieved the afflicted, if she has diligently followed every good work." (1 Timothy 5:10). You will notice that among other things that she washed the saints feet. In what setting? Where they were sick or were invalids and needed to be physically cared for. In other words, she washed feet where there was a need to do so. Christians should be humble enough to do that today, and if not, then they are not following the example of Christ.

So, if our friend is wondering if we practice what Christ taught in John 13, then if he is talking about feet washing as an act of worship, the answer would be no. But if he is talking about practicing feet washing as Jesus taught it, that is, in being humble enough to wash the feet of the sick, the invalids, the crippled, etc., then we most certainly do practice that. I would ask the one who asked this question if he and his friends practice feet washing by being humble enough to care for the needs of those who are sick and are in need? There are those who like to put on a big show by having feet washing in their worship service once a year, but they are not willing to care for the needs of the sick which includes bathing them, washing their feet, etc.

May God help us not to read into the scriptures practices that are not there and were not intended. May he help us not to bind things on ourselves and others that the scriptures do not teach. If we will humble ourselves before the Lord and obey him and serve him and our fellowman we will be truly doing as Jesus did when he washed his disciples feet.

Oh Come, Let Us Worship The Lord!

BETTY B. CHOATE

Oh come, let us worship and bow down; Let us kneel before the Lord our Maker, For He is our God! (Psalm 95:6).

Jesus described worship in His new dispensation with these words: "But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth . . ." (John 4:23).

Let us remove ourselves from the tradition of 'worship' as many in the Lord's church have experienced it, week after week, all of their lives, and look at biblical statements which describe the *reality* of worship.

Genesis 24:26: Then the man *bowed down his head and worshipped* the Lord.

Genesis 17:3: Then Abram *fell on his face*, and God talked with him . . .

Exodus 34:8: So Moses *made haste and bowed his head toward the earth, and worshipped*.

1 Chronicles 16:23,26,29,36: *Sing to the Lord . . . Give to the Lord glory and strength . . . Bring an offering and come before Him. Oh, worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness! Tremble before Him, all the earth . . . And all the people said, "Amen!" and praised the Lord.*

Psalms 66:4: All the earth shall *worship* You and *sing praises* to You.

Psalms 99:5: *Exalt the Lord our God, and worship at His footstool; for He is holy.*

Psalms 132:7: Let us go into His tabernacle; Let us *worship* at His *footstool*.

1 Corinthians 14:25: . . . and so, *falling down on his face*, he will *worship* God . . .

Revelation 5:14: And the twenty-four elders *fell down and worshipped* Him who lives forever and ever.

Even Satan, when he tempted Christ to worship him, knew exactly what he must have to satisfy his hunger for exaltation: "All these things I

will give you if you will fall down and worship me." (Matthew 4:9).

I have no desire to be accusing or unduly critical, but I think a personal examination concerning our worship would be very helpful. Jesus, Himself, stated emphatically that only one type of worship is *acceptable* to God: "... those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." (John 4:24).

Too often, as I am sitting in my seat in the church building, surrounded by the typical distractions and devotions, as I am passing through the biblically prescribed vehicles of worship—that is, singing, praying, partaking of the Lord's Supper, studying, and giving—I feel myself to be physically and emotionally relaxed, mentally floating through thoughts concerning what is being said, momentary examination of self, reflections of yesterday and tomorrow, feeling myself to be a 'spectator', being 'entertained'...

Too often, I may be *thinking about spiritual things*, without being *actively conscious* of being in the *presence of God*! *At the end of a designated worship period, in retrospect it is amazing to realize that sometimes I have not worshipped at all. I have sung songs about myself and my anticipation of eventually going to heaven; I have listened to words of a prayer about the congregation's collective wishes and needs; I have focussed my attention on the ability and the thoughts presented by a preacher, usually dealing with my comprehension of God's message, my response to it, about my own self-image and how to feel better about myself, or even about the wondrous things God in His love has done for me; I have made a cursory examination of my past week's behaviour as brief prayers were said and the bread and the fruit of the vine passed down my pew; I have given from my week's earning and laid it in the basket, conscious of the fact that these funds are necessary to pay for the building, the utilities, the salaries of those who have been employed to take care of the needs of the congregation—me, in plurality.*

And often I have been dismissed without ever once feeling myself emotionally prostrate before the great and awesome presence of *God*, without feeling surrounded and comforted in His continual outpouring of love, without feeling both humbled and exalted by the tremendous experience of *worship*. Most of my thinking throughout the scant hour was centered around *myself*, not God!

