

Monthly

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The Bible Teacher



LET THE TRUTH PREVAIL

1. That there should be only one church today, as it was in the beginning—Church of Christ—Which Christ Himself built, and about which we all can read in the Bible (Matthew 16:18). That congregations of His one church everywhere may be known as churches of Christ, as we read at Romans 16:16. That there should be no denominations or sects in the name of the church. (1 Corinthians 1:10).
2. That there should be only one plan or guideline of salvation, as is revealed and taught in the Bible, followed everywhere. All must be told to believe in Christ, to repent of wrong, to confess Christ the Son of God, and to be baptized for the forgiveness of sins. (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; Acts 8:36-38). Those who obey these commands of salvation are saved by the Lord and He Himself adds the saved ones to His church (Acts 2:47); which is His Spiritual body. (Ephesians 1:22, 23; 4:4; 5:22).
3. That all followers of Christ, everywhere, should be known as Christians, after His name alone, as it was in the beginning. (Acts 4:12; Acts 11:26; 1 Peter 4:16). That all other names which exalt and glorify any other name of a man, or a doctrine, or a day or a movement, etc., must be forgotten.
4. That all man-made creed books must be put aside, with other books written by men, and only the Bible which contains God's inspired message for man must be followed in all spiritual matters. (Matthew 7:21-23; John 12:48).
5. Let us accept the authority of Christ in all religious matters (Matthew 28:18), and strive to abide in the New Testament doctrine of Christ (2 John 9).

THE BIBLE TEACHER

Pleading for the Restoration of Pure New Testament Christianity

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EDITORIAL

What Does the Bible Teach?

God Means Exactly What He Says

One of the most important lessons that we all need to learn from the Bible is that when God asks us to do something in a specific way or manner then we should not change or substitute or add or take away anything from what He has asked us to do. For example, before the great flood, God had asked Noah to build the ark, but God had also specified that he should build the giant ark with gopherwood. (Genesis 6:14). And, the Bible says, "Thus Noah did, according to *all* that God commanded him, so he did." (Genesis 6:22). Suppose Noah had used another kind of wood, instead of gopherwood, in building of the ark. Would it be acceptable to God? Would that be exactly what God had asked him to do? There is another example in the Old Testament book of Leviticus chapter ten. There we read of the two sons of Aaron, Nadab and Abihu. It says there that according to the Old Testament worship, each of them "took his censer and put fire in it, and put incense on it, and offered profane fire before the Lord, *which He had not commanded them.*" (Leviticus 10:1). So what happened!? The next verse 2 of the Scripture reads, "So fire went out from the Lord and devoured them, and they died before the Lord," God was pleased with Noah, because Noah had done exactly as God had told him to do. But God was not happy with Nadab and Abihu, because they had disobeyed God's specific command.

In the book of 2 Kings, also in the Old Testament, in its 5th chapter, we read about a man whose name was Naaman. Naaman was the commander of the army of the king of Syria at that time. In the Bible he is described as a great and honorable man in the eyes of his master, whom he served in his army. But, the Bible says, Naaman was a leper, that is, he may have some kind of white patches all over his body that made him look ugly. One day, however, he learned from his little servant girl, who was from Israel, that there was a man of God in Israel, who could cure Naaman of his ailment. Without losing any time he came to Israel, with his horses and chariots and servants to meet the man of God. As he stood in his door, we read, the man of God did not come out to meet the important visitor, but instead sent a message that he should go to the river Jordan and dip himself seven times in the river Jordan. As soon as Naaman heard that he became furious, feeling affronted and despising the means, in anger he started to go back home, saying in a rage, "Are not Abanah and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be cleaned?" So Naaman began to go back as he had come. But on the way, his servants soothed his temper by saying, "If the prophet had told you to do something great, would you not have done it?" and urged him to dip in the Jordan, as the man of God had said. Naaman thought about it, and changed his mind. Humbling himself, Naaman came to river Jordan and dipped himself seven times, as the prophet had said. And as soon as Naaman did that, the Bible says, "his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean." (2 Kings 5:14). The most important lesson Naaman learned that day was that when God specifies something, it cannot be substituted with another. When God through His prophet, had said *Jordan*, He did mean *Jordan*, not Abanah or Pharpar or any other.

After His death burial and resurrection, when Christ was about to leave to go back to heaven, He had commanded His disciples that they should go everywhere and preach His Gospel to every creature, and added by saying, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved." (Mark 16:16). Now, who will be saved, according to Christ? He said, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved," and that is exactly what He meant. But if someone want to understand it some other way then he certainly need help. Plainly stated, according to Christ, the Saviour, to be saved from sin one

must *both* believe and be baptized. It cannot mean that one can be saved by faith alone or when one merely believes in Christ, before baptism. Because Christ put salvation after, and not before, baptism. Also, little babies cannot believe, as they are not capable of believing, therefore, little babies are not the right subject for baptism. Too, it is of great importance to learn that Christ had commanded to be baptized, not sprinkled or poured. The New Testament of the Bible was written in Greek language, and the Greek word "baptisma" means a burial or immersion, not sprinkling or pouring.

