

THE BIBLE TEACHER

Pleading for the Restoration of Pure New Testament Christianity

Vol. 38

July 2007

No. 3

EDITORIAL

What Does the Bible Teach?

"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."

The Bible is the book of sixty-six books; and there are two divisions of these sixty-six books. The first division of thirty-nine books is called the Old Testament and the second division of twenty-seven books is called the New Testament. The word testament means covenant or will. Obviously then, God made two covenants or wills at two different times for two different kind of people. All of the sixty-six books of the Bible were written by the inspiration of God's Holy Spirit, as we read from 2Timothy 3:16 and 2 Peter 1: 20,21. The first division of the Bible, the Old Testament contains the story of creation, how God in the beginning created everything; and how sin entered the world; and how God promised to send the Saviour of the world from sin. The Old Testament shows how God had chosen a people who were of Jewish origin and were called Israelites, through whom God had planned to bring the Saviour of the world. To these people God had given some laws to follow, which are a part of the Old Testament. But when Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world came on earth in fulfillment of God's promise, and fulfilled the law's every requirement, then God made, the Old Testament laws obsolete, and gave The New Testament

in its place, through Jesus Christ and His apostles. (Read: Colossians 2:14; Hebrews 8:7, 13; Galatians 5:4).

Today God's covenant, His will is revealed for us in the New Testament of the Bible. Paul, the apostle, therefore said to his co-worker Timothy, in 2 Timothy 2:15 that he should be diligent to present himself approved unto God, rightly dividing the word of truth. He was telling him to handle aright God's word by making proper division of the things written in the Old and the New Testament of the Bible. For some people this is a genuine problem even today in understanding the Bible. For example some think the first day of the week, Sunday, on which Christians come together to worship God today, is Sabbath. Sabbath is a Hebrew word and means rest. Sabbath was not the first day of the week but was the last day, Saturday. According to the Old Testament law which was given at Sinai, the seventh day was to be a day of rest in which no secular work was to be done and it was to be kept holy to God. (Exodus 20:8-11; 16:23). After the death, burial, resurrection and ascension of Christ into heaven, His disciples, however, met for worship on the first day of the week. (Acts 20:7). Under the New Testament of Christ, first day of the week, Sunday, is the day of worship, and not the day of rest. This is the day on which Christ was resurrected after His death and burial. (Mark 16: 1-8). This is the day on which Christ established His Church (Acts 2).

Some have problem in understanding as to why Christ, after His resurrection, told His disciples to go and preach the gospel to every-one everywhere and he who believes and will be baptized will be saved, as we read in Mark 16:16. they point out that the thief who was put to death along with Jesus didn't need to be baptized. Christ told him on the basis of his faith in Him that "today you will be with Me in Paradise." (Luke 23:43). Since the thief didn't need to be baptize to go to Paradise, why should I, someone would say? Again, we need to handle aright the word of truth, to understand it. Both Christ and the thief still lived under the Old Testament law when Christ spoke those words. The New Testament of Christ became effective or forceful only after His death as we read from Hebrews 9:11-22. Just like any other will, Christ's will or testament came in force after His death. (Math. 26:26-28)

Still others do not understand, why it is taught that under the New Testament we should not use instruments of music while

singing in worship to God. (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16; Heb.13:15). They argue and say that David used them under the Old Testament. This is the precise reason why we can't use them, musical instruments, under the New Testament, because we do not live today under the Old Testament law. We live under a different law of God. David did many other things under the Old law, he would dance while singing and also he married many wives, and did other things which we cannot even think of doing today. David did not live under the New Testament of Christ, as we do.

What about tithing? There are some who are teaching that Christians must give their tithes or tenth of their income according to the Bible. In the Old Testament of the Bible we do read of people giving tenth of their income, it was an ancient practice. However, in the New Testament, neither Christ, nor His apostles have commanded Christians to practice tithing. The New Testament teaches that Christians ought to give their offerings on the first day of the week, as they come together for worship, according to their prosperity (1 Cor. 16:1,2). 2 Cor. 9:7 reads, "So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity, for God loves a cheerful giver." This is quite the opposite of tithing.

Sure, the Bible is the word of God. But one must learn to rightly divide the word of truth, understanding that there are two different laws or testaments in the Bible. *The* one under which we live today is the New Testament of Jesus Christ.

Working With God

J.C. CHOATE

First, I would like to remind you that the heavens and earth are the works of God. The Psalmist David said, speaking of God, "Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth: and the heavens are the work of thy hands". (Psalm chapter 102, and verse 25). The Hebrew writer said, "And, Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands: They shall perish; but thou remainest; and they all shall wax old as doth a garment; And as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years

shall not fail." (Hebrews 1:10-12).

Not only did God make the heavens and the earth, but all things therein, and that included man and woman. Then He set the law of nature in motion whereby each living thing would be able to reproduce itself. We read, "And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth: and it was so". (Genesis 1:11). Continuing, "And God said, Let the earth bring forth the living creature after its kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after its kind: and it was so". (Genesis 1:24). Concerning man, we read, "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth". (Genesis 1:27, 28).

