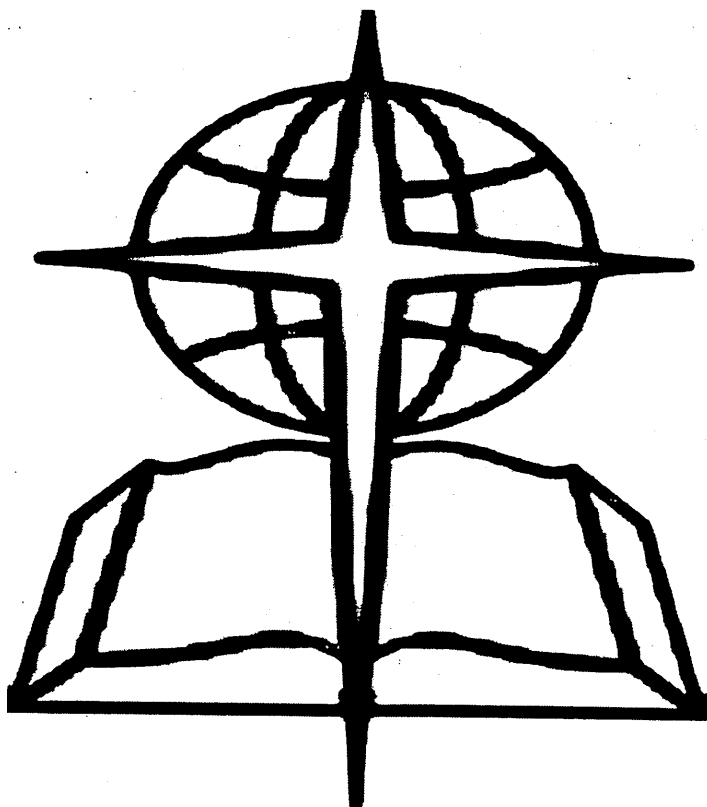


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# THE BIBLE TEACHER



## **BACK TO BASICS**

Jesus promised to build His church (Matthew 16:18). His promise was fulfilled when His church came into existence on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). Peter commanded the multitude assembled on that day: "Repent, and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins." (Acts 2:38). Those who gladly received his word were baptized (Acts 2:41), as a result three thousand were added to the church on that day by the Lord Himself (Acts 2:47). That was the beginning of Christ's church.

Of what denomination did those three thousand become members? Our contention is that they joined no denomination. Indeed, denominationalism such as we know in today's world did not even exist then. They had simply obeyed the Gospel and were added by the Lord to His church. They wore no sectarian name, adopted no denominational creed, and belonged to no ecclesiastical hierarchy. They were simply children of God, members of the church, were called Christians (Acts 11:26).

Churches of Christ today everywhere plead for a return to that same church with that same simplicity. We do not claim to be a denomination. Our goal is to be that church—nothing more, nothing less—just basic New Testament Christians as people were in the first century.

We teach the same plan of salvation—faith, repentance, confession, and baptism for the remission of sins. (Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:38; 8:35-39). We practice the same worship—teaching, giving, observing the Lord's Supper, praying, and singing praises to God. (Acts 2:42; Acts 20:7; Ephesians 5:19). We follow the same congregational organization—elders, deacons, saints (Philippians 1:1), without offices and positions unknown to the Christians in the beginning.

If you want to be just what people were in the New Testament, then we urge you to investigate churches of Christ. We strive to speak where the Bible speaks and to remain silent where the Bible is silent.

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# THE BIBLE TEACHER

*Pleading for the Restoration of Pure New Testament Christianity*

**Vol. 43**

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## *Editorial*

### **What Does the Bible Teach?**

#### ***The Church Christ Built Is Neither Catholic Nor Protestant***

WHEN CHRIST had promised to build His church, as we read in Matthew 16:18, He didn't mean to build a Catholic or Protestant or a Pentecostal church. The word church is a derivative of old English word "chirche," which is the translation of Greek word "ekklesia," the word Christ had used for building His church, which means, "the called out." The term "called out" carries the idea of separation or being set apart for a given purpose. Christ's church, according to the Bible, therefore, is the called-out body of people, who are called to follow Christ. (1 Peter 2:21). Another way of putting it, the church of Christ consists of the followers of Christ. Christ had built only one church, and small congregations of His one church are found all over the world. His church is called by His name—church of Christ, and all congregations of His church in various places put together are called churches of Christ (Romans 16:16).

The church of Christ is not a denomination, it is neither denominational or inter-denominational or sectarian. Member of the church of Christ are called Christians—Christians only (Acts 11:26; 1 Peter 4: 16).

According to the Bible, Christ Himself is the Head of His church (Colossians 1:18), which is His spiritual body (Ephesians 1:22, 23). There is, therefore no human head and no central headquarters on earth of the church of Christ. Since Christ, the Head of the church is in heaven, He governs His church on earth by or through

His New Testament of the Bible.

The church of Christ follows only the Bible as its guide in all religious or spiritual matters, and does not follow any creed books originated with men. It rejects all man-made teachings and dogmas. The church of Christ believes in speaking where the Bible speaks and maintaining silence where the Bible is silent. This is the precise reason why the church of Christ does not observe religious "holidays," such as, Christmas and Easter because the Bible nowhere speaks of them. Sure, we read in the Bible where Christ was born, but no one on earth knows on what month of the year and on what date of the month he was born. Also, there is no example in the entire Bible where one can read of early Christians ever observing any such festivals. (Read Galatians 4:8-11). In fact, the word "Christmas" is not even once mentioned anywhere in the Bible. We believe, the Bible contains God's message for man. Whatsoever man need to know and follow in religious matters, God has revealed His complete will in the Bible for man everywhere. (2 Timothy 3:16, 17). The Bible has no expiry date. What it taught people to do in the first century, it teaches the same today. Man is warned not to add into God's written word and not to take away any word from it. (Deuteronomy 4:2; 1 Corinthians 4:6; Revelation 22:18, 19).