The Bible says, about baptism, "... buried with Him in baptism in which also you were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead." (Colossians 2:12). Also, "Or do you not know that as many of us were baptized into Christ Jesus, were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in the newness of life." (Romans 6:3, 4).

It was many years after the death of Christ and His apostles, that men began to teach that one may be saved from sin by faith alone, without being baptized; and that one may be sprinkled or poured to be baptized; and that infants or little babies should be baptized. The Bible nowhere teaches any such thing. (Read Matthew 7:21-23).

Blessings Of The Gospel

J.C. CHOATE

Apart from the facts of the gospel, and the commands of the gospel, there are also blessings of the gospel. Of course, the facts are to be believed, the commands are to be obeyed, and the blessings are to be received by those who believe and obey the gospel. The Apostle Paul says, *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ"* (Ephesians 1:3). He also writes to his Roman brethren, *"But I know that when I come to you, I shall come in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ"* (Romans 15:29).

What are some of these blessings? There are so many, but

we will list some of the prominent ones:

1. In obeying the gospel of Christ one receives the remission of sins. *"Then Peter said to them, 'Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit'"* (Acts 2:38). This is another way of saying that one is saved (Mark 16:16), and that he has been born again (John 3:5). How wonderful it is to know that all of one's sins have been washed away and that he is now a new person and ready to begin life all over again.
2. Through the gospel one enters Christ. *"Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?"* (Romans 6:3). *"For you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ"* (Galatians 3:26,27). *"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new"* (2 Corinthians 5:17). Because we are in Christ we have access to all spiritual blessings that the Lord has in store for those who belong to Him.
3. In obeying the gospel we enter the body of Christ, or the church. In 1 Corinthians 12 the Apostle Paul discussed at length the body of Christ, and of course we are told that the body is the church (Colossians 1:18; Ephesians 1:22,23). Then he explains that it is through the act of baptism that we enter the body or the church *"For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit"* (1 Corinthians 12:13). The church is the greatest institution in all the world. It cannot be destroyed but will stand forever. How wonderful it is to be a part of such a body, to be members of the Lord's church.
4. We are now children of God, and therefore, Christians. *"Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter"* (1 Peter 4:16). Why? Because there is salvation in the name of Christ. *"Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved"* (Acts 4:12). Just think about it! In believing in Christ and obeying His teachings, He honors us by allowing us to wear

- His name. This is a great blessing within itself.
5. As Christians we are in position to worship the Lord. *"But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth"* (John 4:23,24). We are even warned not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together: *"Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching"* (Hebrews 10:25). What a privilege and an honor to be able to meet with the Lord's people each first day of the week to worship the Lord. We ought not to count this as a responsibility or as a task, but as a privilege. The Lord Himself has promised to be our honored guest, and surely we would not want to disappoint Him. He said Himself, *"For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them"* (Matthew 18:20).
 6. There is the blessing of fellowship. *"And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers"* (Acts 2:42). We as Christians need the help and encouragement that our fellow Christians can give us. This is one of the purposes of the weekly assembly. The fellowship that can come through such association, worship, and work can be a great blessing within itself.
 7. We have the privilege of prayer. God does not hear everyone. The Scriptures say, *"Now we know that God does not hear sinners, but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does His will, He hears him"* (John 9:31). In other words, prayer is reserved for the child of God, the one who can approach God as his Father. However, even then his prayer must be in harmony with God's will for it to be heard and his request granted. *"Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us"* (1 John 5:14). But going on, the Hebrew writer says, *"Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need"* (Hebrews 4:16). Here he is talking about the great blessing of prayer. How thankful we should be that

regardless of the need, the problem, or whatever it may be that we need to pray to the Lord about, we can take it to Him knowing that as His children we can talk to Him and that He will be sympathetic and understanding and will deal with our requests accordingly.

8. We have the honor of remembering Him each first day of the week as we partake of the Lord's Supper. Paul speaks of it in this manner: *"The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?"* (1 Corinthians 10:16). Truly it is a great spiritual blessing to be able to pay homage to Him who died for us by remembering His body and His blood and we are made stronger because of it.
9. Being obedient to the gospel of Christ, we have received the gift of the Holy Spirit. Referring again to Acts 2:38, Peter says that through repentance and baptism we receive the remission of our sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. To have God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit living in us is a blessing which has no equal. What honor could be bestowed upon us that would be any greater?
10. There is the blessing of being able to live for the Lord, to represent Him here on earth. *"And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him "* (Colossians 3:17). Christ Himself said, *"But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you"* (Matthew 6:33).
11. We have the pleasure of teaching others the way of the Lord and knowing that the Lord will be with us always. What greater blessing could we be to others, and even to the whole world, than through teaching them the truth and converting them to Christ? Not only so, but how reassuring it is to know that as we strive to do the Lord's will that He has promised us He will be with us now and always. But listen to Him: *"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age"* (Matthew 28:19,20).

12. Finally, the Lord has promised to give us a crown of life, or eternal life, if we keep His commandments and remain faithful to Him. *"Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city"* (Revelation 22:14). *"Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life"* (Revelation 2:10).

