

# THE BIBLE TEACHER

*Pleading for the Restoration of Pure New Testament Christianity*

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

*“If You Abide In My Word,  
You Are My Disciples Indeed”*

DURING HIS PERSONAL MINISTRY on earth a large number of people had believed on Christ, especially by seeing His mighty and wonderful works. But there were many who no longer went about with Him, because they could not make the complete surrender of themselves in an obedient faith, so they turned back. They were offended at His teaching and said, “This is a hard saying who can understand it?.....From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more.” (John 6:60, 66). They walked with Him no more because His teaching did not find an abiding place in their hearts. Jesus attached a condition to being truly His disciples. “If you continue in my word,” he told them, “then indeed you are My disciples.” (John 8:31). The point is, it is not enough to just accept Jesus and believe in Him, as many do today. But the true disciple is obedient to His word. “But why do you call Me Lord, Lord,” Christ said in one place, “and not do the things I say?” A disciple is a follower of Christ, a learner, who has believed, obeyed, and continue to follow and abide in His teaching.

To those who had believed in Him, He did not say, “You have believed in Me and therefore you are saved.” Rather he said in effect, “Now that you have believed, if you really want to be my disciples, do what I have commanded.” In John 15:14 He told them, “You are My friends if you do whatever I command you.” The

ultimate salvation of believers depended then, as it does today, upon their obeying His commandments.

Far too many people today are just believers, and not doers of what the Lord says through His Bible. Christianity of too many people today has shrunk to celebrations of a few man-made yearly festivals and engaging in occasional prayers and reading of the Bible. Yet, Christ taught, "Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father in heaven." Are you listening? Christ taught, if we want to enter heaven we better listen to God and do what He asks us to do. How do I know, what God requires of me to do? The Bible is the answer. Through the Bible, and only the Bible, God speaks to man today. (Hebrews 1:1,2). And He speaks to all the same thing. He is not the author of confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33), that prevails today amongst the believers of Christ who are divided into thousands of sects and denominations. The apostle Paul said, even if an angel from heaven preach to you any other gospel, let him be accursed, that is, do not listen to him. (Galatians 1:6-9). At another place he asked to avoid such who teach contrary to the doctrine of Christ. (Romans 16:17). The beloved apostle John wrote: "Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive Him into your house nor greet him." (2 John 9, 10). So when we have one Bible, one teaching, then why there is division? Jesus taught, "the seed is the word of God." (Luke 8:11). Every seed produces after its own kind. Evidently then there have been different seeds sown through the years which produced a kind of Christianity that is very different than the Christianity of the Bible. Why in the first century, in the beginning of Christ's Christianity there was only one church, and all congregations of that one church were called "churches of Christ"? (Romans 16:16; Matthew 16:18). Why were they all known only as "Christians"? (Acts 11:26; 1Peter 4:16). Why did they all worship in the same way? (Acts 20:7; Acts 2:42). The answer is, they all followed God's will as was revealed to them through the apostles of Christ, which will we have today in the written form in the New Testament of the Bible. Now if we all put away today from us all kinds of human doctrines and teachings; cease to believe and practice them, and return to what God tells us to do in the

Bible, then we all too will be the same as they were in the beginning, Christians and united in one church, worshipping in the same way. To be a true disciple of Christ one must pass the test of abiding in His teaching.

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# THE CHURCH OF THE BIBLE

**J.C. Choate**

*Lesson Ten*

## Unity Of The Church

The religious world today seems to be more concerned than ever with the unity of the church. The ecumenical movement has caught the imagination of man everywhere. The reason for this is because there is so much religious division in the world, and one and all are tired of it. And yet, unity can never be brought about with the religious bodies of men agreeing to disagree. The division will still be there in spite of the fact that there may be some degree of union or harmony. So what is the answer? The answer lies in the Bible itself. In order for true unity to exist men must lay down their teachings, doctrines, names, churches, creed books, etc., and pick up the Bible, read and study it, believe it, and obey it. Then there can be genuine unity, the kind the Lord prayed for in John 17. When men do this, they will all believe the same thing, all obey the same teachings, all wear the scriptural name, all work together, all teach the same thing, and all go to heaven together. It will be so simple for unity to exist when man quits following man and begins to follow Christ.