No man in the church of Christ is called by a title, such as, Father, Reverend, or Pastor, etc. Christ strictly forbade His followers against the use of titles. To His followers He said, "But you do not be called 'Rabbi'; for one is your teacher, the Christ, and you are all brethren. Do not call anyone on earth your father; for one is your Father, He who is in heaven." (Matthew 23:9). We all have our physical fathers, but spiritually speaking we all have only one Father, God, who is in heaven. The word Reverend is used only once in the entire Bible in the King James Version of the Bible, in Psalm 111:9, and it is used for God. The word means, "the most fearful." Nowhere in the Bible any man was ever called "Father" or "Reverend," or "Pastor." Paul was not called "Father Paul," Peter was not called "Reverend Peter" and John was not called "Pastor John." The word Pastor denotes a work that a person does and means to be a shepherd or overseer. It is not a term or title to be used. In church of Christ all members are equal—all are brothers and sisters in Christ.

Today churches of Christ are pleading with men everywhere for a return to that same church that Christ in the beginning had established. Our goal is to be just Christians and members of the

church of Christ—nothing more, nothing less— just basic New Testament Christians as people were in the first century when the apostles of Christ were living on earth. We strive to speak where the Bible speaks and to remain silent where the Bible is silent.

If you want to be just what people were in the beginning in New Testament, we invite you and urge you to come join us to be in the Bible way.

### **Putting Off The Old Man Of Sin**

#### **LESSON 8**

## **HOMOSEXUALITY**

**J.C. CHOATE**

In our modern day world there are many evils. Many of these are accepted or tolerated. Some are even paraded before the public as if they were something to be proud of and to glory in. One of these is the practice of homosexuality. Homosexuality is not new, but in the past it has been kept in the background and homosexuals were not disposed to identify themselves. But in the past few years something has happened to change all of that. Homosexuality has come out into the open. Homosexuals have not only identified themselves but have banded together to make demands in various parts of the world. They portray themselves as those who have been unjustly treated and persecuted. They preach that there is nothing wrong with homosexuality since it is simply another lifestyle. They further try to make all of those who oppose them to feel guilty and that they are denying the rights to a minority group.

We must understand that when God created man in the beginning that he saw it was not good for man to be alone. (Genesis 2:18). So what did he do? Did he make another man? No, but we read, "And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; And the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave onto his wife: and they shall be one flesh." (Genesis 2:21-24). So God made a woman. Didn't he? And he said that a man should leave his father and mother (male and female) and cleave

to his wife (female) and they (man and woman) should be one flesh. None of this fits the homosexuality philosophy. If God had made a man, and then had made another man to be his companion, then that would have been the end of the human race. But God didn't do that. Instead, God made a woman for man and commanded them to be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth. (Genesis 1:26, 27). And they did, and that is where you and I came from.

I am assuming of course that you know what homosexuality is, and I am sure you do, but I am talking about men turning to men and women turning to women to satisfy their sexual needs. In other words, God created man and woman in such a way that they are incomplete without each other, and therefore they are attracted to one another. He further instituted marriage to provide man and woman with a lawful way of being united to reproduce. As long as God's way is respected and followed then it produces the desired results. In that case it provides man and woman companionship, the pleasure of being together, and of having children so that the human race might go on. But when God's way is forsaken, and man turns to man and woman turns to woman, then this is not natural. How can anyone argue in favour of homosexuality when this is contrary to the law of nature, marriage, and having a family. If this practice was accepted by all then this would be the means of removing man from earth within a short period of time. But even if a few practice this, then it means that God and his way is rejected to that extent.

There are those who argue that if there are men and women who want to practice homosexuality then they should be allowed to do so. True, God allows people to go on and do as they please, even if it is to their own destruction, but at the same time, God has had certain things to say in his word about this matter and we who believe and teach his will are duty bound to point out the evils of such a practice.

One of the best examples of homosexuality is to be found in Genesis 18 and 19 in the story of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. The setting for this is as follows: Abraham's herdsmen and Lot's herdsmen were having problems and so Abraham suggested to Lot that they separate and go out to themselves to keep down further problems. Since Abraham gave Lot a choice of the land, the record says that he pitched his tents toward Sodom. This was a mistake, since Lot and his family eventually ended up

in Sodom. But in time God observed that the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were so wicked that he proposed to destroy them. When Abraham learned of this, and knowing that Lot and his family were in Sodom, then he pleaded with the Lord to spare these cities. He asked the Lord if he would spare them if fifty righteous could be found there. The Lord agreed that he would. Then he kept coming on down in the number of righteous until he came to ten righteous, and again the Lord said that he would spare the cities if they could find just ten there, but even this was not possible. Now let's pick up the story at Genesis 19:1: "And there came two angels to Sodom at even: and Lot sat in the gate of Sodom: and Lot seeing them rose up to meet them; and he bowed himself with his face toward the ground; And he said, Behold now, my lords, turn in, I pray you, into your servant's house, and tarry all night, and wash your feet, and ye shall rise up early, and go on your ways. And they said. Nay; but we will abide in the street all night. And he pressed upon them greatly; and they turned in unto him, and entered into his house; and he made them a feast, and did bake unleavened bread, and they did eat. But before they lay down, the men of the city, even the men of the city, even the men of Sodom; compassed the house round, both old and young, all the people from every quarter; And they called unto Lot, and said unto him, Where are the men which came in to thee this night? bring them out unto us, that we may know them. And Lot went out at the door unto them, and shut the door after him, And said, I pray you, brethren, do not so wickedly. Behold now, I have two daughters which have not known man; let me, I pray you, bring them out unto you and do ye to them as is good in your eyes: only unto these men do nothing; for therefore came they under the shadow of my roof. And they said, Stand back. And they said again, This one fellow came in to sojourn, and he will needs