Now who said that the Lord doesn't care for His own? Who said that the Christian life is not a happy life? Who said that the Christian life has nothing to offer? Who said that the Christian has nothing to look forward to? The Christian life is the best life, the most rewarding life, that one can live. As such, one is free from his sin, leads a good and peaceful life, and has everything to live for and to look forward to. He is blessed materially and spiritually. It all begins for him when he obeys the gospel. This then is really the beginning point of his life. This is the beginning of blessings unlimited.

"I Am The Life"

DAVID THURMAN

In John 14 Jesus is at the table where the passover feast has been observed. He has instituted the Lord's supper and watched as Judas left in order to betray Him. Jesus knows His life on earth is almost over. He sees the concern in the faces of His friends. He realizes they feel confused and frightened. They, too, realize something important is about to take place. They are worried it will take their Lord from them.

Jesus offers this reassurance. *"Let not your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way where I am going. Thomas said to Him, 'Lord, we do not know where you are going; how do we know the way?' Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me'"* (John 14:1-6).

Jesus understood life perfectly. Jesus knew that the next step,

His betrayal and death, was only the prelude to the following step, his resurrection. Jesus was planning His triumphant return even as He looked into the worried eyes of His closest friends. Calling Himself *"the life,"* meant Jesus was ready to face His death.

Life Is Granted by God

This was true for Jesus and it is true for us as well. Life comes from God and no other source—Life on this planet is no accident of scientific processes, but is an act of creation (Gen. 1). It was a personal, eternal God who conceived of life and who created it in all its forms. It was that same Creator that *"formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul"* (Gen. 2:7).

Jesus knew that life sprang from God. But Jesus also came from God. *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him ..."* (John 1:1-3). Jesus was the source of life with God, having been with Him from the start and having been the source of the creation Himself.

But God is more than the source of physical life, He is also the source of eternal life as well. *"Father, the hour has come; glorify Thy Son, that the Son may glorify Thee, even as Thou gavest Him authority over all mankind, that to all whom Thou hast given Him, He may give eternal life. And this is eternal life, that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent"* (John 17:1-3). God not only conceived of life on this planet, but He gave to His Son the authority to extend life beyond this existence. God is the source of eternal life.

In that upper room, Jesus is reassuring His followers that He is the source of life. All of Satan's powers (deceit, cruelty, even death) will not prevail over Jesus, because He is the source of life, and that life is eternal. The eleven might be uncertain about upcoming events, but one thing they could be sure about was that the source of life had no fear of death. Whatever Satan might do to Jesus (or to them) God was still the One who granted life.

Life Is Intimacy with God

God is the source of life, when He breathes into us we live (Gen. 2:7). It is in God that we live, and move and have our being (Acts 17:24-25). When God removes His Spirit, life ends (Psalm 104:29-30). Death then is the natural result of being separated

from God. When God steps back, things die. When God is near, things live. Life, then, is closeness to God, the Creator.

Jesus came to earth to demonstrate this closeness. God was distant from mankind because of sin (1 John 1:5-6). But Jesus became flesh and lived among us to bring God near to mankind once again. *"And the word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth"* (John 1:14). When people saw Jesus in the flesh, they were seeing a God who had come near.

When Jesus calls Himself *"the life,"* He is wanting His followers to see that God is near, even during the events that are to unfold in the coming hours. God has not abandoned Jesus, in fact, Jesus is doing just what God commands. It is because of His intimacy with God that Jesus is going to the cross. It is because of His closeness to God that He can face the trials, the whipping, the crucifixion. Jesus wants us to see that His death is not the result of failing to do God's will, but is the result of following God's will. That changes the whole event from a powerful victory by Satan to a fulfillment of the plans of God.

Life Is Victory over Sin

For Jesus to be the life is for Him to claim victory over sin. Jesus came to offer His life to defeat sin. *"For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it up again"* (John 10:17). Jesus willingly laid down His life. It might seem odd that God in the flesh would die on purpose. What made the source of life surrender life?

"Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin, once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 6:8-11). Paul explains why Jesus gave His life. When he laid it down (his crucifixion) and took it up again (His resurrection) Jesus overcame sin. The end result is that sin no longer has dominion over Jesus or over those who die with Jesus. In the same way, we can consider ourselves dead to sin, since Jesus gave His life to overcome sin.

This process allows me to reclaim my intimacy with God on a

spiritual level. Whereas I was dead in my sin, Jesus has made me alive through His death and resurrection (Eph. 2:1-5). Sin no longer rules in the lives of those who have died with Christ. Jesus is the life, and has overcome sin.

It seems to me that would have encouraged those in the upper room with Jesus. In the coming hours Satan and his methods are going to seem to be overpowering. But Jesus has the victory over sin, and thus over Satan. He is the life. You can lie about Him, you can convict Him, even though He is innocent. You can even wickedly crucify Him. But Jesus will overcome all of that by His death and resurrection. Jesus is the victor over sin, which means that the sins that plague your life have been defeated if you are *"in Christ."*

Life Is Victory over Death

Death haunts us all. Death seems so powerful, so final, so absolute. It separates us from friends, from hope, from the future, from life itself. And we all die, no matter who we are or what we are. Jesus knows that He will soon experience death. He will be killed. So, He reminds His disciples (and perhaps Himself) that eternal life is His. Satan may win this round, but the victory will belong to Jesus.