Yes, we live in physical bodies, and the physical world serves as a distraction from the spiritual. And, yes, certain prescribed 'acts' must be the framework of our worship. And yes, it is a simple matter for any

prescribed list to become a line of empty rituals, if the unthinking Christian allows it to be so.

And this is my point! I think we have done that, in many cases. I am convinced that the traditions which have developed as our mode of "worship" have actually hindered worship. Instead, they have been a means of Bible study, of personal edification, and even of spiritual entertainment.

Re-read those passages about worship. Do they sound like relaxed, laid-back, watch-the-clock, doze-a-little, me-centered experiences? Or would an honest survey of them convince us that true worship is adoration, requiring our best energy, our undivided attention, directed in reverence toward the glorious presence of God, an emotional and spiritual setting in which it would be near-blasphemous to be watching the clock?

What could we do, differently, yet within the framework of the truths God has given as guidelines, so that the time we spend together on Sundays, as His children, is actually *worship*?

Risking replacing one set of traditions for what might in time become only another traditional formula, I believe these suggestions would better inspire *me* to actually worship:

Always . . . always . . . always, the men leading the parts of worship must keep their own minds and the minds of the congregation focussed on the fact that everything we say and do is to honour, glorify, and praise God. While participants will be strengthened by worship and will benefit in many ways, this time is devoted primarily to *adoration of God*, and only secondarily to *self edification*. That kind of study should, in large part, be reserved for the Bible study periods.

1. I should begin preparing for worship by (a) being sure to get enough rest Saturday night, (b) waking early enough Sunday morning to make unhurried preparations to go to the building, and (c) getting there early enough to set my mind in the proper channels for worship. These optimums may not always be possible, but they should be my goals.

2. Arriving at the building, all 'visiting' should be done outside the auditorium. Entrance into that area should signal the beginning of the actual attitude of being in God's presence in corporate worship.

3. While awaiting the beginning of the designated worship period, I should spend the time reading the Scriptures, praying, or meditating—concentrating my thinking very pointedly on the person of God.

4. Worship, itself:

A. The Godhead should be the focal point, throughout. Hymns should be selected to inspire each participant to sing from the depths of his very soul, words that praise, glorify, thank, and express our love for our God.

B. Prayers should also concentrate more on praise and thanks giving than on self; however, great care should be taken to learn the specific concerns and needs of the individual Christians, before praying. Any area-wide; or national crisis should receive special attention, taking it sincerely to the Heavenly Father, who is the Lord of all, and asking Him to overrule according to His will. Prayers should perhaps be shorter, yet more frequently interspersed throughout the meeting, and dealing with specific needs, requests, and concerns, with some intervals of prayer being devoted entirely to praise. Prayers should be worded with sincerity, avoiding 'formula' phrases, and being sure that each thought is from the heart.

C. As Christians of the first century met on the first day of the week to commune with their Lord and the Father through the Super, so this feast and all of its meanings should be the central part of today's worship. Appropriate Scriptures should be read, with accompanying explanations and encouragement, designed to remind and inspire the participants in their remembrances of Christ as well as in the examination of self.

D. Rather than have a 'sermon' which has largely deteriorated to a display of talent, ability, and entertainment, various ones of the men (either spontaneously or by pre-arrangement) should intersperse throughout the meeting, readings which would lead the participants to thoughts that glorify and worship God. Some commentary and words of exhortation might be given, but they should not take precedence over the Scriptures themselves.

E. Contributions should reflect an outpouring of individual and congregational love, in response to the inspirational period of worship. If our attention were focussed, as it should be, on the greatness of God and His love for the world, we should be motivated to help spread that truth to those who live in darkness.

Should we stand or sit or bow or what, as we worship? No rule is laid down, as such, in the Scriptures, but what we read there does serve as an example. Obviously, for much of the time it would be better to sit. In the Scriptures people were spoken of as 'standing' in the presence of God. But more prominently than any other posture, the Bible describes worshippers as bowing before God, even putting their faces to the

ground. I am convinced from my own private worship at home, that human pride has designed our public worship periods, deliberately omitting this humbling posture. I am also convinced that we won't experience the type of adoration and glorification of God that Abraham, Abel, David, and others knew until we long to fall prostrate in His Presence.

How do the Scriptures themselves describe the setting of worship? By inspiration, the writer of Hebrews in 12:22-24, contrasting God's appearance to the children of Israel on Mount Sinai with the thunder and lightnings, speaks of the assembly of the church:

"But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God, the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel." What an awesome assembly! Into what glorious realms we enter, when we presume to worship God! With what humility and soul-searching we should dare to join that throng! What an inspirational experience it should be for us each Lord's Day!