be a judge: now will we deal worse with thee, than with-them. And they pressed sore upon the man, even Lot, and came near to break the door. But the men put forth their hand, and pulled Lot into the house to them, and shut to the door. And they smote the men that were at the door of the house with blindness, both small and great: so that they wearied themselves to find the door. And the men said unto Lot, Hast thou here any besides? son in law, and thy sons, and thy daughters, and whatsoever thou hast in the city, bring them out of this place: For we will destroy this place, because the cry of them is waxen great before the face of the Lord

and the Lord hath sent us to destroy it. And Lot went out, and spake unto his sons in law, which married his daughters, and said, Up, get you out of this place; for the Lord will destroy this city. But he seemed as one that mocked unto his sons in law. And when the morning arose, then the angels hastened Lot, saying, Arise, take thy wife, and thy two daughters, which are here; lest thou be consumed in the iniquity of the city. And while he lingered, the men laid hold upon his hand, and upon the hand of his wife, and upon the hand of his two daughters; the Lord being merciful unto him: and they brought him forth, and set him without the city . . . Then the Lord rained upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven; And he overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground." (Genesis 19:1-16,24,25).

Now what do we have in this story? You can obviously see that the men of Sodom were homosexuals. Even when Lot went so far as to offer his daughters to them, to do with them as they wish, to save the men inside, who were angels, they rejected them since they wanted the men. Therefore since they were so wicked, and inasmuch as not even ten righteous could be found, then God destroyed those cities from the face of the earth. In other words, they were so wicked that it would not even be possible to rehabilitate them or to change them. We can see what God thought of this kind of lifestyle.

Although God will not destroy homosexuals from the face of the earth today as he did then, that does not mean that they will not be dealt with. Even through their own immoral practices, they have contacted a disease called AIDS they are passing it around among themselves and that threatens to wipe them out. But more than that, God will deal with them at the judgment, and unless they repent and obey God while they have the time and the opportunity, then he will cast them into eternal destruction.

We have Paul describing a group of wicked people of his day, and he said, "For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet." (Romans 1:26, 27). Going on to mention all of their wicked practices, he said that one of their sins was that they were without natural affection.



(Romans 1:31). He concludes by saying, "Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them." (Romans 1:32). Now if he is not describing homosexuality here, then what is he talking about? Then homosexuals have the nerve to say that the Bible does not condemn their so-called "lifestyle."

Also in 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10 the Apostle Paul lists some of the works of the flesh, and among them he speaks of adulterers, the effeminate, abusers of themselves with mankind, and so on, and he says that those who practice these things cannot enter the kingdom of God.

Surely then you can see that homosexuality is indeed a sin against God and man. It is not natural and there is nothing good about it. I pray that you are not guilty of anything like this. If you are then I would encourage you to repent of it. If you have children, I would encourage you to warn them against this type of thing. I would also protect them against those kind of characters who will take them and abuse them and attempt to influence them to accept such a wicked way of life.

God's way is for man and woman to come together in marriage, have their families, and to live godly lives. Any other way than this, is contrary to God's will.

## THE THREE "LET US" PASSAGES OF HEBREWS 10

MARK POSEY

The book of Hebrews was written to Jewish Christians that were facing extreme persecution because they followed and believed in Christ. The author of Hebrews writes to them in an attempt to encourage and uplift them to a greater faith, hope and love in Christ and one another. His message is that "Christ is better" In chapter 10: 19-27, we find three passages in which he exhorts them to "draw near with faith," "hold fast their hope," and "consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works." The author of Hebrews prefaces each exhortation statement in this section with "let us." He includes himself and does not elevate himself as a

superior law giver. This is evident in his constant glorification and magnification of Christ as superior.

In verse 22 he says, "Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith." Faith is an essential part of being a Christian. In fact, we cannot please God without faith. Hebrews 11:6 says, "But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." So we must show our faith by our works. James 2:18 says, "show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works." One verse earlier James says, "even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone." A Christian's faith is expressed in his/her works, not for self glorification, but for the glorification of God.

In verse 23 the Hebrew writer says, "Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering." For someone to hold fast the profession of their faith expresses their hope. We have so much to hope for, but it is sad to think of those who are not members of the true Church for which Christ died. They are like the Gentiles we read about in Ephesians 2:11-13, "having no hope, and without God in the world." Having no hope makes the future dark as a dungeon. If there is no hope for the future, there is no power for today. Christians should all have the outlook on the future that Paul expressed in Philippians 3:20. "For our conversation is in heaven; from whence we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ." We look for the Savior, that's hope!

In verse 24 he says, "And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works." It is easy to do something if you love it. It's easy to be a Christian if you love it. Jesus said in John 14:15, "If ye love me, keep my commandments." Paul said in Romans 5:8, "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

But how were these Christians to stimulate their faith, hope and love? We are told in the very next verse. In verse 25 he says, "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another, and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching." The author of Hebrews is saying don't neglect Christian fellowship and assembling together. Here they could feed on the Word, commune with God, and lift each other up to face another week. This is how they would grow stronger and encourage one another in this time of great persecution.

# EXAMINING THE EVIDENCE

STAFFORD NORTH

In the religious world, "denomination" refers to a body of believers in Christ who consider their church to be only one group among many groups of the saved. The majority of these groups think that a person is saved at the moment of belief in Christ and then may join any one of many denominations, each of which has equal standing with God.