At the tomb of Lazarus, Jesus explains all this. *"I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me shall live even though he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this? She said to Him, "Yes, Lord; I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God, even He who comes into the world"* (John 11:25-27). There, in a cemetery, Jesus claims power over death. Some will die, others will not. But all who believe in Jesus will live again.

So, for Jesus and for us, death is not the final step it seems to be. Imagine being among the disciples in the upper room that night. They may be wondering if they would be arrested or tried or even executed. Jesus lets them know He will be leaving. He never hides from them the fact they too will one day suffer and die for His name. But, even though Jesus dies that night and even though they will, one by one, die themselves, death will still lose! Jesus may be leaving them, but death is not the final act. Everyone will be raised one day to meet the Lord. Some will meet their savior, others their judge. But death is overcome in the life,

death and resurrection of Jesus.

Claim Your Victory

"O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 15:55-57). Paul sums all this up beautifully. You need not fear sin or its dreaded power, death. Jesus has overcome sin and death for your sake. All you need to do is die to sin with Jesus and be raised with Him. Then you can walk in newness of life, having received your life from the source of life, Jesus Christ, the Son of God. "And now why do you delay? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on his name" (Acts 22:16). "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:3-4).

They Did It Willingly

GEORGE BAILEY

Shortly before his death, David made his final charge to his son, Solomon, and to the people over whom Solomon was soon to be king (1 Chron. 29). Some very commendable things were said about the people whom David addressed. Seven times the phrase, "offered willingly," is used. In verse 9, it was said, *"Then the people rejoiced, for that they offered willingly, because with a perfect heart they offered willingly to Jehovah: and David the king also rejoiced with great joy."* Then to Jehovah David said, *"Now therefore, our God, we thank thee and praise thy glorious name. But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? for all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee" (v. 13-14).*

As a result of such willing service, there was great joy. Such has always been so. A happy person is he who seeks an opportunity to do more. He desires to be "worn out" in God's service. He does not seek to do that which will bring glory to

himself, but, like David, is ever ready to give God the praise and receive the encouragement to himself. If you would be religiously happy, give freely and willingly of your time, service and means to the Lord!

Some have deceived themselves into believing they were ready to give liberally to the Cause, but, when the time came for the actual work, they attempted to ease themselves by finding a hundred other things less difficult to do. A part of the Corinthian church seems to have fallen into this class. To them Paul wrote, *"But now complete the doing also; that as there was the readiness to will, so there may be the completion also out of your ability"* (2 Cor. 8:11). Again, to the same Christians he said, *"I speak not by way of commandment, but as proving through the earnestness of others the sincerity also of your love"* (v. 8). Our service always ought to be voluntary rather than compulsory.

Had Noah not been willing to put forth the effort to build the ark, he and his family would not have been saved from the flood (Gen. 6, 7). He was *"moved"* with godly fear to do the job which God gave him (Heb. 11:7). He perfectly submitted to God's orders, obeying without hesitancy.

If Abraham had not willingly submitted to the Master's will, he would not have been called *"the friend of God"* (James 2:23). Inspiration says, *"He that had gladly received the promises was offering up his only begotten son"* (Heb. 11:17). Just before the fatal knife touched the flesh of his son, Abraham's hand was stayed, followed by a voice which said, *"Lay not thy hand upon the lad . . . for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou has not withheld thy son, thine only son, from me"* (Gen. 22:12).

God will not force his way on anyone. But, *"He that will, let him take the water of life freely"* (Rev. 22:17). The church began with willing workers: *"Then they that gladly received his word were baptized"* (Acts 2:41). After being beaten and given a charge not to teach in the name of Jesus, Peter and John were pardoned from prison. But after departing from the council, *"They rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the Name"* (Acts 5:40-41).

Regardless of the nature of our service, we ought to be willing to offer unto God our best. David said, *"I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go unto the house of the Lord"* (Psa. 122:1). Let us learn to give as the Lord says, *"Not grudgingly or of necessity,*

for God loveth a cheerful giver" (2 Cor. 9:7). This is the only kind of service that God will accept.

COMMUNICATING

Truth to Men

STEVEN GUY

Years ago a devoted Christian asked me, "What is the work of an evangelist?" The Bible teaches that first and foremost an evangelist is to be a man of God. This distinction was given to Moses (Deuteronomy 33:1), Samuel (1 Samuel 9:6), David (Nehemiah 12:24, 36), Elijah (1 Kings 17:18), Elisha (2 Kings 4:8-9), and Timothy (1 Timothy 6:11). It refers to someone who represents God by speaking His Word.

The man of God is marked by what he flees from, what he follows after, what he fights for, and what he is faithful to. This lifelong endeavor encompasses the evangelist and his family. He and his family, by virtue of ministry, live in a fishbowl. Therefore, the main objective of the man of God and his family is to monitor their spiritual lives constantly (Matthew 5:16; Acts 20:18; 1 Corinthians 9:27; 15:31; Acts 20:28; 1 Timothy 3:15; 4:12; 5:22; 2 Timothy 2:15, 21-26; 3:15-17). The fishbowl concept applies to all Christians, but especially to the evangelist.