Following worship there should be a lengthy period of Bible study, divided into age-groups. During this meeting, the preacher and/or elders would have opportunity to impart to the congregation the fruit of their own Bible study. Much of the 'teaching and admonishing one another' that has been the thrust of worship periods should be moved to the Bible class time, in order to concentrate more fully on the actual *worshipping* of God.

What is The Difference Between The Christian Church and The Church of Christ?

JACK MEYER, SR.

In this tract we answer the question so often asked: "What is the difference between the Christian Church and the church of Christ?" So many people think that the use of mechanical instruments of music in worship is about the only difference. And the Christian Church leaders

want people to believe that, for not nearly so many unsuspecting and uninformed people will be caught in its apostasy when the facts are known.

MISSIONARY SOCIETIES A DEPARTURE

Before the division came in the middle of the nineteenth century, the worship, work, doctrine, etc., of the church was exactly as they are practiced by the churches of Christ today. As much as the Christian Church people try to avoid the responsibility for the division, they will nevertheless have to admit the accuracy of the foregoing statement. The division first began to take form by the formation and introduction of a Missionary Society to handle the "missionary work" of the church. This started by congregations in different districts sending delegates to district meetings, and said districts being organized. One step in such organisation led to another, until in Cincinnati, in 1849, the American Christian Missionary Society was formed. Those in the church who opposed this, and who stood on the same ground occupied by churches of Christ today, did so for several reasons. Such an organisation was separate and apart from the congregations; was above and over them in supervising missionary work, while the only organisation in the New Testament for doing the church's work was the local congregation. *God's plan was for each congregation to be its own Missionary society.* The New Testament churches were not tied together in any inter-congregational organisation, neither was there any organisation over them. "Unto him be the glory in the church"—not in the missionary society (Ephesians 3:21). If this was Christ's plan, and we are ordered to "make all things according to the pattern" (Hebrews 8:5), the Christian Church people departed from God's plan in organising anything but a congregation to do the mission work for the church. They still maintain that departure today, and this departure caused the original division.

INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC

The second cause of division, and point of difference, was the use of instrumental music in the worship. The church carried on its music worship exactly as the church of Christ does today, with singing alone, until instrumental music was introduced in 1859 in Midway, Ky. Those who worshiped without the instruments, as do churches of Christ today, opposed it for these reasons: (1) The Old Testament law was abolished on the cross of Christ (Colossians 2:14), and we are therefore under the new covenant. (Hebrews 9:15). Christ sent the Holy Spirit to guide the apostles into all truth (John 16: 13), and through their preaching and

writing in the Scriptures "furnished us completely unto every good work." (II Timothy 3:16, 17). (2) The new covenant specified singing as the music for the church. (I Corinthians 14:15; Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16). (3) We dare not change the plan of the covenant, and are therefore restricted to the music the new covenant specifies. (II John 9).

Instrumental music advocates insisted that it was not necessary, but they thought enough of it to introduce it and by it to divide the body of Christ. (Romans 16:17.) So, instrumental music's introduction became another cause of division; it remains as a point of difference between the Christian Church and church of Christ today; and the Christian Church people must therefore bear the responsibility for causing the division by introducing something which they themselves claimed was a "non-essential"—yet to them it was more "essential" than the unity of God's people.

But in dividing the body of Christ by introducing missionary societies and instrumental music, the Christian Church people took two positions which are fundamental. First, they insisted that they should have these and other things in order to follow the pattern of the other religious groups. Israel wanted a king "to be like other nations," and God condemned that position. (I Samuel 8.) The Christian Church people stand on that platform today—to be like the sects in everything. If God condemned it in the Israelites, He certainly condemns it in the Christian Church, as He is no respecter of persons (Romans 2:11).

Secondly, they took the position that if God did not condemn a thing it was all right. Hence, they justified instrumental music. But that position is unsound, for God laid down a principle from one end of the Bible to the other that we should do things precisely as He ordered, without addition or subtraction (Deuteronomy 4:2; Revelation 22:18, 19). When God said to do something in one way, that excluded every other way. So far as we know, no Christian Church would put anything on the Lord's table except the bread and fruit of the vine. And yet the Lord did not say not to do so. They respect the plan of the Lord on these points. Then, why not do the same in the matter of music? But in taking the position that we may have anything in worship which was not expressly prohibited, the Christian Church let down the bars for many other departures, and those departures have come.