Thus, in a city wide evangelistic effort for all denominations as people confess Christ as their Savior, they are told they are now saved and may join the church of their choice. Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians and other denominations subscribe to this view.

To visualize this denominational concept, think of a larger circle with smaller circles within it. This view says that by faith only a person gets inside the larger circle, sometimes called "the church universal." Once in the larger circle, a person may enter into his choice among the smaller circles representing different denominations.

Accepting this denominational view necessarily means agreeing with the following statements implicit in the belief that a person belongs to one out of many groups of saved people:

1. A person is saved from past sins at the time he believes in Jesus and asks Jesus into his life.
2. A person is saved and is in the church universal before joining a denomination. This denominational view holds that a person is saved at the moment of faith before joining a denomination. Membership in a denomination then has nothing to do with salvation. All denominations admit that there are saved people outside of their denomination and outside of all denominations.
3. A saved person may choose to join any denomination. In this view, people in all denominations are equally acceptable to God and equally on the road to heaven. A person may choose a denomination on the basis of worship style, building location, preacher or particular doctrines; but whichever denomination a person joins makes no difference in his eternal salvation.

There was a time when the positions mentioned above characterized Protestant denominations but not those of the Roman

Catholic faith. In recent years, however, under the pressures of our culture's pluralism and tolerance, this line is beginning to blur. Some in Protestant denominations now consider Catholics as equally in the fold of the saved, and some Catholics, likewise, consider those in Protestant denominations as saved.

Are the views listed above in harmony with what the Bible teaches? Is this Christ's view of His body? Should everyone adopt and promote this view? This position should be examined in light of Scripture.

The Bible teaches a person is saved from past sins when he believes in Jesus and has demonstrated that faith in repentance and baptism. This is salvation by grace. No one can earn his way to heaven. At the same time, God has promised His grace only to people who meet His stated conditions to receive it. These conditions include believing in and confessing Jesus, repenting of sins, and being baptized for remission of sins. Acts 2:38; 22:16; Romans 6:3-4 and Galatians 3:26-27 teach that forgiveness of sins follows obedience in baptism; denomination accepting salvation by faith only and rejecting baptism for remission of sins as essential.

The Bible teaches that a person who believes in Christ, repents and is baptized is saved and, at that time, is added to the body of the saved by God (Acts 2:47; Galatians 3:27). This body of saved people is called the body of Christ, the church of Christ, the kingdom of God, the family of God. All the saved are in it, and no saved are outside of it. Each person whose sins are removed by the blood of Christ becomes, by that very act, part of the body of the saved and has no need to join any other group.

For churches of Christ to consider themselves a denomination, then, means believing the Bible says God adds to the church universal on the basis of faith only and then a person may join the church of Christ or any other chosen denomination. This would mean abandoning our belief that the Scriptures teach only one church, which is the body of all those saved by obeying the gospel.

The Bible teaches that people within Christ's body are not to divide into groups, separating themselves from one another. In 1 Corinthians 1:10, Paul speaks to people starting such divisions. He warns them against it because Christ is not divided, and only He died for our sins. Jesus prayed for unity among believers (John 17:21), and Paul condemns such dividing (Galatians 5:18-21).

The Scriptures, then, condemn subgroups within the body of the saved. For churches of Christ to consider themselves a

denomination, means agreeing that it is right to divide the body of Christ into subgroups with differing views about essentials. While we have disagreements within our ranks, we have not taught that having subgroups within the body is desirable.

The Bible teaches that the people on the Day of Pentecost, the Samaritans, the Ethiopian, Paul, Cornelius, Lydia, the Philippian jailor and hundreds of thousands more in the first century were saved when they believed, repented and were baptized. They were in the one body of believers, not in any denominational subgroup of Christians. To consider churches of Christ as a denomination would mean that we no longer believe a person can only be in the one body with these first-century Christians.

If a person, knowing nothing about denominations and reading only the Bible, were to follow the cases in Acts by believing, repenting and being baptized, would that person be in a denomination? Such a person would know nothing about denominations and would have done the same as the believers in Acts. Such a person would expect to be added to the same church, the body of the saved, but would not expect to be in a subgroup of Christians of which he had never heard. If we preach the Acts message and people today respond as these people did, those converted will be in the same body as were first-century Christians—not a denomination.

It is possible, then, for a person to believe and obey today such as the people in the first century did and, when that happens, God adds that person to His body of believers. Our role is not to pass judgment on the eternal salvation of people. How God will reward or punish those who have sought to come to Jesus in ways that do not match the Scriptures, only God can decide. Our job, however, is to teach and obey what the Scriptures reveal. To do any less is to fail in our responsibility. To unite in fellowship with and thus give our approval to people who teach and practice such doctrines as salvation by faith only is to fellowship false teachers, a practice we are forbidden to do.

Aquila and Priscilla taught Apollos “the Way of God ... more accurately” when they found him preaching less than the full truth about how to become a Christian (Acts 18:26 NRSV). When Paul found people not taught properly about the purpose of baptism, he did not consider them part of some other acceptable group of believers. He taught them the truth and then baptized them properly. We should do no less.

The church of the New Testament was not a denomination. It still exists where anyone has obeyed God's plan for receiving grace. We could not make God's church into a denomination if we tried. It never has been and never will be a denomination. We can, but should never, create a new denomination. Let us seek to be God's church and call all people to the biblical concept of the body of Christ where all the saved are members.

## REFUTING DENOMINATIONAL ERRORS

GLENN E. HAWKINS

What do these names have in common: Catholic, Episcopal, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormon, Seventh Day Adventist and Christian Science? Each is the name of a prominent religious body or denomination around the world.