The scriptures condemn division. The Bible says that God hates those that sow division or discord among the brethren (Proverbs 6:19). In 1 Corinthians 1 we are told of the church at Corinth becoming divided. Instead of commending this sort of thing, the Apostle Paul took immediate steps to destroy the root cause of it. He began by saying, *"Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment"* (1 Corinthians 1:10). Then he proceeded by asking three questions,

any one of which would show the fallacy of their action. The questions were: Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized in the name of Paul? In all three instances they would have to answer in the negative. Therefore, he showed the absurdity of their divided condition.

The same Apostle Paul wrote the brethren at Rome, *"Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple"* (Romans 16:17,18). In Colossians 2:20-22, he says, *"Therefore if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations—do not touch, do not taste, do not handle, which all concern things which perish with the using—according to the commandments and doctrines of men ?"*

All of this is to say that the teachings of men, the doctrines and commandments of men, exalting men, accepting and following books other than the Bible, are things that cause division. On the other hand, unity can be had and enjoyed only as one follows Christ. It was Christ who prayed, *"I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me"* (John 17:20,21). Now did Christ pray for the impossible? No. Surely then there can be unity. When? When we follow Christ. Man-made teaching will divide us but Bible teaching will unite us.

In Ephesians 4:1-6 we have a formula for unity. Listen to it: *"I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were 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."* Notice that this is a plea for unity. Notice, too, that there is but one of each of the things listed. Whoever got the idea that there was more than one?

The unity of the church is seen in that Christ said he would build his church (Matthew 16:18), meaning one, that it is his spiritual

body (1 Corinthians 12:27), and that he is the head of it (Colossians 1:8). Surely one would not accuse Christ of having two bodies or two heads. The church is also pictured as the house of God or the family of God (1 Timothy 3:15). But how many houses or families? One, of course. We read of the kingdom of Christ or the kingdom of God, with Christ as king (John 3:3-5; Colossians 4:11; 1 Timothy 6:15). How many kingdoms does the Lord have and how many kings are there? Just one in either case.

Surely the Bible is opposed to the very thought of denominationalism, that which is division. On the other hand, it pictures unity, oneness, completeness, and wholeness. While the Bible does not picture the church as being a mystical body made up of all religious people regardless of their beliefs and practices, it does picture the church as belonging to Christ, made up of those called out, those who have followed Christ and who have obeyed his teaching, the saved. Christ is not divided and neither is his church divided. To be divided or to uphold division in any way is to oppose Christ and that for which he prayed.

*(To be Continued)*

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## JESUS CHRIST

TIMOTHY TARBET

WE LIVE IN A WORLD THAT IS ANTI-CHRIST. Without Christ, being a Christian means nothing and the church means nothing because we are still in our sins. We have no hope, and we are to be pitied above all men for our misguided faith. But we can know that Jesus Christ really is the answer to all of man's troubles and problems, such as sin, doubt, loneliness and despair, because Jesus Christ is Lord, God and Savior.

The apostle John, in all his writings, forcefully declares that Jesus Christ was God made into flesh and that salvation, the forgiveness of sins, can only be found in Him. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and Word was God.... And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us" (John 1:1,14 nasb). His testimonies in 1 John 1:1-2; 2:1-2 allows us to affirm, with the conviction of faith, that Jesus is wholly God, wholly man, and the only source of our salvation.

## **SPIRIT OF THE ANTICHRIST**

Throughout the last 2,000 years, there have been many attempts to dethrone Christ of the glory, majesty and authority He deserves. In the first century, the early church had to deal with various apostasies that began with a distorted view of Christ that included Gnosticism in all forms: Docetism, Marcionism and many others. The apostles and the early church fathers responded to each threat with conviction, calling all denials to the deity and lordship of Christ as the “spirit of the antichrist” (1 John 4:3). “Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son. Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father; the one who confesses the Son has the Father also” (2:22-23).

