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EDITORIAL

The Church of Christ Can Exist At Any Place

The word "church" is derived from the Greek word "ekklesia", and means "a body of people called out." A building built with bricks, cements and mortar is not the church, but is a place where the church comes together for fellowship and worship of God. God's people, Christians, are called church in the Bible. When Christ, almost two thousand years ago, said to His disciples, that He would build *His church*, (Matthew 16:18), He was teaching them that after His death and resurrection from the dead, when His gospel would be preached and people would believe in Him as their Saviour and would repent of their sins and would be baptized in water (immersed) for remission of their sins; then they would become the body of His people. That is why the church of Christ is referred to in the Bible many times as "the body", such as in Romans, 12:5; I Corinthians 12:13,14,27; Ephesians 1:22,23; 4:4; 5:23.

When Christ's church began in Jerusalem, almost two thousand years ago, the Bible in Acts 2:47 tells us that the followers of Christ, Christians, were "praising God and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved." The Lord was adding the saved ones to the same church—His church, and He still does the same thing. That is, when one believes in Jesus Christ that He is the Son of God who died on the cross for my sins and

repents of all sins and in baptized in water for the forgiveness of sins, then the Lord adds that person, now a Christian, to His church, which is His spiritual body. All who had become followers of Christ in the beginning were known as "Christians" (Acts 11:26); and everywhere as a body of people, followers of Christ, they were known as "churches of Christ," numerous congregations (Romans 16:16).

Church of Christ is not a manmade organization. No human being is the head of the church of Christ, because Christ Himself is the head of the church. (Colossians 1:18). No one can ever become a member of Christ's church by following manmade rules-regulations. One is not required to fill any kind of forms for becoming member of the church of Christ. The Lord's church CANNOT be joined. But the Lord ADDS to His church daily who are being saved by obeying His gospel. In any place where people obey the gospel of Jesus Christ, then they should know that Christ has added them to His church, to the body of His saved people. One does not have to become a catholic or a protestant to be a follower of Christ or a Christian. Thus the church of Christ can exist in any place independently.

As Christians and members of the Lord's church, followers of Christ in every place come together to worship the Lord every Sunday, which is the first day of the week. On the first day of the week or Sunday Christ had accomplished the work of man's salvation from sin, as He had risen from the dead, after His propitiatory death for the sins of the world. (Matthew 28:1-8; Mark 16:1-8). The word worship means "to adore" or "to pay homage". The Bible, in the New Testament of Christ describes five specific acts or avenues of worship for the Lord's church. These are:

1. Singing of Spiritual songs or hymns. Through our singing we praise God and teach and admonish one another. (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16; Hebrews 13:15). It is to be done with the whole heart. Musical instruments of any kind must not be played with the singing in the worship of the Lord. God desires us to sing for HIM, whom He has created, NOT through the things that we have made with our hands. (Acts 17:24, 25).

2. Prayer, which means "a pouring out" is another significant act of Christian worship. Both prayer and singing must be done with the spirit and with the understanding: As the apostle wrote in 1 Corinthians 14:15, "I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit and I will also sing with the understanding." That

*is, when Christians sing or pray that must be done from the heart—NOT just from lips! And, also with understanding, not just making vain repetitions traditionally (Matthew 6:7). Those who do otherwise, Christ said, "Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: These people draw near to me with their mouths, and honor me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. And in vain they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men." (Matthew 15:8,9). A Christian must pray in the name of Jesus or through the name of Jesus Christ, since He is the mediator between God and men. (1 Timothy 2:5 & Colossians 3:17).

3. Partaking in the Lord's Supper on every first day of the week, Sunday, is the integral part of Christian worship. The Lord's Supper is a simple memorial of Christ's sacrifice on the cross for sinners, which the Lord Himself had instituted prior to His death. (1 Corinthians 11:23-29). The Lord's Supper consists of two elements, which are: the unleavened bread (roti or chapati) and the fruit of the vine (grape juice). Matthew 26:17-29; Luke 22:7-20. A little of each of these elements are partaken of by each Christian man and woman to remember Christ's body and His blood. (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 11:27-29).

4. When Christians come together on every first day of the week to worship the Lord they give of their means; a collection is taken, and every earning member of the church is expected to give for the work of the Lord, as the Lord has prospered them. (1 Corinthians 16:2). This collection must be given with joy and according to one's income; not grudgingly or of necessity. (2 Corinthians 9:6,7).

5. In coming together for worship on each first day of the week, Christians study from the Bible the word of God. An example of this is seen in Acts 20:7. Paul told young preacher Timothy to "preach the word." (2 Timothy 4:2). This is not the time of giving personal testimonies or discussing about any other matters. The word of God must be preached from the Bible. Bible based lessons must be taught, to edify the church. The words written in the Bible are inspired of God and are profitable for doctrine, for instruction, in righteousness, for reproof and for correction; so that each Christian may be complete and thoroughly equipped for every good work to do and live. (2 Timothy 3:16,17).