Now when God created man and woman, and all of the other living things, and set the law of reproducing into force, with the result of each one reproducing after their kind, then that made it possible for life to continue up to this lime. But who is responsible for it? Whose work is it? We must admit that God is responsible for all of it, even up to this very hour.

Man has accomplished great things, but who created man? Who gave him his intelligence and his ability to learn and to do all of these things? Again, that is God.

Although man has been able to do some great things, as man himself views them and measures them but that may be very little in comparison to what he might have been able to do, had he sought God's help. How can God bless man's efforts when he thinks he is all-wise, that he doesn't need God, and even rejects the idea of God? James said, "For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God". (James 1:20). Some give lip service to God, but in reality they deny him. Paul said concerning this type: "They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate". (Titus 1:16). Again, he said, "For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself. But let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another". (Galatians 6:3, 4).

God has done many things, as with the creation, but he has not seen fit to continue to miraculously create things. He sent his Son into this world to live and die for man that he might be saved, and then he gave man the job of taking this good news to the world. Christ commanded the apostles, "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". (Mark 16:15,16). You will note that the Lord not only commanded the apostles to take the gospel to every creature in all the world, but he told them to preach the terms of salvation. Those terms were, that the hearer would have to believe and be baptized to be saved. The Lord did his part in providing salvation, but then after that it would be up to man to obey God and take the gospel to others. But what if man refused to take it? Then it would not be taken, because the Lord would not take it. What if man refused to obey the gospel that was taken? Then he would be lost because of his unbelief. When a person believes in the Lord with all of his heart then he is going to do whatever the Lord has asked him to do, as in the case of the man from Ethiopia as recorded in Acts 8. But someone might say, "I thought salvation was provided by the grace and mercy of the Lord, and that one cannot do enough to be saved". That's right. Salvation is by grace and mercy (Ephesians 2:8, 9; Titus 3:5), but just because one obeys the Lord's commands to be saved, that doesn't mean that he has earned his salvation. One is just proving to the Lord, in that case, that he believes in him enough to obey him. If one doesn't believe in the Lord enough to obey him, then why should he think the Lord should save him anyway?

So the Lord needs workers today—those that will obey him, become members of his church, and then carry out his orders. Paul said, "We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain". (2 Corinthians 6:1). Again, Paul wrote, "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth". (2 Timothy 2:15). Hear him again: "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them". (Ephesians 2:10). That means then that we must be in Christ, in the church, to qualify to work with him, and for him to work with us. It means

that we must accept each other, but that we must realize that he is the Lord and that we are the servants. If we will then carry out his instructions, then he will bless us and bless those that will receive the message we proclaim by word of mouth and through the example that we set.

The Lord can take us and mould us and change us into his likeness, provided we will submit to him, obey his will, and yield our selves to him and his wishes. He can make great workers out of us. He can work through us to accomplish his purposes and to do things we never dreamed possible. He wants to do more and more for us, and for others, if we will but work with him.

The apostle Paul said, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose". (Romans 8:28). Reading on, he says, "What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord". (Romans 8:31-39). Paul said personally, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me". (Philippians 4:13).

My friends, if we are with the Lord and he is with us, then he will bless us and help us to bear much good fruit. What greater thing could we do in this world? There is nothing more important than saving souls, ours and others, as we carry forth the gospel of Christ to a lost and dying world.

Image and Form of God

THOMAS DOHLING

"He is the IMAGE of the INVISIBLE God, the firstborn over all creation."—Col. 1:15 : [Christ] being the brightness of [the Father's] glory and the express IMAGE of His Person... Heb.1:3.

The Bible says that Christ Jesus is the FORM of the FORMLESS God. The EXACT FORM of GOD'S PERSON.

"For it pleased the Father that in Him [Jesus] all fullness should dwell." [Col.1:19.]

What fullness is the apostle Paul talking about here? We find the answer in Col.2:9: "For in Him [Jesus] dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily."

The fullness of invisible DEITY finds FORM in Jesus. In other words, Jesus is the visible IMAGE of the invisible Godhead. He is the Word incarnate [John 1:14], the expression of Deity. Eternal, Almighty God showed Himself to humanity in and through Jesus Christ. Therefore, the Scriptures speak of "For by Him all things were created...All things were created by Him and for Him" [Col.1:16]. It could not be any other way. God made the worlds through Jesus, God's One and Only Unique Son, the FIRSTBORN over all creation. When God SPOKE, JESUS WAS!

Jesus is the EXPRESSION [visible form] of the invisible Father's mind, His Will, His Way, His Life, the Truth of His Reality, His Being. When we look at Jesus, we KNOW ETERNAL, ALMIGHTY GOD IS. Therefore, all things were made by the Word, through the Word, for Himself.