Homiletics from Aristotle in the fourth century B.C. (in his classic work *Rhetoric*) to John Broadus (*Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*) concur with David L. Larsen who wrote in *The Anatomy of Preaching*, "The character of the preacher and the nature of his spiritual walk are inexplicably bound up with the preaching event." Phillips Brooks' famous definition of preaching capsulizes this theme, "Preaching is the communication of truth by man to men. It has in it two essential elements, truth and personality." In essence, what we do speaks louder than what we say.

Developing a spiritual life begins with a daily reading of God's Word (Psalm 119:11, 105; 73:24; 2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Second, the man of God must be constant in prayer (1 Thessalonians 5:17; Luke 18:1). Larsen, a homiletics instructor, states, "We have not prepared until we have prayed. ... No one

has the power of God with men unless he has the power with God for men. ... We cannot represent God if we have not stood before God. ... It is more important for me, therefore, to teach a student to pray, than to preach."

An excellent tool is to keep a prayer and faith journal, similar to a daily diary, in which you record your reading, thoughts and dated prayer requests. Maintaining this journal is a faith-building exercise.

Third, choose a wife who wants to be a preacher's wife and train your children to be men and women of God, not because they are the preacher's children but because they have developed their own love and faith in God. The key is for the evangelist and his family to spend time with God so they can reflect God to man (2 Corinthians 3:18; 6:3-10).

The man of God is a care-giver (2 Timothy 1:16-17; 2 Corinthians 1:3-4; Matthew 10:42; James 1:27; Matthew 25:31-46). People do not care how much you know until they know how much you care. Luke summarized our Lord's ministry as "going about doing good" (Acts 10:38).

The man of God is to be a comforter. Hugo McCord shared a conversation he had with a London cab driver. Brother McCord asked the driver if he ever went to church. The cab driver responded that there are three times in a man's life when he needs to go to church: when he's hatched, matched and dispatched.

Although this man had an incomplete view of the church, he did underline the fact that ministry involves weddings and funerals. The evangelist ought to require premarital counseling for people he weds, involving four essential areas: social, economic, physical and religious. Ministering to the bereaved in times of funerals is another important aspect of ministry. Time does not heal things, but the right processes in time do.

God is our counselor (Isaiah 9:6; Psalm 73:24), and the man of God must be a counselor too. The importance of knowing when to refer cannot be overstated.

The man of God deals with relationships. Peter admonished each one, "Love the brotherhood" (1 Peter 2:17). A man of God understands that his relationships with elders, deacons, members in general, community, brotherhood, and fellow preachers must be exemplary.

The evangelist is a man of God called to ministry with a passion for service in the areas of preaching, teaching God's word (Matthew 4:23; 9:35; 2 Thessalonians 2:14). He follows a divine pattern (2 Timothy 4:1-8). My strong advice is that our preaching be expository and evangelistic. In his excellent work, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, Bryan Chapell states that our preaching should consist of revealing the seriousness of sin, the significance of the cross, the nature of faith. He reminds us of what he calls FCF—the "fallen condition focus" of mankind. Such preaching involves expectancy.

The Bible portrays preaching as producing response, both positively and negatively. The Gospel does not offer an audience the option of indecision. People who heeded biblical preaching in the first century were convinced, and convicted. For the audience to see it, the preacher must first see it and preach it passionately, positively and expectantly.

The man of God will remember people who are less fortunate (Matthew 25:31-46), especially people who are behind bars because Jesus says, "I was in prison" (v. 36). Prison ministry is not for everyone, but people who can do this work reap great rewards.

The man of God is to be a facilitator in church growth. The man of God is to be an administrator, first with his own time management and delegation and then with those to whom he ministers (Matthew 9:36-38; Ephesians 4:11-12). The prime objective for leadership in the Lord's church is to equip the saints for ministry. Each congregation ought to have men's leadership training classes and classes to equip women for service in their role. Training for leadership among our young people can be facilitated by a Lads to Leaders program. Remember, few people come to church to get involved, but few stay who do not.

The man of God functions in community. He can serve as chaplain in the hospital, military service or police force. He can write for local newspapers (editorial sections) and for brotherhood periodicals, and he can use mass media to reach the lost. The man of God who is doing the work of an evangelist, making full proof of his ministry, will use any and all available talents and opportunities to reflect God in this world.

What Makes A Sermon Positive or Negative

JIMMY E. ASHBURN

The terms "positive sermon" and "negative sermon" are often used in the church today. No indication exists in the Scriptures that any message delivered in either the Old Testament or the New Testament is referred to as positive or negative. Not long ago a preacher remarked that when he was a younger man, an elder at the congregation where he worked told him he was preaching too many negative sermons. What does a negative sermon consist of? Apparently when a person refers to a negative sermon, he means a lesson touching upon the unrepented sins of the Christians.