If you have never attended the worship service of a church of Christ, I encourage you to do so. Find a congregation of the Lord's church in your city or town and attend the worship service on Sunday,

and you will find that all the things that we have observed from the Bible regarding Christian worship are practised there. The address in Delhi, where the Lord's church meets every Sunday, is given on the last page of this booklet. You are most welcome to come and worship with the church of Christ at the time listed. If you are in a place where there is no congregation of the church of Christ, and if you desire that there should be one there then this is very much possible. Obedience to the gospel of Jesus Christ is all that is needed; those who obey His gospel, Christ saves them and adds them to His church. His church can exist in any place. For further information write to the editor.

What It Means To Be Added To The Church

J. C. CHOATE

Most people talk about joining a church. This is something like joining a club such as the Lion's Club or the Rotary Club. In a case like this it is usually left up to the members to accept or reject the one seeking membership. This would mean that the members would have more to say about whether a person became a member of some particular church than the Lord would. There is another side to the picture, however, and that's the Lord's side or his part when it comes to being a member of the church, and this should be the thing that matters more than anything else if one really wants to be saved and to be a member of Christ's church.

First of all, we must understand that the Bible teaches that the Lord built one church and that church belongs to him. (Matthew 16:18). He is the foundation of it (1 Corinthians 3:11), head of it (Colossians 1:18), the saviour of it (Ephesians 5:23), and it wears his name. (Romans 16:16). The church is his spiritual body, his family. (1 Corinthians 12:27; 1 Timothy 3:15). Also, with Christ being the saviour of the church then he has the authority to say who can be a member or not a member. It is certainly not up to man to make such a decision. Then when one complies with the Lord's wishes by obeying his commands to be saved, it is the Lord himself, not man, that is able to discern and know whether that person has obeyed from the heart. If he does so then the Lord saves him and adds that one to his church. (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; Acts

2:47). If he does not then he is not saved or added regardless of what he claims or what anyone else says.

Another way of putting it, when one hears the word of God, it conceives in his heart, and in obedience to the Lord's commands of repentance, acknowledging Christ as the Son of God, and being baptized (buried in water), for the remission of his sins, he is spiritually born again or becomes a member of the Lord's family. (John 3:3-5).

No doubt sometimes we accept people as members of the church when they are really not. All we have to go by are the outward acts of faith, repentance, confessing Christ with the mouth as being the Son of God, and a burial in the waters of baptism for the remission of sins. Now when they say they want to be saved, and are willing to comply with these acts that lead to salvation, then all we can do, once they have outwardly complied with these commands, is to accept the fact that the Lord has saved them and added them to the church. But only the Lord can look into one's heart and know the real motives that are there. Therefore, only the Lord can save one and add him to his church. As Paul wrote, "Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal. The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity." (2 Timothy 2:19).

Especially For Women

Mothers, Is It Worth What It Costs For You To Work Outside The Home?

BETTY B. CHOATE

How times have changed! Most families of generations past lived on farms or in villages, either surrounded by families of relatives or perhaps even living in a large joint-family.

With the changing of economies, many young couples have moved to the cities to find work. They have been caught up with the

financial pressures of city life and of the modern thinking concerning women developing themselves, their careers, and their own lives. An ever-increasing number of young wives, all over the world, now work at jobs outside the home. Whether or not their family could have managed to eat without the added income, the wife *did* take outside work and the couple *grew accustomed* to living on the two salaries. This is a tragic mistake, because it is almost impossible to cut back on family income, once a two-salary habit of spending and way of life has been established.

Then a baby comes. What does the wife do now? The pattern in the world as a whole is for the child to be kept by grandparents, or to be put in some type of day-care facility, so that the mother can continue to bring in that second salary. The family—already budgeted for both salaries, and growing now in size and expense—is convinced it cannot pay its bills without the mother's income.

"Besides, a young baby doesn't realize anything," the parents reason. So the mother goes back to work, thinking that maybe she will stay home with her children after they are old enough to really need her there—if it is financially possible then.

But studies reveal that from the very beginning, a baby responds to the love, moods, and security—or lack of it—in the home. Doctors now feel that the first year of a baby's life is perhaps the most important, in the development of thriving health and emotional security. It is the time when "bonding" takes place. If the mother is continually there, creating a stable environment filled with physical and emotional love, the baby will be happy and well-balanced, emotionally.

However, babies who are left daily with others, and especially those who are taken to public child-care places, often are sickly and mal-adjusted. Such effects should not be surprising when one considers that the baby must go to its keeper regardless of whether or not it is well, and regardless of the wellness of other children in the same nursery. Naturally, too, attendants will not have the time or the patience to give each baby the attention in needs, for its own nurturing.