What do we see in Jesus? Omnipotence restrained. Omnipresence curtailed. Omniscience controlled. The Son of Man. The Creator of the universe in poverty! To make us rich! [2 Cor.8:9.] We truly behold and experience the Father [one of Jesus' names is Eternal Father]. We see humility, gentleness, meekness, compassion, tenderness among many other graces. After all, He is Grace and Truth revealed. He says, "I am gentle and humble in heart" [Matt.11:29] and "I AM the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except THROUGH Me" [John 14:6].

We have to rise above our petty carnality and live the divine

life—the Jesus life. “His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness ... by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that by these you may be partakers of the divine nature...” [2 Peter 1:3, 4].

We approach the Father looking for things—trinkets really—when He is offering us LIFE ETERNAL in the Jesus Life. That we should KNOW Him and Jesus Christ, the Son of His love [John 17:3]. The purpose of our calling is to “proclaim the praises of Him” who called us into His marvelous light and to worship, honour and glorify Him always by being conformed to the image of His beloved Son.

These are very humbling revelations which God has made in His book. The book points us to Him. Let us seek His face each moment and as we consciously abide in His Presence, in His glory, let us be transformed into His likeness as expressed in, by, and through the earthly life of Christ Jesus, His only begotten Son.

Paul And The “Unknown God”

DILLARD THURMAN

“And Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus, and said, Ye men of Athens, in all things, I perceive that ye are very religious. For as I passed along, and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. What therefore ye worship in ignorance, this I set forth unto you. The God that made the world and all things therein, he, being Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples *made with hands; neither is he served by men's hands, as though he needed anything, seeing he himself giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; and he made of one every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed seasons, and the bounds of their habitation; that they should seek God, if haply they might feel after him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us: for in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain even of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring: Being then the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and device of man. The times of ignorance therefore God overlooked;*

but now he commandeth men that they should all everywhere repent: inasmuch as he hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead" (Acts 17:22-31).

When Paul entered into the idolatrous city of Athens, he was moved by the religious concepts of a people devoid of understanding as to the true nature of the God of the universe. In their city they had erected images of their gods in all the buildings, on pedestals and niches, on street corners and market places, and winged figures adorned every house on the street of Hermes. Then, lest they should have overlooked and thus offended some "god" unintentionally, they built another altar "*to the Unknown God.*" This gave Paul the introduction to his sermon on Mar's Hill. He first accepted their altar of worship in order to declare unto them the true God, which to them was "*unknown.*" In his sermon, you will find clear logic in developing a knowledge of God. From their "*Unknown God,*" Paul introduces to them God the Maker, Lord, Giver, Father, Man and Judge. Let us study his treatise.

THE UNKNOWN GOD

Here is presented the remotest concept of God. Every race and tongue entertains ideas of something greater than man behind the vast universe. But to man, God is unknown. Idolatry reigns supreme where the knowledge of the true God is not found. Man will find some object to whom he will give homage, whether it be the god of the Nile in Egypt, the god of the sun in southern Europe or the "great spirit" in American Indian lore. "*Howbeit at that time, not knowing God, ye were in bondage to them that by nature are no gods*" (Gal. 4:8). Ignorance of God leads only to idolatry.

But the Lord God can be known by all who seek Him (Acts 17:27). Paul also stated, "*For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hinder the truth in unrighteousness; because that which is known of God is manifest in them; for God manifested it unto them. For the invisible things of him since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made, (even) his everlasting power and divinity; that they may be without excuse: because that, knowing God, they glorified him not as God, neither gave thanks; but became vain in their reasonings, and their*

senseless heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God for the likeness of an image of corruptible man, and of birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things" (Rom. 1:18-23). Here was a clear picture of Paul's introduction to Athens: a city devoted to idols.

GOD, THE MAKER

Darkened minds often fail to see the works of God in the material universe. This was true with Athens. They had developed a pride in philosophy, but had failed to see the works of the one true God, rather than the abstractions of their mythology. Yet, as Paul said, they were without excuse. *"The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament showeth his handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech, And night unto night showeth knowledge"* (Psa. 19:1-2).

After the puny voices of men have argued back to their fuzzy "first cause" in defense of their hypothesis as to how this vast universe appeared, God's word says simply, *"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth"* (Gen. 1:1). There can never be found a more reasonable nor logical explanation. Paul introduced God as "Maker." He was the Master Designer and Architect for limitless space and all its systems of stars and solar systems. Too, He made man in His own image, as Paul declares in Athens.

GOD, THE LORD

Since God was Maker of heaven and earth, and also made man, then man should accept Him as Lord over all. Other deities exist as figments of imagination, and are the results of ignorant idolatry. The homage paid to Zeus, Athene, Mars, Jupiter, etc., should rightly be given to God the Lord! He declared, *"I am the Lord thy God . . . Thou shalt have no other gods before me"* (Ex. 20:2-3). Paul used Old Testament Scripture, declaring, *"The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof"* (Psa. 24:1). King Nebuchadnezzar became puffed up with pride when God blessed him, but God deposed him and said, *"To the intent that the living may know that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the lowest of men"* (Dan. 4:17). Paul did not want the Athenians to forget that there is one Lord!