Almost every cult embraces a distorted view of Jesus. Many of these distorted views of Christ are the same views that the apostles faced, such as Christ is a spirit that dwells in everything; Christ never existed in the flesh; and Christ was just a created being. All other major religions of the world have a distorted view of Jesus. Hinduism and Buddhism testify that Jesus is just one god among millions of other gods. Judaism says Jesus was a great man and prophet but not the Messiah to come. Islam teaches that Jesus was a great prophet in his right.

## **THE JESUS SEMINAR**

These are not the only threats to the truth about Christ. A modern threat, known as the “Jesus Seminar,” was organized in 1985. This group has sought to distinguish between the historical Jesus and the Jesus portrayed in the Gospel accounts. They have examined the gospel accounts to determine which statements and deeds of Jesus should be accepted as historically authentic and which should be rejected as myth.

Proponents of the Jesus Seminar hypothesis approach Jesus with several presuppositions: 1. The historical Jesus is to be distinguished from the Jesus of the Gospel; 2. Jesus’ disciples transmitted their experiences orally and revised their sayings and parables as the situation demanded; 3. The gospel accounts are made up of layers of tradition; 4. Only a small portion of sayings attributed to Jesus were actually spoken by Him; 5. The early church added mythology and fairy tales to the historical Jesus to invent a supernatural Christ. They attributed miracles and claims to Jesus

that He never made.

In a 575-page book, *The Five Gospels: What Did Jesus Really Say?*, written by a supporter of the Jesus Seminar, the author concluded the following: 1. Jesus never claimed to be the Messiah and did not predict the end of the world; 2. Jesus probably did share a symbolic last meal with His disciples just before His death. But the words attributed to Jesus in the Bible, comparing Himself to the bread and wine that He passed around the table, were probably fabricated by followers after His death; 3. The Lord's Prayer, which the Bible says Jesus taught to His followers, was also probably composed by Christians after His time on earth had ended.

In Matthew Andrew's article, "Debate Over the Jesus Seminar," John Dominc Crossan, a co-founder of the Jesus Seminar and professor of biblical studies at DePaul University in Chicago, claims Jesus did not say about 80 percent of the words attributed to Him in the New Testament. (*Midwest Today*, March 1994; p. 1).

Mark Allen Powell, in his article "Blackballing Jesus?," relates that of the 111 sayings attributed to Jesus in Mark, only one was judged authentic: "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (12:17). Sixteen other statements were voted as possibly authentic. The gospel of John contains 140 sayings of Jesus, none of which were judged to be authentic, and one was judged as possibly authentic: "a prophet has no honor in his own country" (John 4:44). (*The Lutheran*, p. 1)

Other well-known scriptures judged as not authentic included Jesus' words regarding the salt of the earth, bearing the Cross, and being born again. All seven statements from the Cross were judged inauthentic as were all His claims to be the Messiah and "the way the truth and the life." They also state that "Jesus' corpse probably rotted in some unknown grave" (p. 2).

The Jesus Seminar also concludes that Paul made up Jesus as a figment of his imagination. When people began believing in this imaginary figure, the Gospel writers borrowed from all sorts of Old Testament prophecies and constructed a historical setting and fabricated a martyr's death during the reign of Pontius Pilate (Andrews, p. 2).

### **INCONSISTENCIES IN THINKING**

The problems associated with the Jesus Seminar and similar

approaches like it must be exposed. These scholars begin with the wrong presuppositions that affect each and every one of their conclusions:

1. The Scriptures are not verbally inspired. For scholars to choose arbitrarily which scriptures are authentic and which are not authentic is a useless task. We know from historians, such as Josephus, that Jesus did live. But the only significant source of information we have about Jesus is found in Scripture. How else can we know about the virgin birth, walking on the water, raising the dead, and all of Jesus' claims of deity? Scripture is the only link 20th-century man has with the historical Jesus. If we are going to reject some of the Scripture, then we must reject all of it. The reverse is also true. If we want to accept some of Scripture as inspired and true, then we must accept all of it as inspired. There is no middle ground.

2. They also presuppose that miracles cannot happen. The fact that Jesus performed miracles should not surprise us. It would surprise us if he had not performed supernatural things to get man's attention.