OPEN MEMBERSHIP

Another fruit of the above position, and point of difference, is what is called "open membership." That is, churches of Christ teach, as does the New Testament, and as did the Christian Church people before they

left us, that one becomes a member of the church only by faith in Christ, repentance of sins, confession of faith in Christ, and being buried by baptism into Christ (Mark 16:15, 16; Luke 24:47; Romans 10:9, 10; 6:3, 4). Many—though not all—congregations of the Christian Church practice “open membership”—accept people on immersion, sprinkling, pouring, or no baptism. This is not known among all people and the more conservative, God-fearing people in the Christian Church object to the practice. But what can they do to prevent it? Nothing, as long as they have their present policies of catering to the world; and the only way they can please the Lord is to come out of Babylon.

The Christian Church practices the foregoing because of another error they hold: in growing numbers they recognize all sects, or denominations, as being in the New Testament church, while the churches of Christ do not so recognize them. Christ had the apostles to found His church in Acts 2. Denominations started hundreds of years later. Since the Father did not plant them, Christ said that they would be rooted up (Matthew 15:13). They divide; Christ prayed for unity (John 17:20,21), and Paul even commanded us to avoid things that divide (Romans 16:17). Although thousands of good people are in them, these people do not know that such sects exist in rebellion against the will of Christ, that they worship according to the Commandments of men, and Christ said that such worship is vain (Matthew 15:9). But the Christian Church is “broad” enough to ignore the word of Christ and recognize sects as part of the church, when the New Testament does not. Neither does the church of Christ. But accepting members on no baptism or anything called baptism is naturally a result of recognizing all sects as being in the New Testament church.

SPECIAL DAYS

Another difference between the two groups consists in this: in Galatians 4:10, 11, Paul rebuked some fickle, worldly churches for celebrating special days, or seasons; whereas, the only day the Lord authorized the church to celebrate was the first day of the week, when the Lord's Supper was to be observed (Matthew 26:26-28; I Corinthians 11:23-27; Acts 20:7). The Christian Church follows the practice of all denominations in observing all special days which they celebrate. It makes no difference why the Lord did not authorize all such and why the Spirit even had Paul to condemn such observance of special days. The fact remains that Paul condemned it, and “we walk by faith” (II Corinthians 5:7) which comes by the word of God (Romans 10:17). The Christian Church goes in for all such special days; the church of Christ

does not. And incidentally, the Christian Church will even observe the Lord's Supper upon special occasions on days of the week other than "the first day of the week," as we are told to do (Acts 20:7). Is not that "teaching a different doctrine" (I Timothy 1:3), and "going beyond the teachings of Christ" (II John 9)? But, they have let down the bars, and error comes trooping in.

FINANCING THE CHURCH

Another point of difference is in raising money for the church's work. The New Testament plan is for the members to give personally on the first day of the week, as they are able, as they purpose, and cheerfully. (I Corinthians 16:1, 2; II Corinthians 9:7). The churches of Christ follow this plan. But the Christian Church follows the plan of the world in using many worldly schemes to raise money for the church—by the giving of all sorts of parties, suppers, shows, entertainments, etc., and thereby begging the public for money. This is not the New Testament plan, but is the logical fruit of their policy of leaving the New Testament standard and catering to worldly plans.

CHOIRS, SOLOS, ETC.

Then, the Christian Church specializes in choirs, special programs, solos, special numbers of all sorts, elaborate ceremonies. The purpose of all such is to draw a crowd by entertainment. Churches of Christ follow the simple New Testament worship, centered around Christ as a means of drawing people (John 12:32). Display and entertainment are the main drawing cards of the Christian Church. Churches of Christ hold to the simplicity of the New Testament worship.

DIFFERENCE OF NAME

Finally, there is the difference of the name. Early congregations were called "churches of Christ." (Romans 16:16). This is not the only name by which they were known, and we should keep that in mind. *But never did the New Testament call the church the "Christian Church."* We are under orders to call Bible things by Bible names. (I Peter 4:11; Colossians 3:17; Hebrews 8:5). Churches of Christ use Bible names for the church. The Christian Church uses a name which the New Testament nowhere assigns to the church. Of course, they can see no harm in it, as they have surrendered the New Testament plan, and go on the policy of following the world. But the Christian Church wears a church name which it cannot do "in the name of Christ" (Colossians 3:17), for He nowhere authorized that name for the church.

In the final analysis, the Christian Church has become just another denomination among sister denominations. It has nothing distinctive; has left the original ground of "speaking where the Bible speaks"; and is drifting further from the truth all of the time. We present the answer to the question, "What is the difference between the Christian Church and the church of Christ?" with no thought of animosity toward our departed digressive one-time brethren. But these facts are presented for the information of the non-partisan, unprejudiced, who will investigate for themselves, and that good people may not be deceived when they hear someone say that "there is a very little difference between the two groups."