GOD, THE GIVER

Paul revealed that the one true God was the giver of life, and breath and all things. This correlates well with James 1:17, where we are told that *"every good and perfect gift cometh down from above, from the Father of lights."* God has given more to man than man has or will ever have. The whole creation is a gift from God. Paul wrote to Timothy to charge the rich that they put their trust in, *"The living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy"* (1 Tim. 6:17). Job had well learned this lesson, and with submission said, *"The LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD"* (Job 1:21). Paul had labored much for the Lord, but then admitted, *"God giveth the increase"* (1 Cor. 3:7). Let us remember God is the Giver.

GOD, THE FATHER

The Fatherhood of God is an idea that is developed especially in the New Testament. Note: *"For ye are all sons of God, through faith, in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ did put on Christ"* (Gal. 3:26-27). Jesus taught the disciples to pray, *"Our Father, which art in heaven"* (Matt. 6:9). We read that Christ gave us *"power to become the sons of God; even to them that believe on his name"* (John 1:12).

What an intimate relationship, that we can call upon God as our Father. Yet John wrote, *"Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God; and such we are"* (1 John 3:1-2). And to this Paul could add: *"And because ye are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father"* (Gal. 4:6). What an exalted relationship—children of God!

GOD, THE JUDGE

Paul also presented God as the final Judge over man. Although it is not a popular thought, all men must face His bar of judgment. The Wise Man declared, *"But know thou, that for all these things, God will bring thee into judgment"* (Eccle. 11:9). Again, *"For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil"* (Eccle. 12:14). The Israelites understood that God would judge His people.

It was, however, the New Testament that would reveal that God would judge through His Son, Jesus Christ. Paul showed this

to the people in Athens (Acts 17:31). To the Romans he wrote of, *"the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ"* (Rom. 2:16). Still further he wrote them, *"For we shall all appear before the judgment seat of Christ . . . So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God"* (Rom. 14:10,12). Yet again, *"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in the body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad"* (2 Cor. 5:10). God is Judge, but He will judge the world by His Son, Jesus Christ.

GOD, THE MAN

Another facet of God was introduced when Paul mentioned to the people of Athens that God had ordained a man as the Judge. Of course, he referred to Jesus Christ, the Son of God. But He was also the *"Son of man."* It was indeed revolutionary teaching in Athens, that God had sent His Son to be a propitiation for sins (Rom. 3:25). God became flesh in the birth of His Son: *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him; and without him was not anything made that hath been made . . . And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father), full of grace and truth"* (John 1:1-3,14). That is why Jesus could say, *"He that hath seen me hath seen the Father"* (John 14:9).

Paul presented Jesus in Athens as both God and man. But, above all, He presented him as the Christ, the Anointed One of God. In Hebrews, Jesus is presented as *"His Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom also he made the worlds; who being the effulgence of his glory, and the very image of his substance, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had made purification of sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high"* (Heb. 1:2-3). In this book Christ, the Anointed, is presented as God's ordained prophet, priest and king.

With a conclusion stating the resurrection, Paul ended his sermon in Athens. He had led them from *"the unknown God"* to God the Maker, the Father, the Lord, the Giver, the Judge and the Man. Thus, from the unknown God, Paul had preached Christ as the risen Lord. Even to now, we can well study this sermon to better understand both God and Christ.

Not Just Another Evangelical Church

CECIL MAY JR.

Jesus promised to build His church (Matthew 16:18), and He did. It is His assembly (*ecclesia*) of redeemed people, whether assembled or unassembled. He continues to build it as He adds to it those whom He saves. We become part of His church, one by one, as we hear and obey the gospel.

The redeemed in a particular locality who assemble for worship of God and mutual edification become local churches of God (1 Corinthians 1:2), also called churches of Christ (Romans 16:16). These redeemed people and congregations are unique on the modern religious scene. Individually, they profess to be just Christians. Collectively, each local group sees itself as a visible manifestation of the universal church of which Jesus is the head (Colossians 1:18) and to which He adds all the saved (Acts 2:47).

"Evangelical" describes individuals and churches (including independent congregations and whole denominations) who reject religious modernism's denial of the supernatural and who believe the Bible is the Word of God. They emphasize personal conversion and the importance of holy living.

By that definition, we can claim to be evangelical.

Evangelicals are widely diverse in doctrine: Charismatics and cessationists, premillennialists and amillennialists, Baptists and Paedobaptists, Calvinists and Armenians. All fit comfortably within the evangelical label.

An overwhelming majority of evangelicals believe in justification by faith alone, defined as an entirely inward faith, specifically apart from any act of obedience. Also, most of them reject the idea of restoration of congregational worship, organization and work on the basis of apostolic instruction to the first-century churches. Churches of Christ are, therefore, distinct from evangelicals, in the specifics of some beliefs but even more in the degree of importance placed upon these beliefs.