Also, consider these facts that lend support to the conclusion that the Jesus of the Gospel is the genuine historical Jesus:

A. The historical fact that the Lord's Church was established on Pentecost only 53 days after the death of Christ on the basis that Jesus was indeed God, Lord and Christ (Acts 2:22, 36).

B. Why would the apostles and other Christians suffer such anguish and torture if they knew what they were teaching was a figment of their imagination?

C. The historical fact of Jesus' resurrection continues to be the unanswerable argument. If Jesus has been raised, then He must be more than a man. He must be God and the only source of salvation. He "was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead" (Romans 1:4).

### **CHRIST: GOD OF OUR SALVATION**

We can know that Jesus Christ is God, the one and only source of our salvation. After Peter had healed a crippled man at the temple in Acts 3, Peter is asked by the Sanhedrin, the ruling Jewish council, "By what power, or in what name, have you done this?" (4:7). Peter replies, "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men,



by which we must be saved” (v. 12).

Jesus Christ is the greatest Prophet. A prophet is a person who delivers God’s message to other people (Acts 3:22). “In these last days has spoken to us by His Son” (Hebrews 1:2). Through His lips and His apostles’ pens, Jesus brought God’s final revelation to man.

Jesus Christ is the greatest King. There is no earthly governor, ruler, king, president, prime minister or dictator who possesses as much power, majesty and authority as Jesus Christ. Jesus was the fulfillment of God’s prophecy in 2 Samuel 7:12-13 that a ruler would come from David’s seed and His kingdom would never be destroyed (Daniel 2:44; Luke 1:32-33). Jesus Christ is truly “King of kings, and Lord of lords” (1 Timothy 6:13-16; Revelation 17:14; 19:15-16).

Jesus Christ is the greatest Priest. In the Old Testament, the role of the priest was to represent man before God. He was to offer a sacrifice for the sins of the people and to intercede for sin. Jesus Christ is our Ambassador to God and the greatest Priest because He made Himself the only sacrifice for our sins “not by the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood” that He shed willingly and voluntarily on the cross at Golgotha (Hebrews 9:12). Jesus is our only Redeemer (1 Peter 1:18-19) and our reconciliation with God (Romans 5:6-11).

Every attempt to dethrone the true biblical Christ has failed. The Jesus Christ we worship is none other than God. Paul declared, “looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus” (Titus 2:13). He is the only source of our salvation from the consequences of guilt and sin.

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## *KEEP IT IN CONTEXTS*

CHARLES HODGE

MATTHEW 7:1— “Judge not, that you be not judged” (nkjv) - is the favorite verse of all sinners, worldly people, liberals and hypocrites! They may know the text but not the context.

Sinners, like Satan, quote scripture when they can! “Who are you to judge me?” “Be tolerant; let me sin, have my own way.” Here are some of their complaints.

- **Blind!** The context in the Sermon on the Mount is internal (heart) righteousness. Christianity is internal first, then external. Only God knows the heart. No man fully knows his own motives - let alone another's. Man only has outward appearances, and he probably doesn't know enough about the circumstances. We must be right to do right.
- **Proud!** No one can appoint himself judge. No one is to be the watchdog for all the brotherhood, or the judge, jury and executioner!
- **Chronic!** Chronic is Greek for mean or super-critical. Some cannot be pleased. Critics don't count. We are to be people-helpers not fault-finders. Too many people know what is wrong but not what is right.
- **Hypocritical!** No one is good enough to judge. No one has earned this right. Judging often begins with, "I am better than you!" Before one judges another, he must first judge himself. Jesus, in this context, introduced the sins of lust, hate, bigotry, meanness. Too much of our judging is wrong, wrong, wrong!

### Keep Reading in Context

To study the Bible, to gain convictions, requires thought! We must do our biblical homework. The text must be understood in its context. "Judge not" finds Jesus as its speaker. The context is the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7). Jesus said some harsh things in this profound sermon. Before His "Judge not" statement, He judged in the previous chapter. Jesus judged the self-righteous, branding them as hypocrites. This was judging. Even in almsgiving, public prayers and fastings, brethren can be hypocrites. Remember our speaker is Jesus. In the same breath of "Judge not," Jesus said, "Judge yourself." "Get the log out of yourself; then help another with his splinter." That's judging both of us! Keep reading in the context.