Yes, admittedly, there are situations in which the mother has no choice but to work outside the home. Either the husband is dead, or disabled, or just cannot earn enough money to keep food on the table and a roof over the family. Such cases are the exception and are sad, because there is *no choice*. At least the damage done to the family is less if, in such circumstances, the grandparents are able to help with the

rearing of the children so that the family love and bonding are as nearly normal as possible.

But in those cases where the wife simply *chooses* to work in order to buy more of the extras she wants her family to have, or when she works, because her husband likes having the added income, *every rupee she earns is extracted directly from her own children's well-being.* At their great cost, she is buying unnecessary extras; at their cost, there is financial ease.

In too many cases, at a very early age the children become their own baby-sitters, in order to save child-care charges. They come home from school and do whatever they please, without supervision, or as their own consciences dictate obedience to the parents' instructions. Television may become the baby-sitter; or time may be spent with other neighborhood children who are also growing up without close supervision. Regardless, children in their formative years are at great risk when left day after day on their own, and the costly payment for such "economy" will continue throughout life.

When both parents work outside the home, they return at the end of the day, tired, often irritable, and in no mood for all the chores waiting for them at home. With a meal to prepare, clothes to wash, cleaning to do, children's studies to supervise, there is no time for nurturing family bonds. There is no time to hear the small things that filled each person's day; no time to talk out feelings and emotions; no time to teach spiritual and moral principles; no time to develop the vital bonds of love that are needed to help a family weather the challenges that will surely come.

Even a cursory look at the western world should be enough to alert and alarm parents about the tragedy of following this path. Since World War II a growing percentage of American mothers have worked outside the home, so that now far more than half the mothers of pre-school-age children are not at home with their little ones. Parallel with this statistic has grown the divorce rate, physical abuse within the family, the rate of mental and emotional problems, crime, juvenile crime, and every kind of moral and social problem known to man. Certainly, many other factors influence these statistics as well, but the basic and underlying cause of all of them lies in the decay of the home—which began *when mothers left their God given work of being wives and home-makers and mothers, and devoted their time and energies instead to competing in the man's world to earn a living.*

If the rest of the world would spare itself untold sorrow and

destruction, it should look on the effect of this system in America and be warned. God says, ". . . admonish the young women to *love their husbands, to love their children*, to be discreet, chaste, *homemakers*, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed." (Titus 2:4,5) We cannot improve on His wisdom. He planned marriage, parenthood, and the home, and He knows what is required to make it function successfully. A loving and devoted wife and mother, keeping the home, is the basis of the welfare of the entire human race.

Women can do no greater work.

Three Epochs Of The Gospel!

DILLARD THURMAN

The Gospel of Christ did not burst upon mankind as a sudden sunrise! God was pleased to develop His *Good News* by three epochs: Prophecy; Preparation; and finally, a complete Revolution. The way of salvation was not made known under the law. Nor was it fully revealed in the personal ministry of our Lord on earth! Speaking of that salvation, Peter wrote of prophets gone before: "*Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into.*" (1 Pet. 1:12). Though the gospel was known by the prophets as a coming attraction, they were not able to apprehend it nor comprehend it! It was for coming generations!

The Epoch of Gospel Prophecy!

That the gospel was preached in prophecy was well known by the apostles. Paul wrote: "*And the scripture foreseeing that God would justify the heathen by faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed.*" (Gal. 3:8). Thus even in the days of Abraham, the gospel was preached! Too, it was shown that the blessing of God would come upon mankind by the *SEED*. Then to pinpoint this further it was written: "*Now to Abraham and his seed were*

the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ." (Gal. 3:16). Read carefully where this promise was made long ago: Gen 12:3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; and 28:14. That promise, often repeated, God would surely keep in the fullness of time! Those under the law are referred to in the passage: *"For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it."* (Heb. 4:2). Oh yes, those under the law heard the gospel, but not in its fulness and clarity as we have it presented to us: *"God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect."* (Heb. 11:40).

The Epoch of Gospel Preparation

In preparation for the Good News of salvation, John the Baptist came fulfilling Isa 40:3—*"As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiahs the prophet, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight."* (Lk. 3:4; Mt. 3:3; Mk. 1:2-3). John preached, *"Repent ye; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."* (Mt. 3:3). Jesus came with the same message! *"From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."* (Mt. 4:17). During His personal ministry, Jesus never taught that God's kingdom had been established on earth! *"Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God."* (Mk. 1:14). *"And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom."* (Mt. 4:23; see also Mt. 9:35). Though the gospel of the kingdom was preached by Jesus, that kingdom had not been established! His every reference to it was futuristic, pointing out that it was *at hand* or approaching. It was much later that we read: *"And he said unto them, Verily, I say unto you. That there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God. come with power."* (Mk. 9:1). He preached the gospel of that kingdom, but it was yet to come!