A defining distinction is the conviction that baptism is essential to salvation.

Although the Scriptures seem to us to be abundantly clear on

that point, evangelicals generally see that conviction as a denial of justification by grace alone and faith alone, matters about which the Scriptures seem to them to be abundantly clear.

If it is at baptism that the Lord saves and adds, then obviously those who have not been baptized still need to do so to be numbered among the redeemed. If sprinkling is not baptism and if being immersed while adamantly declaring that baptism has nothing to do with salvation is not scriptural baptism either, then most evangelicals are biblically not Christians. Evangelicals see themselves as "born again," working with other evangelicals to bring the lost to Christ. Churches of Christ see them, instead, as legitimate prospects for conversion.

Several preachers from churches of Christ, who have presented the case for the necessity of baptism throughout most of their ministries, are now denying it. They generally explain their denial; not by new light found as they re-examined scripture texts about baptism but as the result of an emotional experience. They say they were unable to find it in themselves to accept that friends and relatives who profess faith in Christ and indicate by word and life that they love the Lord but who have not been baptized are not as authentically Christian as they are themselves. Some almost seem to say, "The Bible does not know any unimmersed Christians, but I think I do."

As a result, in a variety of venues within the church, we are being told that we are not really unique in any biblical way; that our individual identities as Christians only and our collective identities as simply local assemblies of the church Jesus built are merely self-delusions.

Truly some unbaptized evangelicals manifest greater zeal and live holier lives than some baptized believers in our congregations. The Bible, however, condemns any who do not demonstrate the new life in Christ into which they have been raised by the power of God. On the other hand, the apostolic word to the God-fearing, praying, benevolent but unbaptized Cornelius was to command him to be baptized in the name of the Lord (Acts 10:48). Modern evangelicals know and believe things Cornelius had never heard, but the Bible knows nothing this side of the great commission of an unbaptized Christian. Those who are children of God by faith in Christ Jesus have been baptized into Christ and have put on Christ (Galatians 3:26-27).

Isolation, removing ourselves from any association with evangelicals, is not the appropriate response to the situation. We are not likely to convert anyone with whom we have no association. However, neither is it an appropriate response to pretend that no difference exists and that evangelicals are in Christ as surely as if they had been baptized into Christ.

Several prominent evangelicals have recently begun to maintain that baptism is an integral part of the conversion experience, rather than something that follows it. Perhaps they have been stimulated in their thinking by things they heard from some of us, although it is equally likely that they simply studied their Bible and came to that conclusion. It is sad, even ironic, that at the very time some evangelicals are taking a fresh biblical look at the place of baptism in conversion, some of us are ignoring what the Bible says about it, trying to identify as brothers in Christ with unbaptized evangelicals.

The appeal for restoration according to scriptural command and precedent has biblical roots. Josiah restored temple worship in Judah on the basis of having found the Book of the Law (2 Kings 22). To whatever degree any group of people who profess to follow Christ have forgotten or neglected aspects of what He has taught through His Word, those aspects need to be restored.

The apostles ordained elders in every church (Acts 14:23) and commanded Titus to do the same in Crete (Titus 1:5). God's Word does not lead us into hierarchical church governmental arrangements, and we ought not go there.

Under the direction of the apostles the New Testament churches recognized "the Lord's day" (Revelation 1:10), the first day of the week (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:1-2), as the day on which the Lord was raised from the dead, and commemorated his death in the Lord's Supper on that day.

A cappella singing (which means "singing in the manner of the church") was also a feature of New Testament worship (Hebrews 13:15).

The restoration plea maintains that the New Testament epistles were not merely occasional writings to correct specific situations in first-century churches but that they also carry continuing authority as the Word of God (1 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Corinthians 14:37). Although some may seek to bind patterns that are not found in Scripture, autonomous congregational

government, the Lord's Supper each Sunday, and singing and making melody in our hearts are a part of God's will for His church.

The appeal to fashion each local church after the New Testament in apostolically prescribed forms as well as in mission, teaching and holy life is too relevant and attractive to be lost by absorption into evangelicalism.

Allan McNichol asks, "Can we be active participants in evangelical culture without abandoning the clear biblical basis of our distinctive beliefs and practices that have defined us as a fellowship?" McNichol doubts it. What he sees happening is a headlong rush into evangelicalism, marked by a full-scale acceptance of evangelical theology, abandoning the confession and the plea for the restoration of the common faith and practice of the ancient church ("Churches of Christ Meet the Evangelicals," *Christian Studies*, Austin Graduate School of Theology, no. 19, pp. 75-76).

The claim to be Christians only, properly understood, is not a claim to know everything or even to be correct about everything we think we know. It is simply a claim to have been redeemed by the gospel of Christ, to have been added by Him to His church, and to be seeking to be led by His teaching in Scripture to the best of our understanding, recognizing no other authority over our faith and practice.

It is a plea to be proclaimed and shared. It should not be abandoned for the sake of acceptance into the broader "Christian community" or into evangelicalism.