I recently asked a minister whom I greatly respect, if he would consider Jonah's message to Nineveh negative or positive. He immediately replied, "Negative." I went on to point out that the message caused an entire wicked nation to realize their sins and to repent of them. Not only did the message bring about a change for the better for the world, but also it caused an entire nation to repent of its sins and to be brought closer to God. That would have to be a very positive lesson, indeed!

The only one who did not consider the message to be positive was Jonah because it did not bring about the result that he desired. In his selfish desire and judgment, Jonah did not want Nineveh to repent because he had considered them unworthy of salvation.

We may have some Jonahs in the church today. They cause great sadness for our Lord and Savior when He sees some Christians who claim to be His followers not wanting to bring others to heaven with them.

We are instructed in 2 Timothy 4:2 to "Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all long-suffering and teaching". We are further instructed in 1 Peter 4:11 "If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God."

The Greek word translated here as "oracles" is *logia*, which indicates the plural of word, thus words. One could properly consider it to mean the entire Word of God. And so, we are

instructed to speak the entire Word of God, not just that portion that pleases men. Some say that two of the three instructions in 2 Timothy 4:2 are positive; however, all three seem positive.

God's Word is not negative, except to those who refuse to submit to it. When one speaks the entire Word of God, he cannot go wrong in spiritual matters. The only negative sermon is the one that makes everyone feel good but does no spiritual good for anyone. The congregation leaves the worship service still not convicted of the unrepented sin in their lives to spend another week wandering in darkness, the result of not wanting to hear what would have been positive if it had been preached and if they had listened.

What Mark 9:38-40 Really Teaches

GARY DODD

A small gallery of portraits of famous people hangs in the vestibule of a church building in northern California. The gallery appears to include purposefully people who are diverse in their beliefs. There are portraits of Socrates, Abraham Lincoln, Eleanor Roosevelt, Mahatma Gandhi and Jesus Christ. A portion of Galatians 3:26 written above the portraits in beautiful gold letters expresses the theme of the collection: "And we are all children of God." While the theme of this gallery through this text from Scripture expresses a sentiment and a desire for universal brotherhood, it fails to express all of what Paul said in Galatians 3:26. The condition for becoming children of God is "faith in our Lord Jesus Christ."

Today, church leaders, ministers and members of God's family express similar sentiments and desires for a brotherhood that is more inclusive and accepting of religious people with different beliefs. Through joint worship services, evangelistic efforts and a variety of associations, efforts are being made to bridge the gaps that separate people of different faiths and to establish unity with denominations.

Increasingly, Jesus' commendation of an exorcist unknown by the disciples is being quoted from the gospel of Mark to support

these efforts (Mark 9:38-40). Does Mark include this reference in his gospel to provide a scriptural basis for unity with denominations or for some other purpose?

The Context of Mark 9:38-40

The pivotal centre of the gospel of Mark is Peter's confession that Jesus is the Christ (8:27-30) and the crucial discussion of the Messiah's work and the work of those who would be the disciples of the Messiah that immediately follows (8:31-9:1). The first half of the gospel leads to Peter's confession. By Mark 8:29 the answer is clear as Peter answers Jesus' question about His identity by declaring: "You are the Christ." Unfortunately, Peter and the other disciples, did not fully understand all that was entailed in Peter's identification of Jesus as the Messiah.

In the second half of the gospel, Mark makes it clear that Jesus, as the authoritative Son of God, is willing to submit to death. The Son of Man is willing to be the servant of all and to die for all. If the disciples believe in and confess that Jesus is the Christ, they must be willing to submit to Christ's authority and follow in His footsteps of service. This half of Mark's gospel emphasizes service or discipleship.

Mark's Purpose for This Story

In Mark 9:38-40 we read an intriguing story that involves an exorcist unknown to Jesus' chosen 12 disciples. Mark's purpose for including the story appears to be similar to two other stories told early in the second half of Mark. The inner circle of Jesus' disciples, Peter, James and John, are used to demonstrate that the disciples did not understand fully what Jesus' messiahship and His death signified for their lives and mission. Each story follows a prophecy by Jesus of His passion.

Jesus' prediction of His death (Mark 8:31) is countered by Peter's disputing (8:32). Jesus' rebuke of Peter makes it clear that Peter doesn't understand fully what it meant for Jesus to be the Messiah or what it meant to be a disciple of the Messiah (8:33). Jesus' private explanation to His 12-disciples of what was about to happen to Him in Jerusalem (10:32-34) is followed by the request of James and John to occupy physical seats of authority in His coming kingdom (10:35-37). Obviously James and John misunderstood the nature of Christ's kingdom (10:38-45).

The story that involves the unknown exorcist (Mark 9:38-40)

further reveals John's misunderstanding of the significance of Christ's passion for the disciples. Again, it follows a prediction about Jesus' death (9:30-32). Jesus has just explained that His followers will be identified with Him as they are willing to be last, to be the servants of all, and to be like children in their attitude of humble service (9:33-37). And to this John responds: "But look how zealous we are for you! Look at what great things we are doing!"

Discipleship Misunderstood

To demonstrate the disciples' zeal and the greatness of their works, John tells Jesus about an intervention in ministry that they made on behalf of Jesus. "We saw a man expelling demons from people by ordering them to leave. Teacher, he was using Your authority and claiming to be Your representative. We tried to prevent him from doing this, but he refused to stop. If he has Your authority to do this, we certainly are not aware of it! We do not know this man. How could he have Your authority when he is not travelling and working with us?" (9:38, author's paraphrase).