Gospel Preached in Preparation

Jesus sent out the twelve with instructions that they were to *"Go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as ye go, preach, saying, The Kingdom of heaven is at hand."* (Mt. 10:6-7). That kingdom was not present, but was *"at hand."* *The kingdom had not yet come, but*

was "at hand." Later Jesus chose seventy, and sent them forth with instructions: "Say unto them, the kingdom of God is come nigh unto you." (Lk. 10:9). So long as Jesus was on earth, that kingdom was yet in the future. Some try to prove that it was set up in the days of John, quoting: "The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it." (Lk. 16:16). During that time the kingdom was preached, and every man pressed into the preaching of it! That is shown in the message of John, Jesus, the twelve and the seventy! Everyone was engaged in proclaiming. "The kingdom is at hand!" But Christ was not crowned until He ascended to the right hand of God; and you must have a King to have a kingdom! Keep in mind that even to the day of His ascension, His disciples asked, "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6). They yet awaited the kingdom!

Disciples Directed to Preach It!

While Jesus walked and talked with them. He gave instructions as to how they should tell the *Good News*. The scope of its proclamation was definitely set: "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come." (Mt. 24:14). Wherever sin had gone, the gospel of the kingdom, the message of salvation, was to go also! "Thus it is written, and thus it behoved the Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." (Lk. 24:46-47). Even to this day, His disciples must not lose sight of this challenge to faith!

How clearly the terms of salvation were to be stated in the gospel! Jesus said, "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 always, even to the end of the world, Amen." (Mt. 28:19-20). Now combine this with what is recorded again: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." (Mk. 16:15-16). They were to go and preach; folk had to believe, repent and be baptized—and then they were saved from sin! It was just that plain and simple! And what He commanded, they did! "And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen." (Mk. 16:20). The commission was obeyed!

The Epoch of Gospel Proclamation!

The fulness of the gospel could not be preached while Jesus yet lived. Paul said the facts of the gospel included the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 15:1-4). Jesus had said this preaching should begin at Jerusalem (Lk. 24:47; Acts 1:7-8). Thus it was on the day of Pentecost after His resurrection, that Peter preached the first gospel sermon in Jerusalem wherein Christ was extolled as a risen Lord! It was when they heard him declare that *"God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ,"* that they cried out, *"Men and brethren, what shall we do?"* Peter then told 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 2:36-38). *"With many other words"* Peter exhorted them, and the result was shown: *"Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls."* (Acts 2:40-41). This is where the gospel proclamation began, and the pattern was set (Acts 11:15; 15:8-9)! From this time forth, the gospel demanded faith in Christ, repentance, and baptism into Him! This was the means of salvation; *"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek."* (Rom. 1:16). When they *"went every where preaching the word,"* they obtained the same results! *"Then Philip went down to Samaria and preached Christ unto them . . . But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women."* (Acts 8:5, 12). This shows the simple progression of the gospel preached by them! The same results came with Philip's preaching to the Ethiopian eunuch (8:26-40).

The Apostles Wrote of this Gospel

Long after the gospel was first preached in Jerusalem, inspired men of God wrote regarding the gospel and its effect on lives of its converts. To saints at Rome Paul wrote: *"But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness."* (Rom. 6:17-18). The *form of doctrine* was the gospel they heard, received and obeyed! Paul stated the gospel which he received was *"that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again."* (1 Cor. 15:3-4). Now notice how this is exemplified in their obedience: *"Know ye not, that so many of us as*

were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted with him in the likeness of his death, we shall also be in the likeness of his resurrection." (Rom. 6:3-5). The gospel is amply emulated in their obedience: they died to past sins, were buried from those sins, and rose to a new life in Christ. "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus Paul could say, "I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye received, and wherein ye stand; by which also ye are saved." (1 Cor. 15:1-5). He called it, "the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation," (Eph. 1:13).

But friend, there was another view of this matter. A warning is given to those who refuse to accept this gospel of salvation! "And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and the glory of his power." (2 Thes. 1:7-9). He is the Saviour of all who obey him (Heb. 5:8-9), and those who do His commandments will be ushered in to glory (Rev. 22:14). But woe unto all who reject the gospel of salvation!

The Power Of His Death And Resurrection

RON BRYANT

There is a real connection, beyond our comprehension, between the death of Christ and the forgiveness of men's sins. This is the thrust of the Old Testament (see Isaiah 53:4-12), and this is in agreement with the very message of the Gospel (1 Corinthians 15:1-4). Jesus "*died for our sins*," (literally, "*on account of our sins*"). This is no formulated creed, but a clear declaration of the historical fact. That which did take place and is a matter of irrefutable historical fact, was foretold in Scripture (Luke 22:37; 24:25-27, 44-46; Acts 2:25-27; 3:35; 13:34-35;

17:3; 18:28).

The death of Christ for our sins is also vitally connected with the power of His resurrection. In His death and burial He came down to our level and met our needs of forgiveness and cleansing. In His resurrection He made it possible for us to be raised up to His level. He died on the cross, paying the debt of sin "*once for all times*." He arose from the dead, and remains alive as the Risen One. He conquered sin in His death, and conquered death in His resurrection. Christ has been raised from the dead; this, to, is a matter of history. Jesus is the first and foremost example of all those that are to be raised. It is to be affirmed: If Christ be risen, others can rise. In truth, when His relation to mankind is considered, it can be affirmed, others will rise.