Denominationalism

WAYNE JACKSON

The word "denominate" means "to give a name to, to designate." It is a perfectly respectable term. If one cashes a Rs. 5000 bank draft, he may request currency in "denominations" of 100s and 500s. In this sense, the word merely signifies a separation into various divisions by name. And so the term itself is not tainted.

Denomination takes on a less-than-ideal sense when one

considers its popular use in the lexicon of Christendom. The term "Christendom" embraces the entire religious terrain professing any identification (however remote the connection may be) with Jesus Christ. This would include every kind of organism, from the Unitarian Universalist Church to the various cults that allege an association with Christ (e.g., Christian Science, the Watchtower movement, etc.).

One authority defines denominationalism in this following fashion: "The system and ideology founded on the division of the religious population into numerous ecclesiastical bodies, each stressing particular values or traditions and each competing with the other in the same community under substantial conditions of freedom" (Jerald C. Brauer, Ed., *The Westminster Dictionary of Church History*, Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1971, 262-263).

Within this definition several flaws are revealed that mar the system, (a) Denominationalism is the result of division—a division, incidentally, that frequently is applauded, (b) The ideology accommodates variant "ecclesiastical [church] bodies" with distinctive, doctrinal differences, (c) Denominationalism tends to focus more upon tradition and preferential values than Scripture, (d) The system engenders a spirit of adversarial rivalry rather than cooperation, (e) The denominational concept encourages the idea that the freedom to differ on major points of doctrine is a healthy spiritual phenomenon.

Each of these propositions is antagonistic to biblical truth.

DIVISION

The Scriptures do not condone the diversity characteristic of denominationalism. Religious division is condemned in both the Old and New Testaments.

David declared that it is a good and pleasant thing when brothers live together in unity (Psalm 133:1). What are the opposites of these adjectives?

When the kingdom of Israel split into northern and southern segments, each with its different system of worship, such became the disgrace of Old Testament history. The rebellious Jeroboam started a new denomination that he "had devised of his own heart"

(1 Kings 12:33 asv); in so doing, he "made Israel to sin" (1 Kings 14:16). Not many years later, Judah charted a similar course of apostasy.

Jesus prayed that all who profess being His disciples might be one, thus emulating the unity He shares with His Father (John 17:20-21). The object of this unity was that the world might believe that He came from the Father. The reverse of His petition suggests that division is the fertile soil for unbelief.

In numerous texts Paul condemned divisiveness (1 Corinthians 1:10-16; Romans 16:17; Galatians 5:20); in others he extolled the virtue of unity. Note his admonition to the saints in Philippi—that they cultivate the "same mind, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind" (Philippians 2:2). God's attitude toward religious division is perfectly clear.

MULTIPLE BODIES

Even in the Old Testament, there were prophetic glimpses of what heaven intended in terms of the unity of Christ's church—when that body should appear. For example, Isaiah spoke of the coming of "Jehovah's house" (2:2-4). Ezekiel wrote of the day when the Lord's people would be "one nation" (37:22) and under "one shepherd" (34:23). Daniel foretold the arrival of the Lord's "kingdom" (2:44). Note that "house," "nation" and "kingdom" all are singular in number.

Jesus spoke of the time when His people would be "one flock" (John 10:16), and, as noted earlier, He prayed for the abiding unity of that flock (John 17:20-21).

Caiaphas unwittingly prophesied that God would gather together his scattered children (potentially so) into "one" (John 11:52). The object implied by the numeral "one" would seem to be "house" or "family" because the term "children" is employed in the text (cf. 1 Timothy 3:15; Ephesians 2:19).

The early church was "one" (Acts 4:32). Is there any suggestion of multiple Christian denominations in the inspired historical record? None whatsoever.

In a letter to the church at Ephesus, Paul declared that there is "one body" (Ephesians 4:4). It is hardly a point of dispute that this "one body" is the church of Jesus Christ. The church and body also

are seen as equivalents elsewhere in this epistle (1:22-23; cf. Colossians 1:18, 24). The apostle makes a similar point in a letter to the church in Corinth. "You are the body of Christ," he says, "and severally [individually] members thereof (1 Corinthians 12:27).

The church (the "called out" of God) is viewed under the figure of a body for at least two reasons. First, the body is under the control of the "head." Even so, Christ is the head of His spiritual body and the members are subject to His sovereignty (Ephesians 1:22-23; 5:22-32; Colossians 1:18). Second, just as a physical body cannot function with precision unless there is unity of operation among its members (1 Corinthians 12:12ff; Romans 12:4-8), even so, Christ's kingdom cannot be effective when there is an absence of cooperation among its fellow-citizens (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:10ff).

This information necessarily implies a condemnation of the denominational system that clutters Christendom today. Unfortunately, men, wedded to their sectarian ideologies, applaud this factious system, rather than seeing that the divine ideal is oneness in teaching and practice.

TRADITION

The term "tradition" renders a Greek word that suggests the idea of "instruction that has been handed down." It takes on two sense in Scripture.