What do these people have in common: Boniface III, Henry VIII, Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Knox, John Wesley, John Smith, Roger Williams, Charles Russell, Judge Joseph F. Rutherford, Joseph Smith, William Miller, Ellen G. White and Mary Baker Eddy? These are the names of some prominent men and women who either founded or helped influence the founding of the above-named denominations.

With all due respect, these denominations have one more thing in common. They lack any kind of biblical authority for existing. Not one of these religious bodies can point to the New Testament for its origin, head or many of its religious beliefs and practices.

Denominationalism as we know it today violates the desire and will of God and the prayer of Jesus in John 17 for unity among people who profess to be His disciples, and people in these religious bodies do so profess. It is a known fact, both within the pages of the New Testament and in the annals of early church history, that there was no such thing as a denomination in the first century. There was one church body, as per Ephesians 4:4, over which Christ Jesus was Head (Colossians 1:18) and to which God had added all the saved (Acts 2:47).

Denominationalism as it exists today is the product of man, not God. There is absolutely no God-given authority for a man, woman

or groups of men and women to organize a denomination and pass it off as the church or even a part of the church of the living God.

The doctrinal errors of denominationalism are many. The influence of John Calvin upon the Protestant denominational scene is enormous. The major points of Calvinism can be remembered by using the acronym TULIP: total hereditary depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace and perseverance of saints.

A particularly troublesome error that continues to surface is related to Calvin's view of the Holy Spirit and how it operates upon the sinner. In the *Campbell-Rice Debate* (A.T. Skillman & Son, 1844; p. 715), Rice made this statement: "It is now perfectly clear, that the 'natural man' is the unrenewed man; and since unrenewed men do not receive, but ultimately reject the gospel, it follows inevitably that the spiritual influence of the Holy Spirit, in addition to the Word, is absolutely necessary to their conversion and sanctification. Consequently, in the case of conversions, such a divine influence is actually exerted."

In his debate with brother N.B. Hardeman, Baptist debater Ben M. Bogard affirmed: "The Bible teaches that in conviction and conversion, the Holy Spirit exercises a power or influence in addition to the written word."

Two passages of Scripture may be helpful in the matter of how the Holy Spirit operates in conversion. In Hebrews 4:12, the writer affirms: "For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (KJV) Then, in Ephesians 6:17, as part of Paul's teaching about the Christian's armor, he writes, "And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God."

A Roman soldier in Paul's day carried a sword as a weapon for offense. If it was a two-edged sword, it could cut in either direction. But the sword was of no use in battle unless it was in the hands of the soldier. The Word of God is called the "sword of the Spirit" and is used by the Spirit to convict and convert the sinner.

No case of conversion in the book of Acts was ever undertaken and brought to a conclusion by the Holy Spirit apart from His sword, the Word of God. In every case of conversion, the Word of God was preached. The Holy Spirit used His Sword, the Word of God,

to prick the hearts and minds of sinners to convict them of their sin and to turn to God by obeying the gospel of His Son.

This can be seen clearly by carefully reading the accounts of conversion of the 3,000 on Pentecost in Acts 2; 3:11-4:4, in Acts 8 as Philip preached in Samaria, in the conversion of Saul in Acts 9 and in the conversion of Cornelius in Acts 10. This same Saul, later the apostle Paul, would one day write: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (Romans 1:16). The Holy Spirit has never operated directly upon the heart of a sinner apart from or in addition to the Word of God.

Another major doctrinal error associated with denominationalism is the doctrine of faith only. As believed and taught by its adherents, this doctrine says that a person is saved at the very moment he believes in Jesus. L.S. Ballard, noted Baptist debater, affirmed the following proposition in his debate with brother Thomas Warren: "The Scriptures teach that faith in Christ procures salvation without further acts of obedience." Another well-known Baptist debater, Bob Ross, affirmed the following proposition in his debate with brother Garland Elkins: "The Scriptures teach that salvation comes at the point of faith alone before and without any further acts of obedience."

Suffice it to say that the only times the expressions "faith alone" and "faith only" occur in Scripture are in James 2:17—"even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone" - and in James 2:24—"Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only." Obviously, works are involved in our salvation namely, works of obedience to God's commands.

If salvation is by faith alone, before and without any further acts of obedience, where do repentance and confession fit into the plan of salvation? The New Testament plainly teaches that both are necessary to salvation (Acts 2:38; Romans 10:9-10). Obviously, there is something beyond belief or faith necessary to be saved. To be saved by faith is a biblical doctrine; to be saved by faith only or faith alone is a teaching of man.

People who teach the doctrine of faith only are quick to deny that water baptism has anything to do with a person's salvation. *Hiscox Baptist Manual* says baptism is not essential to salvation, for "our churches repudiate the dogma of baptismal regeneration" (p. 20-21). But baptism is essential to obedience because Christ commanded it.



The book *What Baptists Believe* says, "Baptists believe that no one is a scriptural subject for baptism till he is already saved. All well-informed people know we teach this, then upon what ground can they say we believe baptism is essential to salvation?" (p. 37). W.K. Wood, in the book *Why We Are Baptist*, states, "Baptists do not baptize in order to take away sin" (p. 16).

There are two clear Scriptures that show the fallacy of this view of baptism. Mark 16:16 states, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved. He that believeth not, shall be damned." Both belief and baptism are joined together by the coordinating conjunction "and," which makes both belief and baptism essential to salvation.

In this passage, "he that believeth" and "is baptized" are both aorist participles in the Greek text. Because the aorist participle never indicates action that is subsequent to the main verb, in this case, "shall be saved," neither believing nor being baptized occurs after a person is saved. Both occur before a person is saved.

The second passage to show baptism's necessity for salvation is: "Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 2:38). Two things are commanded: repent and be baptized. The reason or purpose for both is also stated - "for the remission of sins."