This death of Christ on the cross and the resurrection of Christ from the grave are not to be viewed as points to be mechanically embraced, but as sources of Divine power which extend personal redemption and personal resurrection to the believer. His resurrection stands to vindicate all of His claims, gives credence to the authority of His Word, and is the support of all that He has promised. He has secured for us a life beyond the grave, for He Himself possesses that life (Romans 5:1-11; Philippians 3:10; Colossians 3:1ff). The good news is "*Christ died for our sins, was buried, and arose from the dead*," and all of this was foretold in Scripture.

God's Intimate Knowledge

CHRIS V. PHILLIPS

God is omniscient. He knows all. He knows the past, the present and the future. His understanding is unfathomable.

He has known every individual perfectly well. A psalm of David proclaimed of Jehovah that he sees the bones of a person being formed secretly in the womb (Ps. 139:15). David also sang that Jehovah knows very well of our formation (Ps. 103:14).

Every individual's birth is a solemn event. God has perfect knowledge of each person coming into existence. Jesus the Christ taught that we are of much more worth than the birds of the air (Matt. 6:26).

In vain do we sometimes lament that God is oblivious of our miseries.

A sure thing that God offers us, His creation, is intellect and reason. That might vary in degree from person to person. But he offers the capacity to understand about him through inquisition into the nature that he created.

A person only needs to approach God willingly and maintain intimate relationship with him in order to get to know the meaning of life. Inasmuch as we are precious in God's sight, he will have a plan for every child of his.

The one who saw my substance (embryo) during conception (Ps. 139.16) will not obliterate my responsibility during my life!

Sometimes God ordains some for certain specific tasks. The word of Jehovah came to Jeremiah saying that he knew Jeremiah before he came forth out of his Mother's womb and sanctified him as prophet (Jer. 1:5).

We must only get in right tune with God to realize our duties. As we walk with God he will be able to use us for his glory in his own way and at his appointed time.

Apostle Paul long after when he had persecuted Christians, realized that it was God who separated him from his mother's womb (Gal. 1:5) and made him a humble and persecuted servant of God.

Fasting: When, Not If

DON PRUITT

All of us at times are frustrated by our spiritual importance. Sometimes we know our prayers do not go higher than the roof. We go through periods when we cannot accomplish what we would like to accomplish. Paul experienced this same problem. He said, "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do" (Rom. 7:18-19). We are all familiar with that feeling. The apostle explained that the trouble lies within ourselves. "For the flesh lusteth

against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would" (Gal. 5:17). We wrestle with our weaknesses. We perform our worship and spiritual duties as though we are simply going through the motions. We lack the ability to focus our lives. The problem most of us have is that we see ourselves as physical beings trying to be spiritual, rather than spiritual beings that have certain physical experiences. One of the best ways God gave us to bring the flesh under control is fasting.

To fast is to abstain from food or to abstain from certain kinds of food for a period of time. There is nothing intrinsically wrong or sinful about food. Nutrition is a physical need. Perhaps the best way to look at fasting is that it is a spiritual means to an end. The Word of God talks about fasting more than seventy-five times. Saints almost never talk about it. Many Christians believe that fasting is an Old Testament practice. Yet, this subject is mentioned in the New Testament nearly three times as often as the Lord's Supper. The brotherhood is informed about the Lord's Supper, but largely ignorant about fasting. I have been a member of the Lord's church for more than thirty years and have never heard a sermon on fasting. I was nearly forty years old before I knew that the Lord intended for me to fast.

Types of Fasts

Three different types of fasts are mentioned in God's Word: the normal fast, the absolute fast, and the partial fast. The normal fast is most often mentioned and occurs when one abstains from all food, but not fluids. "And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungered" (Mt. 4:2; cf. Lk. 4:2). These passages show that when the fast was over He was hungry but not thirsty. Physicians tell us that the human body can go long periods without eating but cannot survive more than a few days without drinking. On the occasions in the Old Testament when people abstained from fluids for long periods, they must have had some Divine assistance (Deut. 9:9,18; Ex. 34:28; Jon. 3:1-10).

The absolute fast is one in which the participant neither eats nor drinks. Perhaps the most familiar example was when a blinded Saul was waiting in Damascus. "And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink" (Acts 9:9). Also, on the occasion when Queen Esther went before the king to intercede for the Jews who were to be exterminated, she requested fasting since her life was in grave danger.

She told Mordecai, "Go gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day: I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law; and if I perish, I perish" (Esth. 4:16). These passages and others show that an absolute fast is distinguished from other fasts in the Bible by the participants neither eating nor drinking.