Tradition may be instruction that was divinely originated. Paul commended the Corinthians for holding to the traditions he delivered unto them (1 Corinthians 11:2; 2 Thessalonians 2:15). The brethren at Thessalonica were admonished to disfellowship those who refused to follow the apostles' tradition (2 Thessalonians 3:6).

On the other hand, tradition is viewed in a pejorative sense. It can refer to human practices of long-standing duration that have supplanted supernatural revelation.

When human tradition becomes an appendix to divine law, the perpetrators of such are transgressors, having gone beyond what "is written" (Matthew 15:3; Colossians 2:8; 1 Corinthians. 4:6; 2 John 9). This was a problem with certain Jews, for instance, who used tradition to avoid their responsibility in caring for needy parents (Mark 7:8ff).

Roman Catholicism holds that the traditions of the Church, as handed down over the centuries and ratified by the clergy, assume an authority equal to (even superior to) the Scriptures. The Church alleges that papal tradition is infallible, and that "tradition would suffice without Scripture" (Donald Attwater, *A Catholic Dictionary*, New York: Macmillan, 1961, 41-42).

On the other hand, it is also an act of presumption to take the law of God and treat it as mere human tradition. When some people suggest that singing without the use of instrumental accompaniment is a church of Christ tradition (see Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16) or that the apostolic restriction of women from leadership roles in public worship was but a first-century, cultural tradition (1 Timothy 2:8, 11-12), they have failed to distinguish human tradition from sacred law.

And what is to be said regarding that growing swell of voices in the denominational community who contend that same-sex relationships, whether in one's private life or in church offices, are matters of personal value, rather than divine revelation?

Is this not a by-product of the denominational mentality? When men are unable to discern the difference between apostolic doctrine and man-made traditions, denominationalism will arise and flourish.

RIVALRY VERSUS COOPERATION

When Paul sought to remedy a problem within the church at Corinth (a congregation plagued with multiple elements of divisiveness), he observed that the members of a body, though they have different functions, do not compete—they cooperate (1 Corinthians 12:12ff).

This principle is well illustrated in the book of Acts. In Luke's record of the growth of the early church, he periodically uses summaries to highlight the spirit of cooperation that adorned the Christian community (see Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-35; 5:12-16). Common to these sections are such expressions as: "fellowship," "together," "all things in common," "one accord," "one heart and one soul," etc.

Paul's great argument in Romans 15, as he sought to cement the relationship between Jews and Gentiles in the primitive church,

was that churches belonging to Christ are not in competition. Rather, they are mutually supportive. Just as the Gentiles were blessed by the spiritual contributions of the Jews to the sacred plan of redemption, even so, the Hebrews deserved to be assisted by the Gentiles in their time of economic need (see Romans 15:27).

It is a crime of considerable magnitude that denominationalism applauds the spirit of divisiveness and rivalry. Some denominational clerics praise God for the different churches wherein folks may find a doctrine and practice that suits each individual taste. What a deplorable, anti-biblical disposition this is.

THE FREEDOM TO DIFFER

The world currently is witness to the spectacle of a wide variety of doctrinal differences within the denominational community, and yet, with many people, this is scarcely a matter of concern. This phenomenon presents a huge problem with religion in the minds of numerous sincere people. Their question is: If God is a Being of truth, and if He is the Author of Christianity, how can there possibly be so many contradictory teachings within the community of believers, and yet all of them be right? This is a logical absurdity.

The careful Bible student is aware that there is room for some variation of conviction among those who follow Christ. In areas of expediency, for example, differences of opinion may prevail with impunity. Barnabas wanted John Mark as a missionary companion on a campaign to Cyprus. Paul did not agree; he preferred Silas, and a mission venture across Asia Minor and into Europe (Acts 15:36ff). Scripture censures neither man.

Additionally, it must be acknowledged that differences may occur among the people of God due to varying levels of spiritual maturity. Some Christians of the early church, for example, did not understand the implications of the abolition of the law of Moses (Colossians 2:14); hence, they were sensitive about the eating of certain foods or the observance of particular days (Romans 14:1ff). Accordingly, the "infirmities" of those who were "weak" (i.e., less-informed) were to be tolerated patiently until they could be taught and made stronger (Romans 15:1ff). It is a tragic mistake, however, to make ignorance the ideal.

But within the environment of the denominational mentality,

significant differences are viewed as trivial matters. Consider, for example, the philosophy of the Unitarian Universalist movement. Many of these folks view themselves as "Christian," holding that the "religion of Jesus, so simply and beautifully expressed in the Sermon on the Mount, remains the ethical ideal." Yet, the issue of whether there even is a God is an open-ended proposition for these folks. They happily embrace atheists, agnostics, humanists, and a variety of other skeptical inquirers (see: Leo Rosten, *Religions of America*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1975, 265). How can it possibly be a righteous situation when people affirm that mutually exclusive propositions are equally acceptable? For example, is baptism to be administered exclusively by immersion, or are pouring and sprinkling also permitted as options? A professor of theology in a denominational seminary argues that each of the three baptismal modes "are only parts of a greater whole," and so each is acceptable (Allan Killen, "Baptism," *Wycliffe Bible Dictionary*, Charles Pfeiffer, Howard Vos, John Rhea, Eds., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999, 201). This mindset is at the very core of denominationalism.