John and the other disciples were concerned about a man who was a stranger to them who was exercising Jesus' power and authority. They may have felt threatened because of their recent inability to heal a boy with an evil spirit (9:14-29). Unfortunately, for our curiosity, Mark does not tell us all the details we might like to know about this man, but he does make it clear that he was indeed acting on behalf of Jesus and accomplishing Jesus' will. Otherwise, his lack of authenticity would have been evident in his inability to drive out demons. Although he is an unknown exorcist to the 12 disciples, his exercise of Jesus' power and the fact that demons were driven out of people mark him as a follower of Christ.

Jesus rebuked John and the other disciples. He said: "Quit trying to prevent this man from exorcising demons. The fact that he is able to perform these miracles, to do these mighty works, reveals that the power of God is at work in him. The fact that he exercises My power and authority is a positive testimony on My behalf. He is not our opponent. He is our friend. Therefore, it should be obvious that he is for us, not against us, because he can not work for Me and against Me at the same moment" (9:39-40, author's paraphrase).

Mark does not explain when this man encountered Jesus or

was given the power to exorcise demons. But Jesus affirms the unknown exorcist was on His side. He was working under Jesus' authority. He did not have to be known by the 12 disciples to be a follower of Jesus or to be involved in spiritual conflict with Satan. He believes in Jesus and is doing what they were struggling to do (9:14-18). John and the other disciples were mistaken in their presumption to intervene on behalf of and to speak for Jesus. It is obvious that they did not have the competence to do so. The disciples needed to learn that service is defined by faith and humble obedience to the Christ and not by their distinctions of what or whom are important or trivial.

Don't Discourage Discipleship

To further illustrate this, Jesus referred to a common act of hospitality that might be extended to the disciples on the ground that they belonged to Him. Such an act of hospitality and service is in vivid contrast with the miracles being done by the unknown exorcist. Jesus says: "I assure you, anyone who expresses their faith in and obedience to Me by so simple an act of hospitality of giving one of My followers a drink of water will have their act of service remembered because they have demonstrated that they also are My followers. By their devotion they have demonstrated they are My disciples" (9:42, author's paraphrase).¹

Just as He used graphic language to expose Peter's misconception of His work ("Get behind Me, Satan!" 8:33), Jesus used graphic language to describe the consequences of discouraging other disciples. Jesus told John and the other disciples: "It would be a tragic irony if you who are to be received in My name as my emissaries are the very ones who cause other disciples to fail to follow me. It would be better for a huge millstone, like the ones turned by animals, to be tied around your neck and for you to be thrown into the sea and drowned than for you to face the punishment for causing other followers to quit following Me" (9:42, author's paraphrase).

Correcting Attitudes and Actions

In context, Mark 9:38-40 reveals how John and the other disciples acted directly counter to the instructions Jesus had just given to them. John and the other disciples demonstrated self-serving interests in approaching and rebuking the unknown exorcist and by telling Jesus about their actions. Jesus has just

told them that He is going to model the type of commitment in His death that He instructs them to follow. Yet they are concerned about their greatness and possibly anyone, like the unknown exorcist, who might threaten their place in the kingdom.

The fact the 12 disciples were specially chosen by Him did not elevate them in status above someone else who could perform an exorcism or someone else who provided a simple hospitality to another believer. As a matter of fact, Jesus went on to explain the extremes to which they should go in order to help others serve Him and in order to live in peace with them (Mark 9:43-50).

Unity with Denominations?

Mark 9:38-40 does not provide a Scriptural basis for unity with denominations. Mark did not include the story of the unknown exorcist in his gospel to show Jesus endorsed unity among people of different beliefs. Like the theme of the portrait gallery in the church building in northern California, to reduce this passage of Scripture to a proof text for unity with denominations is to fail to express fully what Mark intended. At this point in Jesus' ministry, Mark is showing the lack of understanding by even the closest followers of Jesus of what His messiahship entailed for Him and for them as His disciples.

By his comments, John revealed his misunderstanding that great acts of service could earn him a special place of honor in Jesus' kingdom. He also revealed his failure to understand the necessity of Christ's death and its meaning for him. The disciples were inappropriately concerned about their authorization and their status as the chosen Twelve.

We have to assume the unknown exorcist was a follower with a belief system different from that of the 12 disciples to understand Mark 9:38-40 has anything to say about unity with denominations. It is much easier to accept what the text tells us. He was a disciple who did not accompany and was not known by the Twelve. Jesus commends him as a follower. The fact the exorcist could drive out demons was sufficient proof that he was attached to Jesus.

God's Gallery of Faith

As Christians we do not ultimately decide whose portraits are displayed in God's gallery of faith; Jesus' teaching provides sufficient guidelines (John 12:47-50). But God can work through us as He adds to His collection. We are privileged to discuss with

others what the Bible says about how one comes to Christ and continues to be transformed into Christ's image (Romans 12:1-2). We are responsible for striving to understand correctly what the word of Christ teaches and to abide by the full expression of God's theme for His collection. God is the Curator and Owner of His gallery of faith. It is my prayer that He will work through us as He adds other portraits to His collection.