The third type of fast mentioned is a partial fast and is found in Daniel 1:12-15. The partial fast occurs when one restricts himself to a certain type of food, such as the vegetable pulse that Daniel ate in this text.

Prove thy servants, I beseech thee, ten days; and let them give us pulse to eat, and water to drink. Then let our countenances be looked upon before thee, and the countenance of the children that eat of the portion of the king's meat: and as thou seest, deal with thy servants. So he consented to them in this matter, and proved them ten days. And at the end of ten days their countenances appeared fairer and fatter in flesh than all the children which did eat the portion of the king's meat.

When, Not If

"Are we commanded to fast?" is a question that has troubled serious-minded Christians for many years. Even though the New Testament gives no such command, it clearly implies that Christians are to fast. Two scriptures stand out as the most critical in seeking the Lord's will in this matter.

In Matthew 6:1-18, Jesus spoke of three religious activities that spiritual people perform. In verse 2 He said, "Therefore when thou doest thine alms . . ." In verse 5 He said, "And when thou prayest . . ." In verse 16:18 He said,

Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.

Notice that the Lord does not say "if ye fast," but "when ye fast." He speaks of fasting in the same way He speaks of alms giving and prayer. We are to give alms, pray and fast. When we do them, we are not to be hypocritical in their performance. Why do we practice the first two activities and not the last? Why do we believe alms giving and prayer are New Testament responsibilities, but that fasting belongs in Old Testament times? In this text it is obvious that Jesus assumes that spiritual people fast, but they need instruction on how to do it properly.

Another passage that seems crucial in understanding the necessity of fasting is Matthew 9:14-15.

Then came to him the disciples of John, saying, Why do we and the Pharisees fast oft, but thy disciples fast not? And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridechamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? but the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast.

The Pharisees fasted ritualistically. One said, "I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess" (Lk. 18:12). The followers of John the Immerser were fasting regularly, too. But on this occasion, the disciples of Jesus were not fasting. When criticized, Jesus explained that while the Bridegroom was with them it was a time for feasting, not fasting. However, He said there would come a time when His disciples would fast. When is that time? Was it during the legalistic system of Moses? No! Was it while Jesus was on the earth? No! Will His disciples fast after He has left the earth? Yes! The only sensible way to view this passage is to understand that the Lord's disciples would fast during the New Testament age—in the church! Jesus makes this clear as He continues in verses 16-18.

No man putteth a piece of new cloth unto an old garment, for that which is put in to fill it up taketh from the garment, and the rent is made worse. Neither do men put new wine into old bottles: else the bottles break and the wine runneth out, and the bottles perish: but they put new wine into new bottles, and both are preserved.

An honest hearer cannot escape the force of the Lord's teaching in these passages. He made it very clear that He expected His disciples to fast. Even though we do not fast with the ritualistic regularity of the Pharisees in the Old Testament dispensation, New Testament saints must fast in this age! When Paul looked back over what was involved in

being a servant of Christ, one of the many things he listed was "fastings often" (2 Cor. 11:27; 2 Cor. 6:4-5). We need to be like Anna, a widow of over one hundred years of age, who "served God with fastings and prayers night and day" (Lk. 2:37).

Benefits of Fasting

Most of us want to know, "Why should I fast? What is in it for me?" We can be assured that the Christian receives a number of benefits when he fasts properly. We learned earlier in the Sermon on the Mount that we can fast improperly and for the wrong reasons. Fasting is a great deal more than a weight-loss program. Dieting is a physical activity. Fasting is a spiritual one. In Zechariah 7:4-6, the people of God were fasting, but it was not anything spiritual and God was not pleased. he said, "When ye fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh month, even those seventy years, did ye at all fast unto me, even to me?" Fasting must be God centered!

First of all, fasting is a discipline that will help us to grow in personal sanctity. One of the obvious reasons we have trouble being spiritually-minded is the appetites of the flesh are so strong. The body controls what we do and when we do it. We usually do not eat because we are hungry. We eat because it is time to eat. We have been taught that we must eat three good meals each day. We have taught ourselves to snack between meals and before bedtime. The world has lined the streets of our cities with fast-food places to satisfy varied taste. One of the sins of Sodom listed in Ezekiel 16:49 was "fullness of bread." even in the church we are driven to the table. We cannot seem to have the preacher to our house unless we feed him. If you start to invite someone over after worship, the lady of the house says, "Not tonight, I don't have anything fixed to eat." Every "get-together" of saints is built around refreshments. And then there are those all-day dinners. We used to have "dinner on the grounds and singing on Sunday." Now it is just an all-day dinner! The only time Christians come together is to eat or worship. And even while we worship, we watch the clock because if it lasts too long, lunch will burn! We must get the flesh under control and the spiritual man in charge! Paul said, "But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others I myself, should be a castaway" (1 Cor. 9:5). Even our sexual appetites are to be controlled by the spiritual man. "Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan

tempt you not for your incontinency" (1 Cor. 7:5).