CONCLUSION

The spirit of denominational compromise is steadily invading churches of Christ. Prominent brethren openly advocate that the mode of baptism is irrelevant or that the rite, in terms of its purpose, may be received either as "for" the remission of sins, or "because" of the remission of sins; it does not matter. Doors of fellowship are flung open, and sectarian groups are embraced.

Far too many imagine that the church is a democracy in which the people decide what is permissible procedure, rather than recognizing that Christ's church is a kingdom. And the King is the author of its law (1 Corinthians 9:21; Galatians 6:2).

Denominationalism is wrong. There must be no compromise on this. Christians can oppose the system compassionately and courteously, but it must be resisted relentlessly. To neglect to do so is to fail in our responsibility and lose our identity as the people of God.

One cannot but wonder how many candlesticks have been removed already (Revelation 2:5).

Has Man Outgrown the Gospel?

ALLEN WEBSTER

Times are changing. The new soon becomes old; the modern becomes ancient; the technological breakthrough becomes yesterday's history; the popular becomes lost in the latest; and the up-to-date is soon out-of-date.

ETERNAL TRUTH NEVER CHANGES

It reads the same today as yesterday and as it will tomorrow. It is "*once for all delivered to the saints*" (Jude 3). Those who would change God's truth become "*accursed*" (Galatians 1:6-9) and find that it will meet them in judgment unchanged and as their judge (Revelation 20:12).

Modern man feels he has outgrown the ancient Gospel. He thinks an absolute standard is obsolete. Exaltation of self and sensuality replace the idea of sin and spiritual death. Man ridicules blood and the need for forgiveness. He scoffs at the virgin birth, sinless life, sacrificial death, and the miraculous resurrection of Christ. He regards these as myths of a bygone era.

HAS MAN OUTGROWN THE GOSPEL?

Never! The only way man can outgrow the gospel is to conquer sin. He has not. The statement, "*All have sinned and come short of the glory of God*" was true in Paul's day and is true today. Sin is still the transgression of the law of God (1 John 3:4), which can include violating one's conscience (Romans 14:23), omitting a duty (James 4:17), and lawlessness (1 John 3:4). God, not man, determines what is sinful; sin will not change. Men may call sin by another name or they may ban the Word, but that will not alter the fact that it exists. Forgiveness is still the most basic spiritual need humanity has (Romans 3:23; 6:23). The only way a person can be forgiven is through the Gospel—the blood of Christ (Romans 1:16).

HAS MAN OUTGROWN THE GOSPEL?

Never! The gospel is the power to overcome temptation (Ephesians 6:17), and man needs its power, because temptation is still with us. Mankind has not conquered carnal desires. He still gives in to the lusts of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (1 John 2:15-17). He cannot overcome without the power of

the written word (Hebrews 4:12).

HAS MAN OUTGROWN THE GOSPEL?

Never! The devil is still *"as a roaring lion"* walking about *"seeking whom he may devour"* (1 Peter 5:8). Man is still in danger; therefore, he needs the unchanged Gospel, for it is God's great power to save. When humans can defeat Satan without the truth, then they will no longer need the truth. But they cannot. No one is strong enough to conquer the Evil One without an *"it is written"* as his shield (Matthew 4:1-11).

HAS MAN OUTGROWN THE GOSPEL?

Never! The soul of man needs food. If man could invent a substitute for "soul food", he would not need the gospel, but he has not. Peter stated that the soul feeds on the *"sincere milk of the word"* (1 Peter 2:2), and Paul wrote that he could progress to eat *"strong meat"* from the hand of God (Hebrews 5:12-14). The gospel fills those who *"hunger and thirst after righteousness"* (Matthew 5:6).

HAS MAN OUTGROWN THE GOSPEL?

Never! Man still needs a map to heaven. Many try to invent their own roadway to heaven, but these maps will only get one lost. If we follow the road of "faith only" or the lane of "direct operation of the Holy Spirit" or the path of "once saved always saved", we are traveling a broad way that leads to destruction (Matthew 7:13,14). Only Christ and His Gospel can lead one to heaven (John 14:6). As the song says, "I must needs go home by the way of the cross; there's no other way but this."

Jesus plainly stated the conditions by which men can reach much-needed salvation. A sinner must believe in Christ (Mark 16:16), decide to change his sinful life (repent) (Luke 13:5), confess the sweet name of Christ (Romans 10:9-10), and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38; Romans 6:4). We can choose to heed these scriptures or ignore them, to read them or reject them, to respect them or ridicule them, but they will not go away. The same ancient gospel is the cure for all the spiritual ills of men! Why not obey today?

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