- "Don't cast your pearls before swine." That is judging. You must judge to know what pearls are. You must know what hogs are! Remember, life itself is daily judgment. We pick and choose daily. What is worthy of my time, my life?
- "The straight gate, the narrow way." Do you remember this? Jesus said it. This statement is exclusive, dogmatic, legal, judgmental! Jesus said there is a right way and a wrong way. The wide and broad way is wrong! The straight and narrow way is right! The majority are usually wrong. The

iron law in Washington is that when all agree, it probably is wrong. Political correctness is usually wrong.

- “Beware of false prophets.” Whoa! Can there be false prophets? How can one know without judging? Jesus was not even kind. He called them wolves. Preachers can be wolves. Elders can be wolves (Acts 20:30).
- “Be fruit inspectors.” “By their fruits ye shall know them.” Jesus told us to judge by honest inspection. Good trees have good fruit. Bad trees don’t. Who are our false teachers today? How can you tell? By Scripture and sense.
- “Not everyone that says, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom.” To skeptics this is outrageous. Some shout, “Anyone who calls Jesus Lord is my brother.” How do they read Matthew 7? Jesus judged men as hypocrites, wolves, sinners, lost, false prophets, blind guides - all in one sermon! Jesus was talking to religious folk, not heathen. Jesus judged them. He did not deny their good works. But He did conclude, “I never knew you.” “Why call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not the things which I say?” (Luke 6:46). The Greek language is intense, “I absolutely never knew you.” Jesus, absolutely, believed in absolute truth!

Keep reading in the context. Wise builders judge, then build upon the rock. Foolish builders build upon sand. To live is to judge; to be a Christian is to judge wisely. ?

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## *The Church of Christ*

DAN R. OWEN

THE AIM OF JESUS’ INCARNATION was to build the church of Christ. His disciple, Peter, confessed Him as the “Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16 niv). This title is an Old Testament title given to God’s anointed - God’s chosen king. The word “anointed” in Hebrew is “Messiah” and in Greek it is “Christ.” David referred to Saul as “the Lord’s anointed” or the Lord’s Christ (1 Samuel 26:9, 16). Psalm 2 explains the futility of rebelling against the Lord and against His anointed one. God’s chosen king was not only called His “anointed” but also His “son” (vv. 2, 7). In Psalm 2, God’s king tells of the moment God made Him king, when God said to Him, “you are my son! Today I have become your Father!”

(v. 7). God said of Solomon, "I will be his father, and he will be my son" (1 Chronicles 17:13). Nathaniel understood this when he said to Jesus, "you are the son of God; you are the King of Israel" (John 1:49).

When Peter acknowledged his conviction that Jesus was "the Christ, the Son of the living God," he was saying that he believed Jesus to be the King, chosen by God to rule His people. Upon the fact of Jesus' kingship, Jesus built His church, and all those who are added to the church of Christ have submitted their lives to the rule of Christ.

### **Beginning at Pentecost**

On the first day of Pentecost after the resurrection of Jesus, His followers preached the gospel of Christ for the first time. They proclaimed His redemptive death, His resurrection, and His authority as "Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36 NKJV). Those who acknowledged the fact of His rule and submitted to Him in obedience were added to His church (vv. 41, 47). These were saved by the redemptive work of Jesus when they obeyed the gospel of Christ.

This group, called the "church" (Acts 2:47), was defined by a common conviction, a common obedience and a common allegiance. They were convicted that Jesus' death was the final redemptive act of God. They were convicted that Jesus was alive and was ruling with authority over all. They were convicted that they must obey the risen Christ. They shared a common obedience through repentance and baptism in the name of Jesus. They shared a common allegiance to Christ and His commands as given to them by His apostles.

The apostles of Christ were the conveyers of the commands of Christ. Because the apostles were eyewitnesses of Jesus' miracles, His teaching, His death and His resurrection, the rest of the world would come to believe on Christ through their testimony (John 17:20). The early church "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching" (Acts 2:42 niv). The teachings of the apostles - the ambassadors of Christ - formed the defining parameters of the church of Christ. Those added to the church of Christ were called "believers," "disciples" or "Christians" (5:14; 6:7; 11:26; 14:21).