David speaks of "when I wept, and chastened my soul with fasting" (ps. 69:10). Psalms 35:13 says, "But as for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth: I humbled my soul with fasting: and my prayer returned into mine own bosom." I do not understand a great deal about the chemistry that occurs in the human body during a fast, but I do know that we are humbled. Humility is a vital part of Christianity. It is the soil in which the Christian graces grow. Brethren, since humility is a basic ingredient of true holiness, it is needful from time to time to humble our souls with fasting.

Secondly, fasting will also change your prayer life. Many of us simply do not pray as we should. And when we pray, it seems so lackadaisical, repetitious, and self-centered! We must pray fervently. "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (Jas. 5:16). This word fervent means "Zealous, intense, hot or boiling." That is the kind of prayer that will avail much. But does that sound like a description of our prayer life? In Jeremiah 19:13, God said, "And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart." There is a seeking and searching for God that is to be done with commitment. How do we seek God with all our hearts? The prophet said in Joel 2:12-13, "Therefore also now, saith the Lord, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: and rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto your God."

Notice again the connection of fasting and humility. When we combine our prayers with fasting, it increases the urgency with which we seek God in order to be heard on high. When Ezra and the people of God were returning to Jerusalem from the captivity of Babylon, he said,

Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river of Ahava, that we might afflict ourselves before God, to seek of him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance. For I was ashamed to require of the king a band of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy in the way; because we had spoken unto the king, saying, The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek him; but his power and his wrath is against all them that forsake him. So we fasted and besought our God for this: and he was entreated of us (Ezra 8:21-23).

When Saul of Tarsus was waiting in Damascus to be told what he

must do to please God, he spent three days in blind darkness, fasting and praying. Over and over again we can see in the work of God the undeniable connection of humility, fasting, and prayer. There is tremendous power in the combination of these three.

That brings us to the final benefit that I will mention in this treatise. Fasting and prayer are used in Scripture to change the mind of God. The mind of God is awesome. He lives and rules in the lives of men. This is our Father's world. He has revealed for us His unchangeable Word. We must live in obedience to His divine will. Concerning His providence and some of the everyday affairs of our lives, there are occasions in which we seek to change the mind of God. We are concerned about events in our lives and in the lives of our loved ones. We pray for the sick. We are commanded to pray for the sick. We pray believing. When someone is gravely ill and it appears God has determined their end, we pray and ask Him to spare that life and return their health to them. When King Hezekiah was sick unto death. God sent Isaiah to tell him to "set thine house in order; for thou shalt die, and not live." God had made up His mind. The king would die. But Hezekiah wept and prayer, and God changed his mind! Even before the prophet left the king's palace, God told him to return and tell the King that he would be healed, and his life increased fifteen years (2 Kgs. 20:1-7).

When David sinned with Uriah's wife, God said "the child that is born unto thee shall surely die." When the child became sick, David knew the verdict. The mind of God had been revealed. 2 Samuel 12:16 says, "David therefore besought God for the child: and David fasted, and went in, and lay all night upon the earth." He laid there for seven days and fasted. When David heard the child was dead, the record says in verses 20-23.

Then David arose from the earth, and washed, and anointed himself and changed his apparel, and came into the house of the Lord, and worshipped: then he came to his own house; and when he required, they set bread before him, and he did eat. Then said his servants unto him. What thing is this that thou hast done? thou didst fast and weep for the child, while it was alive; but when the child was dead, thou didst rise and eat bread. And he said, While the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept: for I said, Who can tell whether God will be gracious to me, that the child may live? But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me.

While David was trying to change God's mind he fasted and wept for seven days. But when God did not change his mind, there was no animosity. David got up and bathed, changed his clothes, and went to worship the Lord. Then he broke the fast. Also we must see that there was no anger toward David from God for trying to change his mind.

When Jonah finally got to Nineveh he cried, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown." Jonah 3:5-10 says.

So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them. For word came unto the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. And he caused to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh by decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste any thing: let them not feed, nor drink water: But let man and beast be covered with sack-cloth, and cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that in their hands. Who can tell God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not? And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did not.

When this destruction was at hand, these people proclaimed a fast, repented, and cried unto the Lord. As a result, the Lord changed his mind! God spared the very city he had doomed:

In each of these occasions, these ancient people who faced an emergency situation called upon the Lord with fasting. These passages demonstrate that there is tremendous power at the Christian's disposal. The combination of humility, fasting, and prayer can be a great force in a Christian's life. It can even change the mind of God. We need to utilize that power. Before we can change the world by the power of the Gospel, many of us must change ourselves and grow in these Christian disciplines.

We can see from this study that the Lord intended for His people in this age to practice the discipline of fasting. He taught us to fast. He taught us how to fast. And he taught us the benefits of fasting. It is this writer's hope that Christians everywhere will seriously consider this Bible subject.