Remission of sins is dependent upon repentance and baptism. The same group of people who were commanded to repent were also commanded to be baptized for the remission of sins. The phrase "for the remission of sins" does not mean because their sins were already forgiven. It means the same thing as in Matthew 26:28 when Jesus said, "For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for remission of sins." Jesus shed His blood so that we might have remission of sins not because we already had it. Baptism, immersion, is essential for the remission of sin.

Another error taught by some people in the denominational world is the doctrine of salvation by grace alone or grace only. For example, the Primitive Baptist church teaches that salvation is by grace alone and that other actions such as faith, repentance, baptism or even hearing the gospel are works and thus have nothing to do with a person's salvation. Although some people who hold to the doctrine of grace only might not go as far as that, the fact remains that if we are saved by grace only, what role do faith, repentance, confession and baptism have in salvation? If we are saved by grace only, and it is God's desire that all men be saved

(2 Peter 3:9), then why are not all men saved? Although God took the initiative in planning for man's salvation even though he did not deserve it nor could ever merit it, God did allow for a response to His gracious offer of salvation. When man responds in obedience of faith to this grace, it does not mean that salvation is any less of grace because man had done something. Grace and faith and grace and obedience are not mutually exclusive as Romans 5-6 points out.

While we do not question the honesty and sincerity of people in various denominations, we must humbly, yet firmly and lovingly point out the error they believe regarding their salvation while striving to lead them to a more perfect understanding of what the New Testament teaches about this crucial matter. Remember Jesus said, "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32).

## ONENESS IN CHRIST

HOLLIS MILLER

Readers of the Gospel of John know that Jesus prayed for oneness among His disciples. According to His prayer, oneness is crucial to the world's believing that the Father sent Him (John 17:21). But what is oneness, and how is it achieved?

Oneness in Christ can be a viable issue only for people who are in Christ. This self-evident truth helps resolve some of the problems with oneness. According to Paul, a person who is in Christ has been baptized into Him (Romans 6:1-4; Colossians 2:12). The apostle also teaches that when a person is baptized he clothes himself with Christ (Galatians 3:26-27).

In the light of these teachings, oneness between baptized believers and un-baptized persons is an unknown biblical concept. Therefore, efforts to achieve oneness between baptized believers and unbaptized persons are outside the realm of biblical instruction.

Among people who have been baptized into Christ, a degree of latitude exists that does not violate their oneness. In Paul's instruction to the Corinthians that they should be of the same mind and of the same judgment, he was not contradicting the freedom of conscience he approved in Romans 14 (1 Corinthians 1:10).

The Roman Christians were admonished to leave each other alone in matters of conscientious personal belief (Romans 14:1-5). In verse 5, he teaches that in such matters each Christian is to be fully persuaded in his own mind. The context of the apostle's instruction to the Corinthians suggests that he was admonishing the church to abandon the party spirit, along with the attending quarrels, and to have the same mind and the same judgment regarding their relationship to Christ. Attempts to force -"one mind and one judgment" to include personal conscientious liberty in Christ will inevitably lead to confusion and chaos, the very thing Paul was attempting to avoid.

Does Christian liberty have limits? The answer is yes. Liberty is limited by the borders the New Testament places around it. Christian liberty does not grant permission to reach beyond the Word of God and incorporate ideas and practices that are foreign to the Scriptures. The Romans were free to eat meat or herbs or both. But they were not free to lead a brother in Christ into violation of his conscience. Such a move would have repudiated the law of Christian love. It would have exceeded the borders God has placed around liberty.

Five great oneness principles are found in Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 8 and 10. The principles are more than mere advice; they are solidly implanted in the Scriptures for the health and obedience of the church throughout the ages.

#### **Principle No. 1**

"In matters of conscience leave each other alone." All Christians are to believe the one faith, and all are answerable to it. But Paul recognized that a personal faith functions within the one faith. This is the faith that is to be left alone by others. Every Christian is entitled to live according to the persuasion of his own mind, so long as his persuasion does not violate the overall structure of the Gospel of Christ.

#### **Principle No. 2**

"Stop judging your brother; he stands before his own Master." While the Word of God teaches many things, both explicitly and implicitly, there is a vast area of Christian endeavor about which the Bible has nothing to say. All judgments against brethren that fall outside the explicit or implicit teaching of the Scriptures are contrary to Paul's teaching. A person is self-obligated to recognize personal opinion as being opinion and not law.

### **Principle No. 3**

"Do not put a stumbling block or an occasion to fall in a brother's way." Personal liberty in Christ does not permit self-interest to bring about the destruction of one for whom Christ died (Philippians 2:3). The kingdom of heaven is not meat and drink but righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (Romans 14:17). Therefore, oneness in Christ requires Christians to follow after things that make for peace, things that edify their brethren (Romans 14:19; Matthew 5:9). Careful speech and careful journalism are always beneficial to oneness.

### **Principle No. 4**

"Love edifies; knowledge puffs up." Knowledge that is not regulated by love can be a dangerous thing. It can be safely said that raw knowledge risks creating upheavals that love will prevent. Mature, loving saints of God need to be cautious about looking too trustingly in the direction of inexperienced knowledge when seasoned judgment needs to be rendered.

### **Principle No. 5**

"Things that are lawful are not always expedient." There are times and circumstances under which an otherwise lawful thing should not be done. Proper preparation may not have been made, feelings may be edgy, or understanding may be faulty. Although Peter did not elaborate the point, expediency may have been one of inspiration's reasons for instructing elders not to lord it over their flock (1 Peter 5:3).

Oneness in Christ is a prominent New Testament doctrine. So vital is it that the greatest sobriety needs to be exercised in order to achieve and maintain it.