The church of Christ stands where it has always stood—on Bible ground. The Christian Church people once stood there, but they left it. They are drifting hopelessly with the tide, are losing ground, with their conservative members and preachers coming back to the church of Christ in substantial numbers. There is no hope for that Church as a whole to return, but individuals may return to the original New Testament ground, and to that ground they will be welcomed by the churches of Christ as they continue their steady growth.

Many good, sincere, conservative people in the Christian Church will freely say: We do not believe in the extremes of the liberals in the Christian Church, and we conservative believe just above as you in the church of Christ believe. We see no harm in staying in the Christian Church if we do not endorse its extreme liberalism." Such good people need to read Amos 3:3; "Shall two walk together, except they have agreed?" Again: "No man can serve two masters" (Matthew 6:24). Again: "Mark them that are causing division and occasions of stumbling, and turn away from them" (Romans 16:17). Again, speaking of the line of separation contrary to the doctrine which you learned, between truth and error, Paul said: "Come ye out from among them and be ye separate." (II Corinthians 6:17.) These passages teach that you cannot remain in error, or even worship with and fellowship error, and render acceptable worship to God (Matthew 15:9).

Don't Place Limitations on God!

DILLARD THURMAN

As Creator and Lord over all things, God has the right and power

to place restrictions upon man! Yet the Lord was longsuffering toward His people, Israel! *"But he, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and destroyed them not: yea, many a time turned he his anger away, and did not stir up all his wrath . . . For he remembered that they were but flesh; and wind that passeth away, and cometh not again."* But His people still did not respond to His love and compassion: *"How oft did they provoke him in the wilderness, and grieve him in the desert! Yea, they turned back and tempted God, and limited the Holy One of Israel"* (Psa. 78:38-41). In a figure of speaking, they bound the hands of God and limited what He could do for them as His people!

THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL LIMITED GOD!

Our text speaks of a nation's rebellion against God in turning from Him, even as He sought to lead them to the Land of Promise. Because of their lack of faith, they *"limited God Almighty"*? Therefore it was recorded: *"They soon forgot his works; they waited not for his counsel; but lusted exceedingly in the wilderness, and tempted God in the desert. And he gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul"* (Psa 106:13-15). Yes, they effectively limited God, but found to their chagrin that they had, in reality, limited themselves! God recorded for us, *"And the whole congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness: And the children of Israel said unto them, Would to God we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt."* (Ex. 16:2-3).

By their actions, Israel was already limiting what God could do for them because of unbelief and rebellion. Is it any wonder that God would say, *"Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof; I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh."* (Prov. 1:24-26). They had spurned the goodness and mercy He desired to give, and thus they limited God! For this they wandered in the wilderness forty years; and because of this they died outside the Land of Promise!

MAN'S SINS AND INIQUITIES LIMIT GOD!

When man stands removed from God's blessings, it is never because God has withdrawn! Always man is the one at fault! *"Behold, the LORD'S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear"* (Isa. 59:1-2). The wall of separation is always built by man,

and not God. Man's sinful behaviour leads him away; and in this act, man limits the blessings of God.

To fully see man's futility, read God's answer in Isa. 50:1-5. Surely God desired to bless His people abundantly, but obstinately man turns from Him. Even the patience of God wears thin. Hear Him: "*Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh*" (Prov. 1:24-26). When man tries to limit God, he finds that God, in turn, will limit man! Calamities and distresses multiply when God is not near to help! Sanity and reason then declares, "*I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the LORD, which made heaven and earth*" (Psa. 121:1-2). God stands ready to help, but man holds the key to unlock the trap door that binds him in sin!

OUR WRONG RELATIONSHIPS CAN LIMIT GOD!

Our personal right of prayer to God is a most precious spiritual blessing. However, there must be a right relationship with God for our prayers to be accepted! "*They cried, but there was none to save them: even unto the LORD, but he answered them not*" (Psa. 18:41). Those who oppose God need not expect their prayers to be answered. Their own sinfulness limits God so He will not hear and answer prayers. But not so with the righteous: "*The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much*" (James 5:16).

MAN'S FAILURE TO PRAY LIMITS THE LORD!

Many times God's people are bereft of His blessings because they refuse to pray! The Lord appeared to Solomon with the promise: "*If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.*" (2 Chron. 7:14). But there are disciples that limit the Lord by failure to pray often and fervently! James said so: "*Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.*" (James 4:2-3).