They assembled on Sunday, the Lord's Day and the "first day of the week" (Acts 20:7), when they took the Lord's Supper, listened

to the teaching of God's Word, prayed together, sang, and gave to the church (2:42; 1 Corinthians 16:1-2). They were organized under the spiritual leadership of elders, who were appointed in each congregation (Acts 14:22-23; 20:17, 28; Titus 1:5).

This group, the church of Christ, first established in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, grew and spread to other locations as the gospel was preached and people obeyed. In every location, the same message about Christ and His authority was preached, the same obedience rendered, and the same result obtained.

Often, the group was simply called "the church" (Acts 8:1). Sometimes, it was called "the church of God which He purchased with His own blood" (20:28 nkjv). Sometimes its congregations were called "the churches of Christ" (Romans 16:16). Because of its unique blessings and privileges, the group was referred to as "the church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven" (Hebrews 12:23 nasb). Whatever the description, it was understood that all of these descriptions were of the one church of Jesus, founded by the redemptive work of Christ.

### **Pattern of Worship**

The Sunday assemblies of the churches of Christ were characterized by several distinctive activities. First, there was the taking of the Lord's Supper, sometimes known as "the breaking of bread" (Acts 2:42). This was done on the Lord's Day when the church "came together" (20:7 nkjv) in the assembly (see also 1 Corinthians 11:17-18, 20, 33-34; 14:23, 26).

Next, there was spiritual singing of psalms and hymns (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16; Hebrews 13:15). The churches of Christ never considered using musical instruments in their assemblies because they understood that those were designated for the practice of Judaism in the temple along with animal sacrifices, incense and other levitical rites. The apostles filled the ancient assemblies with a cappella singing, emphasizing the meaning of the words and the melody of the heart in both praise to God and admonition of one another.

Much prayer took place in the assemblies of the churches of Christ. The men led these prayers in the assembly, "lifting up holy hands" (1 Timothy 2:8). These prayers were led at the Lord's Supper and were also offered for other reasons (vv. 1-4).

Preaching or teaching in the ancient churches was based heavily

on the Hebrew Scriptures and the writings of the apostles. This preaching was sometimes done in the form of direct prophecy and often in the form of exhortations based on scriptural teaching (Acts 2:42; 20:7; 1 Corinthians 14:27-29, 37).

Financial contribution to the church was also a regular feature of ancient assemblies in churches of Christ. In the beginning, because of Persecution in Jerusalem, they had “fellowship” in the sharing of their goods (Acts 2:42). Ancient Christians even sold their possessions and brought the money and “laid it at the apostles’ feet” or later deposited it with the elders of the church (Acts 4:35, 37; 5:2; 11:29-30). This practice of giving was standardized as part of the Sunday assembly in the writings of the apostles (1 Corinthians 16:1-2).

### **Mission of the Church**

The mission of the church of Christ was the great commission (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:46-47). The Son of Man truly came to “seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). The ancient churches perpetuated the saving gospel, transmitted the teachings of Christ and His apostles about life and worship, and used their human and monetary resources to spread the gospel to other places. The leaders of these churches sought to help Christians “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18) so that they could “present every man complete in Christ” (Colossians 1:28 nasb); at the same time, they encouraged the Christians to “do good unto all men” (Galatians 6:10 KJV).

All the time they were doing this, they passed along the teachings of Christ “to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2 Timothy 2:2 nkjv). In this way they not only spread the Word of God to the lost, but also trained faithful, mature Christians along with evangelists who would continue to teach the gospel to the lost in new places.

The church of Christ, then, is a group of people with a basic set of convictions about a moral lifestyle, Christ’s redemptive work, His resurrection and His return. They are a group of people who have heard the gospel of Christ, put their faith in Christ, turned to Christ in sincere repentance, and have been baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of their sins.

The Bible also calls the church of Christ the body of Christ.

Christ is depicted as the head of the body as well as its Savior (Ephesians 5:23). As the head directs the various members of the body, so Christ directs the various members of His church through the instructions of His Word. One cannot be connected to Christ without being in the church, the body of Christ.