The Stranger We Took In

A few months before I was born, my Dad met a stranger who was new to our small Tennessee town. From the beginning, Dad was fascinated with this enchanting newcomer, and soon invited him to live in our family. The stranger was quickly accepted and was around to welcome me into the world a few months later.

As I grew up I never questioned his place in our family. In my young mind each member had a special niche. My brother, Bill, five years my senior, was my example. Fran, my younger sister gave me the opportunity to play "big brother" and to develop the art of teasing. My parents were complimentary instructors—Mom taught me to love the Word of God and Dad taught me to obey it.

But, the stranger was our storyteller. He could weave the most fascinating tales. Adventures, mysteries, and comedies were daily conversations. He would hold our entire family spellbound for hours each evening.

If I wanted to know all about politics, history, or science, he knew it all. He knew about the past, understood the present, and seemingly could predict the future. The pictures he could draw were so full of life that I would often laugh or cry as I watched.

He was like a friend to the whole family. He took Dad, Bill, and me to our first major league baseball game. He was always encouraging us to see movies, and he even made arrangements to introduce us to several movie stars. My brother and I were deeply impressed by John Wayne in particular.

The stranger was an incessant talker. Dad didn't seem to mind, but sometimes Mom would quietly get up while the rest of us were enthralled with one of his stories of faraway places, but Mom would go to her room, read her Bible, and pray. I wonder if she ever prayed that the stranger would leave.

You see, my Dad ruled our household with certain moral conditions and convictions, yet somehow this stranger never felt obligated to honor them. Profanity, for example, was not allowed in our house—not from us, from our friends, or from adults. Our long term visitor, however, used occasional four letter words that burned my ears and made Dad squirm. To my knowledge the stranger was never confronted.

My Dad was a tee-totaler who didn't permit alcohol in his home, but the stranger felt we needed exposure. He didn't actually ever give us any alcohol, but he constantly tried to enlighten us to other ways of life. He covered the gusto side of life with beer and other alcoholic beverages.

He talked freely (probably much too freely) about sex. His comments were sometimes blafant, sometimes suggestive, and generally embarrassing. I know now that my early concepts of the man-women relationship were influenced by the stranger.

As I look back, I believe it was the grace of God and what we had been taught in church and Sunday school, that kept the stranger from deceiving us. Time after time he opposed the moral values of the Bible. Yet no one said much about it, and no one wanted him to leave.

More than thirty years have passed since the stranger first moved in with our family. To be honest I found a stranger like him and took him into my own home. Now they both sit in the den of my parents home and in my home. He waits patiently for someone to listen to him talk, and you look at him as he talks.

His name? . . . We always called him by his initials: T.V.

The Empty Tomb And Emotions

Ed LOYD .

In reviewing all the numerous stories the Bible relays to us concerning the miraculous healings, the feeding of the multitudes, the casting out of demons and other truths, the one Biblical fact that most skeptics of Holy Writ find incomprehensible, is that of the resurrection of Jesus.

In Luke chapter 24:1-12 we are told that several women coming early in the morning, after the Sabbath day, in anoint the body of Jesus. Of course they found the stone blocking the tomb's entrance, rolled away, and the body of Jesus gone. With that as a prelude, place yourself in the same set of circumstances. What do you think might be your emotions as you gaze about the empty tomb that once housed our Lord's body.

From the afore mentioned scripture, the first feeling we see is that of love. The women came at day break on the first day of the week for the purpose of anointing Jesus's body with sweet spices which they had prepared. They no doubt had worked long and hard in preparation for this task. Also, this shows no anticipation of the resurrection of Jesus, yet they were willing to render service to Jesus even after his death.

Another feeling they may have displayed was that of disappointment. In Matthew's account of the empty tomb (Matthew 28:1-11) we are told that an earthquake had erupted and an angel of the Lord had descended and rolled the immense stone away from the entrance to the tomb. When the women entered, they no doubt were very disappointed to find the body of Jesus gone! Their intentions were to anoint the body of Jesus and this could not be carried out.

In verse 4 of Luke chapter 24, disappointment turns now to perplexity. The tomb was a puzzle, a mystery. Who could have consummated this act? Where is the body of Jesus?

However, amidst the turmoil and confusion as to the whereabouts of Jesus' body, comes a ray of hope. (vs 4-7.) The angel of the Lord asked. "Why do you look for the living among the dead?" (A kind rebuke). "He is not here; he has risen." Then finally a gentle reminder, "Remember how he told you while he was still in Galilee. Saying, the son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again." Verse 8 says, "And they remembered his words."

Upon their recounting the words of Jesus relative to his resurrection (vs. 8-10), there was no resurrection (vs. 8-10), there was no doubt a feeling of joy. The empty tomb was proof to all, that this was true.

As we gaze upon our lives in the 20th Century, from the perspective of the empty tomb, does it affect our feelings? It should; the scriptures tell us that one day we too shall rise from the grave to enter either eternal glory or eternal destruction.