Man's malevolent spirit limits God, and so does a failure to pray! God's children limit Him by not asking! We skirt the shores of His great providence because of weak faith which prevents us from casting ourselves out into the oceans of His love and abundance! Jesus told

Simon, *"Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught"* (Lk. 5:4). But we are afraid to test the waters! We don't ask, for we haven't enough faith to expect; thus our lack of faith limits the Lord! Yet our Lord promised, *"Ask, and it shall be given you; seek and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened"* (Mt. 7:7-8). Jesus didn't tie that up with IFs, ANDs and BUTs! It is our lack of faith that limits the Lord.

WRONG KIND OF PRAYERS LIMITS THE LORD!

There are those who limit the Lord in their prayers by not presenting the right life to Him! The Lord has decreed, *"He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination"* (Prov. 28:9). Saints limit the Lord in answering prayers by asking for the wrong things! Even Job learned this lesson: *"There they cry, but none giveth answer, because of the pride of evil men. Surely God will not hear vanity, neither will the Almighty regard it"* (Job 35:12-13).

Even as we learned from James 4:3, *"Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts."* As parents refuse to give a child that which is bad for him, so God withholds from us that which is detrimental to our spiritual life. *"If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?"* (Matt. 7:11). Don't limit God by asking for things to gratify your fleshly lusts!

LACK OF BIBLE STUDY LIMITS THE LORD!

Our attitude toward God's word determines God's attitude toward our prayers! Do you know why the scriptures have been preserved for us? *"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works"* (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Because of this, saints are instructed to *"Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth"* (2 Tim. 2:15). Thus God has revealed Himself unto man through His word; but man limits God by failure to study His scriptures!

Church members often effectively shut the mouth of the Lord by leaving the Bible closed on the shelf; and thereby they limit God! They fail to win souls to Christ by not using the gospel; and thereby they limit

God, for it is their mouth that HE must use to spread His word! We limit God in failure to *"Handle aright the word of truth"* because we *"are unskilful in the word of righteousness"* (Heb. 5:13). God is limited in our lives and influence when abysmal ignorance could be overcome if we would lovingly read the "love letter" which He has given us! We limit God when we give more time to reading sports and political news than to our priceless word of salvation from our Saviour! How pathetic that it may be said of us: *"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of the God, I will also forget thy children"* (Hos. 4:6). It is indeed a rebellious people that turns away from their God who loves them! Yet this is a picture of many who profess discipleship; and then limit the Lord!

REFUSAL TO WORK FOR HIM LIMITS THE LORD!

The Lord is limited in His church by members who refuse to work for His cause. Parabolically, Jesus taught: *"Go work today in my vineyard"* (Mt. 21:28). Christians must know that Jesus has no feet but *ours* to go; no hands but *ours* to work; and none other than *ourselves* to serve! If we do not answer His call, we limit the Lord! His commission was, *"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen"* (Mt. 28:19-20). This commission was self-perpetuating, and reaches down even to us! If we don't do this work, it will remain undone!

Keep this in mind: You have a work to do that no other can effectively accomplish! There are souls YOU can reach that possibly no other can! When each member of the body of Christ begins to perform to the extent of his or her ability, THEN we will take the world for Christ! But until EVERY member is ready to be used by the Lord, we have effectively limited the Lord!

Like A Silly Dove

JOHNNY RAMSEY

Hosea had a broken heart. His wife was unfaithful and immoral. Jehovah had a broken heart, too. His bride was flippant and ungodly,

also. Israel had wandered back to the world and committed spiritual prostitution. The book of Hosea is a classic love story that went bad. More sob than sermon is what critics of the Bible call this eloquent Old Testament book. In fourteen graphic chapters, we can see the heartache of a fearless prophet. Hosea reminded Israel that her goodness was like the morning dew. It did not last very long. "*Ephraim also is like a silly dove without heart: they call to Egypt, they go to Assyria*" (Hos. 7:11). Like a silly dove, God's people would fly here and there as very unstable folk—flippant and undependable! Hosea's wife was so debased that God gave a name to their third child which clearly shows the offspring did not belong to the prophet, but to some lover of Gomer's with whom she had prostituted herself.

God showed the people of Israel that their only hope for spiritual success was "*in the valley of Achor*" (Hos. 2:14-19). In Josh. 7 is the account of the purging of sin from the camp when Achan sinned so tragically and brought defeat to the army of God's people—in the valley of Achor! Discipline has always been a necessary ingredient in God's plan. We err exceedingly when we bypass or overlook the value of keeping the bride of Christ pure and holy.