## **KEEPING THE UNITY OF THE SPIRIT**

DAVID RILEY

The words of the apostle Paul were very important and very needed for the first century church at Ephesus. They are just as important to the church today. Unless the unity of the Spirit is maintained, the church will never fulfill its purpose for existing.

What is that purpose? Paul said that the eternal purpose for the church was to *"make known ... the manifold wisdom of God"* (Ephesians 3:10). The church is to show the manifold, multifaceted,

all-encompassing wisdom of God to the world around us. As we *"walk worthy of our vocation"* (Ephesians 4:1), we accomplish this purpose. When we *"endeavor"* (to put forth every effort) *to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace* (Ephesians 4:3) we are truly walking *"worthy of our vocation"*. The church fulfills its purpose when we show the world that we are united in peace.

There are several applications that can be made from these verses in Ephesians, but let us not forget the true context. The church at Ephesus was made up of Christians from pagan, Gentile backgrounds. Paul, in Chapter 2, reminds them of their lost condition as Gentiles before Christ's death on the cross (vs. 11-12). He reminds them of the purpose of the cross for the Gentiles (vs 13-18). The old Mosical law was the middle wall of partition that created the division between Jews and Gentiles. By His sacrifice, Christ removed the Law and, in so doing, removed the division. The cross made it so that both the Jew and the Gentile could become one and that both might be reconciled to God in one body.

Paul then tells them that as Christians, both the Jew and Gentile are on equal standing with God (vs. 19-22). Those in Christ, whether Jew or Gentile, are *"growing into a holy temple in the Lord"* (v. 21) and are built *"together for an habitation of God through the Spirit"* (v. 22). To Paul, this is the reason he is a *"prisoner of Jesus Christ for the Gentiles"* (3:1). This mystery *"that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel"* (3:6) was revealed to Paul so that he *"could make all men see what is the mystery of the fellowship"* (3:9) and the *"intent"* of the church (3:11).

The *"vocation"* (work or purpose) that Paul had in mind in Chapter 4:1 was the unity between the Jew and Gentile. This unity was not to be **produced** by the Ephesian congregation because the **Holy Spirit** had already produced it. However, the unity between the Jewish Christians and the Gentile Christians was to be **kept, maintained and nurtured by the church**. Their spiritual job description was to make sure that they were *"endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace"* (4:3)

The urging that Paul expressed to the Ephesian church is as much needed today as in the first century. We must always be *"endeavoring"* (putting forth every effort) to keep the unity that the Spirit has made between all Christians, no matter their national or ethnic origin — black or white, Indian or Pakistani, American or Iraqi, Japanese or Chinese, Jew or Gentile. As Christians, we are

the body of Christ! This unity must supersede race, geography, economics, gender, age, and language. Because, *"there is one body, and one Spirit, even as you are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all"* (4:4-6).

Everyone is watching—the world is watching, the church is watching, especially God is watching! Everyone is watching us! People will judge the church and God by how we treat one another. Will the church accomplish its divine and eternal purpose? Will we by *"walking worthy of our vocation"* display the *"manifold wisdom of God"* as we *"endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace"*?

## JESUS AND TRUTH

PAUL E. CANTRELL

The wise man advises us to "buy the truth, and do not sell it" (Proverbs 23:23 NKJV). It is disappointing to see so many preachers, as well as members of the Lord's church, starting to sell or compromise the truth of the gospel. What was once believed, rejoiced in and held onto is no longer desirable. Why? What could cause God's people to give up God's truth for a lie? Paul warns that "they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables" (2 Timothy 4:4). What has changed their minds? What overwhelming evidence is bringing about a change in the understanding of God's Word?

The writer of Hebrews seems to address this in his exhortations and warnings using the example of the Israelites in the wilderness (Hebrews 3:7-19). Israel had been delivered by the hand of God from Egyptian bondage. He brought them through the wilderness to Mount Sinai where He gave them a Law like no other nation possessed (Psalm 147:19-20). God also promised them the land of Canaan as their new home, but that generation of people rebelled against, doubted and disbelieved God. They were not allowed to enter the Promised Land.

One of the most challenging things that God's children deal with is doubt. James warned of the dangers of doubting in prayer when he said, "But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind" (James 1:6).

The Galatian Christians at first gladly received Paul and his message of truth. They were so grateful for his delivery of the gospel message to them that they would have plucked out their eyes and given them to Paul, if possible (Galatians 4:14-15). Then some teachers came in among them who raised doubt about the message Paul had taught them. The doubt led them to turn from the truth (3:1).

Adam and Eve struggled with the same challenge - whether to believe what God said or what the serpent said (Genesis 3:1-6). Satan won that battle, and their disbelief and doubting led to their expulsion from the beautiful Garden of Eden (vv. 22-24).

In our religious world, we are faced with the same challenge of whether to believe what the Word of God says or doubt it. When God's truth clearly states, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved" (Mark 16:16), we must believe this or doubt it. What about all of the seemingly sincere religious people who have not been baptized into Christ? Is God really saying that a person must believe and be baptized to be saved? Will God not be merciful and save sincere people whether or not they have been immersed in baptism?

Why would we doubt what God says? Does God lie? Is He wishy-washy? Does He speak out of both sides of His mouth? Will the deceptive wiles of Satan persuade us to doubt the truthfulness of God's Word? Will we drink water from the well of Satan that leads to death or drink water from the well of God that leads to eternal life (John 4:13-15)?

One of the ways that men have tried to solve this dilemma is to rationalize. They see so many religious people who have not obeyed the gospel but who seem sincere and very devout toward God. They solve this problem by believing that a person can have Jesus in his life without the truth. They rationalize that truth is not all that important and separate Jesus from the truth.

Can one have Jesus and not accept or abide in His truth? The Bible inseparably ties Jesus and truth together.

"Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me' " (John 14:6). No person can come to the Father except through the truth -which is Jesus. Can a person really believe in and have Jesus in His life and at the same time call Him a liar?

"Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, 'If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the

truth, and the truth shall make you free' " (John 8:31-32). Jesus points out that people become His disciples by abiding in His Word, and His Word is truth (John 17:1-3; 8:40). A person cannot be a disciple of Jesus and have Jesus in his life unless he abides in the truth of God's Word.

"Pilate therefore said to Him, 'Are You a king then?' Jesus answered, 'You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears, My voice' (John 18:37). Those who abide and walk in truth (2 John 4) have both the truth and Jesus. Those who do not abide or walk in truth do not have Jesus. If they did, Jesus would be a liar.

"Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine [teaching] of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son" (2 John 9). John is saying that those who abide in the doctrine of Christ, which is the truth from God, have fellowship and a relationship with both the Father and the Son. Some people want a relationship with Jesus but do not think it is necessary to abide in His doctrine and God's truth.

"And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness" (2 Thessalonians 2:11-12). These people believed a lie rather than believe the truth and were condemned because they did not love the truth and preferred unrighteousness over truth. If a person will be saved, he must believe the truth. It is also necessary for him to believe in Jesus. The two are inseparable for man's salvation.

Man's challenge has always been: do I believe God, His truth, His Word and His teachings, or do I doubt Him because men contradict Him? Do I want to believe God's truth or Satan's twisted lies (2 Peter 3:16), contradictory statements (Genesis 3:4), fables (1 Timothy 4:7) and lies (v. 2; Romans 1:25)? Do I want to believe God's truth or the doctrines and commands of men (Matthew 15:7-9) or the deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons (1 Timothy 4:1)? Do I want to believe God's truth or have an evil heart of unbelief and doubt that leads to destruction?

We must "not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord" (2 Timothy 1:8), and we must be willing to stand for God's truth - even in the face of sufferings and "hold fast the pattern of sound words" (v. 13) which has come from God through His apostles and prophets.



David said, "I have chosen the way of truth" (Psalm 119:30). May we also walk in God's truth (86:11) and allow truth to be our shield and buckler against the wiles of the devil (91:4). May we buy the truth and sell it not. This is the only way to have Jesus in our lives.

## JESUS AND BAPTISM

CLARENCE McDOWELL

If you are a person who has been active in personal evangelism, you have probably experienced the frustration that accompanies doing your very best to present God's plan of salvation to someone, only to have them refuse to believe that baptism is essential. One of my particularly painful memories is of a woman who, upon reading Mark 16:16 and being asked what that passage meant, responded: "I don't know what it means, but it doesn't mean what it seems to say." I tried to convince her by pointing her to other passages about baptism. When nothing persuaded her, I even began to wonder if she was being completely honest.

Looking back, I now understand why I failed to reach that woman. I was trying to teach her what the Bible says about baptism, when I should have been teaching her what the Bible says about faith and grace. Until a person comes to an appreciation that baptism is an act of faith and is in fact a work that completes or perfects faith, he or she may think baptism is contradictory to grace.

G.R. Beasley-Murray says "for in the New Testament precisely the same gifts of grace are associated with faith as with baptism. Forgiveness, cleansing, and justification are the effect of baptism" (*Baptism in the New Testament*). In that same work, under a discussion of baptism's relationship to grace, Beasley-Murray wrote: "The extent and nature of the grace which the New Testament writers declare to be present in baptism is astonishing for any who come to the study freshly with an open mind. Adolf Schlatter, who was no traditionalist sacramentarian, stated 'There is no gift or power which the Apostolic documents do not ascribe to baptism.' He meant, of course, that there is no gift or power available to man in consequence of the redemption of Christ that is not available to him in baptism."

Note that Beasley-Murray called attention to the astonishing nature of grace present in baptism. Consider that fact in view of

what Paul told Timothy: "Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 2:1 κιν). The apostle Peter added the truth that Jesus is the one and only repository of grace when he said: "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). It follows that, if grace is present in baptism and if all grace is in Jesus Christ, then there is something fundamental about the relationship between baptism and Christ.

A couple of years ago, my son Scott called my attention to something germane to this lesson. He noted an interesting relationship between Romans 5:2 and 6:3. The fifth chapter begins: "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace" (Romans 5:1-2).

Romans 6:3 asks: "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?" By looking at those passages in parallel, we can see that the phrase "faith into grace" is the equivalent of "baptism into Christ." Baptism is the act of faith that allows one to access the grace found only in Jesus Christ.

Rather than being a work of human merit that would negate the grace of God, baptism is a work of faith that enables God to save us by His grace. Unfortunately, many fail to appreciate the genius of our merciful Father evidenced by His plan of redemption. He was faced with forgiving sins in a way that would not encourage sin. In addition, redemption had to be offered in a way that harmonized with His justice. God had decreed that the punishment for sin was death (Ezekiel 18:4). How could He pardon man's sin while still being just and honor His word? His solution was to permit the Prince of heaven to die in our place and then command those who were willing to die to sin in repentance to appropriate the benefits of His death by being immersed into Christ's death. Seeing the believer baptized into Christ, God could forgive his sin and mark his account paid in full by Jesus Christ.

Remember that Beasley-Murray said: "For in the New Testament precisely the same gifts of grace are associated with faith as with baptism. Forgiveness, cleansing and justification." He is exactly right; baptism is faith's bridge to Jesus Christ.



## **OUR PLEA**

### **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 the one church of the Bible 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 believe in Christ, repent of wrong, confess Christ the Son of God, and 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).
3. That all followers of Christ, everywhere, should be known as Christians, after His name alone, with no Prefixes or Suffixes, 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 which contain doctrines and commandments of 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).

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