Can a Homosexual Be A Christian?

JIMMY JIVIDEN

There has been a lot of discussion in religious groups about whether or not a homosexual can be a priest or pastor. A more basic question is, "Can a homosexual be a Christian?" The Bible says, "*Do not be deceived, neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals shall inherit the kingdom of God*" (1 Corinthians 6: 9,10).

Language cannot be plainer. These words cannot be qualified by saying that the Bible condemns homosexual immorality because it was a *cultural taboo* then, but it is now accepted in our culture. There was probably a greater ratio of homosexuals in the ancient Greek and Roman world than in the modern world. The Scriptures went cross-grained to the culture then as well as now. The difference is that first century Christians did not try to whitewash the sin of homosexual immorality.

To condemn such immorality is not to nullify grace. God's judgment is against *all* immorality—including homosexual immorality. The most loving thing one can do is to tell the soul enslaved by sin and damned to hell about this judgment. Only by such confrontation can a sinner be motivated to repentance.

Immediately after condemning such immorality, Paul makes a powerful declaration. He says, "*Such were some of you*" (1 Corinthians 6:11). This statement reveals both the magnitude of grace and the demands of repentance. Those who had been condemned as homosexuals were "washed," "sanctified," and "justified." The grace of God is sufficient to cover all sin. Homosexuals can become Christians.

The passage also shows that they no longer practiced

homosexual immorality. Paul's affirmation, "*Such were some of you,*" shows they were no longer living that lifestyle. The demands of repentance meant they quit practicing homosexual immorality. A homosexual, if he repents and obeys the Lord, can become a Christian.

What Is A Denomination And How Did Denominating Begin?

JIM MASSEY

1 Corinthians 1:10-13 is a clear-cut explanation of the beginning of denominationalism. After Paul had left Corinth, the people began to wear the names of their teachers: "*I am of Paul, I am of Apollos, I am of Cephas*" [vs.12]. Paul asked, "*Were ye baptized in the name of Paul?*" [vs.13]. He thanked God that he had only baptized two or more of them because his name and the names of other preachers were causing divisions [vs.15].

This is what denominating is. The word comes from "*de*" meaning "*by*" and "*nomin*" meaning "*name*." A denomination is a "*named division*" or a "*division resulting from its name*." Denominations of a dollar are the names of its parts: *pennies, nickels, dimes, quarters, and halves*. The denominator of a fraction like 1/2 is the 2 which divides these fractions as "*halves*" from other fractions such as "*thirds*."

Christians in Corinth were denominating themselves by wearing the names of the preachers who baptized them, thus dividing the church into "*named divisions*" or denominations. Paul demanded that "*there be no divisions among you*" [vs.10]. Denominating divides Christ [vs.13] by dividing His spiritual body, the church. Jesus prayed that his followers might all be one as He, and God are one [John 17:21].

Denomination is a bad word. Though we have grown up in a world which accept it, it is unscriptural and sinful to denominate ourselves. The world thinks "*lust*" is a good and popular word, but the Bible shows that it is a bad word. The application forms which we fill out will often ask, "*What denomination?*" as if to be a Christian required denominating and as if the word were honorable.

The early church soon tried to be denominated, but the

apostles condemned the practice. They condemned name-wearing which divided Christians. The same Bible condemns denominating today. The names are different, but the sin is the same. Denominating is a sin which began very early in the church. It has multiplied and become widely accepted today.

What are some Bible words for religious divisions?

In Acts 24:14 Paul said that the way in which he served God was called by men a "sect." Christianity was thought of as a "sect" and was everywhere spoken against [Acts 28:22]. "*Sectarianism*" is a bad word. It has been the cause of open warfare in Ireland. To be a "*sectarian*" is to be narrow and divisive. Yet, this is a Bible word for denominating.

Another word is "*heresy*." Heresies are called "*damnable*" in II Peter 2:1. A heresy is a religious division resulting from a strange teaching. It makes a person a "*heretic*." Have you ever heard anyone say, "*You have your heresy and I have mine?*" Would we put on application forms, "*What heresy are you a member of?*" Yet, "*heresy*" is a Bible word for denominating and accurately gives its meaning.

A third word for denominating is "*parties*." This is the American Standard Version reading of "*heresies*" in Galatians 5:20. It helps us to see the true nature of denominating. All Americans are American citizens, but not all are members of the American Citizens Party. The proper Bible concept of the church is like American citizens, since all Christians are the church. But the denominational concept of using some Bible names to divide a group from all other Christians is a corruption which destroys unity. ***Let us call Bible things by Bible names and do Bible things in Bible ways.*** "*Parties*" are works of the flesh [Gal. 5:20]. "*Heresies*" are damnable [II Peter 2:1]. "*Sectarianism*" is a misunderstanding of Christianity [Acts 24:14; 28:22]. "*Denominationalism*" is condemned [I Corinthians 1:10-13]. But strangely this last word has traditionally become respectable and acceptable in our world.



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