As a result of their compromise with worldly things, God tells the people of Hosea's day that there would be a spiritual famine of many days without a king or priest. In bondage they would beg for a prophet and none would be found. All of this was the result of their lack of Bible knowledge. The source of all our problems today is still ignorance of the Scriptures. So many seldom ever study the sacred text, and it shows in the worldliness in our midst, and in shallow preaching and teaching.

God warned His people to leave the landmarks alone (Hos. 5:10). In our era of time, everyone cries for change and modern emphasis. But, only the old Jerusalem gospel can save and edify. We must "go forward, back to the Bible!" We dare not tamper with the mandates of heaven, but must be content with the "faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3). We must be loyal to the ancient precepts found in the Book of Books!

In Hos. 7 and Hos. 8, we learn that Israel was like a half-baked cake. "*Ephraim is a cake not turned*" (Hos. 7:8). This represents folk who were burned on one side and raw on the other—totally useless. As a result, they had sown to the wind and reaped the whirlwind. Their sins did find them out (Num. 32:23). Years in captivity would teach them the bitter result of apostasy. Horrible actions (Hos. 6:10) caused God to cast them away (Hos. 9:17) into spiritual oblivion.

Israel was challenged to break up their fallow ground (Hos. 10:12) and turn back to Jehovah immediately. There was no time for delay. They were long overdue in pursuing divine matters. Despite Israel's slothfulness, the Lord still loved them and sought to draw them back to Himself: "*I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love: and I was to them as they that take off the yoke on their jaws, and I laid meat unto them . . . I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him*" (Hos. 11:4; 14:4). God's justice demanded that Israel be given over to bondage, but it broke the heart of heaven to give them up that they might learn to repent (Hos. 11:8).

God reminds us of the great role the prophets played in warning, rebuking and leadership in Hosea 12 and Hosea 13. Kings learned to stand in awe of the lonely, devoted and loyal spokesman for Jehovah. The prophets stood as monumental reminders of the sanctity of truth and the sorrow of sin. God had allowed a king in His anger, but took him away in His wrath (Hos. 13:11). Sometimes we get what we ask for and have years to regret it: "*He gave them their request, but sent leanness into their souls*" (Psa. 106:15).

We truly need a fresh application of the brilliant book of Hosea. May our goodness be more lasting than the morning dew. May we never be like the silly dove.

Have You Ever Wondered?

P. PAUL RAJ

Man often wonders saying "Where did I come from?," "Why Am I here?" and "Where Am I going?". Neither the man made religion nor the science has answered these questions. But instead he is misled into folly and misery.

But Bible the word of God answers these vital questions. Man is not accidentally born in this world. God has a very definite plan and purpose for each human being.

THE BEGINNING OF MAN

The Bible says "Then God said let Us make man in Our image—." "The Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being" Gen 1: 26, 2:7. Thus the first man Adam and his wife Eve were created by God.

King David acknowledged God's foreknowledge of his creation. Psa, 139:14-16.

THE PURPOSE OF MAN

Men are created "so that they should seek the Lord—" Acts 17:27. "—fear God and keep His commandments for this is the whole duty of man" Ecc. 12:13. Jesus Christ said "But seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness—" Matt 6:33. The ultimate purpose of one's life here on earth is to seek and serve his creator God, all other, earthly pursuits are vain and futile.

THE PROBLEM OF MAN

Man has many socio-economic problems. But sin is the greatest of all. It is a spiritual problem for which there is no human remedy. Sin is transgression of God's law. I Jn. 3:4. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Rom 3:23.

Sin enslaves, deceives, separates, reigns and brings God's wrath on the sinner. But still God loves the sinner and expect him to accept His remedy.

THE REMEDY OF GOD

"God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" John 3:16. "—Christ Jesus came to save the sinners" I Tim 1:15. Christ died for our sins and He rose again the third day. I Cor. 15:3-4. Jesus Christ is the only saviour of the world. Acts. 4:12. The salvation from sin is a free gift of God. But one has to meet certain requirements to get it. That is very simple.

Believe in God and Jesus as His Son. Heb. 11:6, John 20:30-31. Repent of your past sins Acts 2:38. Confess Jesus as the Son of God. Rom. 10:9-10, Acts 8:37, and be baptised for the remission of your sins. Mk. 16:15-16. Now you are a true Christian and a part of the Church of Christ. Acts 2:47, Matt 16:18.

THE ETERNITY OF MAN

"It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment. Heb. 9:27. The world would be burned up on the second coming of Christ. II Pet. 3:7-10. All the dead will be raised. Jesus Christ will execute judgment as a righteous Judge. John 5:22, II Cor. 5:10. The faithful children of God will receive crown of life and disobedient the

eternal condemnation. II Thes 1:7-10.

CONCLUSION

Dear reader, have you ever wondered why you are here? Have you obeyed the gospel of Christ? Where will you live in eternity if this is your last minute of life? If you are not a Christian, we urge you to become one by obeying the gospel of Jesus Christ. May God help you in fulfilling His plan. For further information, please contact the nearest church of Christ.

Unity And Harmony In The Church

THOMAS R. DOHLING

Peace and unity among God's people is very clearly and definitely taught in the Bible. Yet, this principle is grossly and repeatedly violated. It is very depressing to find misunderstandings, ill feelings, hatred, and jealousy among those professing to be Christians. Personal differences are carried to such an extreme that a brother uses the pulpit as the platform from where to launch a malicious attack on a fellow brother and/or brothers with whom he does not agree. Is God honoured and glorified in this way? Such attitudes and actions cause grievous harm and injury to the body of Christ in general and individual members in particular. Is God's love reflected in such behaviours? It is indeed shameful and sinful to indulge in such harmful acts.

Immediately prior to his betrayal and subsequent mock trial and crucifixion, Jesus fervently and urgently prayed for the unity of all believers. He prayed, "that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be one in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me." (John 17:21.) How deeply we hurt Christ by our thoughtless acts! Are we any different from the denominational world when we maintain a confrontationist stance? How can there be disharmony and disunity in the family of God? Logically, there should not be. In 1 Corinthians 1:10, Paul appeals to the church at Corinth: "I appeal to you brothers. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought."

How sobering and said his appeal! That there were divisions in the Corinthian church and that divisions exist in the churches of our Lord today, portrays Christ Jesus in a very poor light. How it must grieve the triune God!! The psalmist David wrote in Psalm 133:1: "How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!"

It is a very sad, serious and sinful matter when Satan is allowed to gain entry in a Christian's heart to stir up dissension and strife in the family of God and to tear apart its members. How Satan must rejoice at the opportunity to sow discord among the saints! He maliciously hurts God through those very people who profess to be God's children. Such thoughtless acts of misguided brothers who, in all sincerity believe themselves to be in the right, hurt God deeply and by persisting in their rigid and parochial stance, they inflict injury upon injury on the body of Christ.

It should be the duty of every Christian to aim at a right relationship with one another. To build up, not to tear down. Jealousy and quarrellings among brothers is worldly (1 Corinthians 3: 3,4). The members collectively constitute God's temple where God's Spirit resides. If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and we are that temple (1 Cor. 3:16,17). We are not to be overcome by evil, but we should overcome evil with good (Romans 12:21). Also, we are to "live in harmony with one another" (Rom. 12:16). It is our bounden duty as Christians to "be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honour one another above yourselves." (Rom 12:10). Paul concedes that some brothers are weak. Does this mean that we are to reject them? No. Paul goes on to say that we are to "accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters." (Romans 14:1.) And, "one man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike . . . He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord . . . and gives thanks to God." (Rom. 14:5,6.) We should, as Christians, "stop passing judgment on one another." Instead, we should make up our minds not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in our brother's way. (Rom. 14:13.) It is our duty to "make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification" (Romans 14:19).

According to Roy Beasley, "God has given us the divine formula for peace and harmony, and here it is:

First, follow things which make for peace. (Rom. 14:19.) As far as personal preferences are concerned, we might have to yield to what offends a brother. We must be "peacemakers" not "peacebreakers."

Second, put away childish things (1 Cor. 13:11). One of the major

causes of trouble in the church is immaturity, selfishness, pouting, blaming others, irresponsibility, all of this is the result of immaturity.

Third, mind your own business. To the church at Thessalonica Paul gave this advice: "Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business . . ." (1 Thess. 4:11). Meddling in other peoples' business always causes trouble. If we tend to our own business we won't have time to meddle.

Fourth, guard against pride. Proverbs 13:10 says, "Pride only breeds quarrels . . ." Sometimes people become upset and quarrelsome because their pride has been hurt; they feel they are not getting enough honour and attention."

Therefore, in summing up, let us always keep in mind the exhortation of the apostles Paul and Peter in the matter of unity and harmony in the church.

Paul said, "May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." (Romans 15:5,6.)

And Peter said, "Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble. Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. For, whoever would love life and see good days must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from deceitful speech. He must turn from evil and do good, he must seek peace and pursue it." (1 Peter 3:8-11).

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