Once a person has been saved and added by Christ to His church, one's spiritual life depends on being connected to Christ and His church. Just as a member of a human body cannot live when severed from the body, so there is no spiritual life for a Christian apart from Christ's church. A Christian cannot leave the church and remain a Christian.

Also, if a particular member of the body is so dysfunctional that he or she refuses to carry out the commands of the head, that member is severed from the body. The spiritual process is called the withdrawal of fellowship. When this is done, such a person is lost and condemned unless that person is readmitted to the fellowship of the body through sincere repentance and submission to Christ (1 Corinthians 5).

Must one be a member of the church of Christ described in the New Testament in order to be saved? Absolutely! That is God's biblical plan.

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## WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS!

EDDIE WHITTEN

**“BUT HE ANSWERED AND SAID, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God”** (Matthew 4:4). While he was on the earth, Jesus demonstrated remarkable loyalty to the Father. He, though himself God, remained in submission to the Father in everything he did both in deed and in word. Note his comment in John 17:8:

For I have given unto them the words **which thou** gavest me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from Thee, and they have believed **that Thou** didst send me,” indicates his total submission to God. Again, Jesus professed **His** dedication to the Father in stating, “For I came down from **heaven**, not to do **mine** own **will**, but the **will** of **Him** that sent me” (John 6:38).

Obviously, the authority for what we do and what we teach rests within the pages of God's Holy word. A careful study of the Scriptures reveals that all things obtain by the authority of God, the Father represented by the earthly frame of Jesus the Man, God on earth, as revealed in the pages of the Bible by God, the Holy Spirit. Jesus spoke only those things authorized by the Father. He was very careful not to inject into his teaching any doctrine not approved in heaven. That being the case, can we do anything more or less? Unfortunately there are emotionally challenging circumstances that produce ideas leading to serious consequences. Noble as we may appear, we do a disservice to God and to Jesus when we try to help Deity by explaining away matters which we think should be a little different than what the Bible may teach.

### BAPTISM

Men in general do not seem to be able to reconcile what the Bible says regarding baptism. Recently a picture was widely circulated in an article depicting a priest baptizing a man by effusion (pouring). What is wrong with that? What is wrong is that baptism is not effusion. The Bible says baptism is immersion. Firstly, the definition of the Anglicized Greek word for baptism literally means immersion, to dip or plunge. The Scriptures say it is a **“burial”** (Romans 6:3-5; Colossians 1:12). To pour water on one's head and call it baptism is a departure from the authority of the Scriptures. It is emotionally instigated, not inspired by Scripture. Others, because of following man-made doctrines, baptize infants by sprinkling a few drops of water on their innocent and incomprehensible heads. Infant baptism violates every requirement for baptism. Philip asked the Ethiopian nobleman, **“Understand what thou readest?”** (Acts 8:30). The nobleman responded, **“How can I, except some man should guide me”** (v. 31). Philip preached unto him, Jesus. They came to a **“certain water.”** The nobleman said, **“See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God”** (Acts 8:36-37). The point to be made is that the Ethiopian understood the teaching of Christ and believed it. Tiny infants can do neither. Why can't men just abide by what the Bible says?



## DOCTRINES OF MEN

Without doubt, most men who invent “something new” religiously are devout men. (We put this statement in the present tense since it is still going on.) There are exceptions even to this generality. What are their motivations? Only God knows the hearts of men, but sometimes men make their hearts an open book. It is correct to say that ALL men who propagate new religions depart from what the Bible says. Honest observation forces that conclusion. Jesus asked, **“Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things that I say?”** (Luke 6:46). Again, Jesus said, **“Ye are my friends, if you do whatsoever I command you”** (John 15:14). Yet, such men, either through disobedience or ignorance, depart from the teaching of the Bible when they propose a different gospel. Paul condemned such teaching in Galatians 1:6-9. He said, **“But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed”** (Galatians 1:8). He said that any other gospel was a perversion of the gospel of Christ. Notice the degree of emphasis Paul places on the prohibition. Not even an angel from heaven has the authority to preach another gospel than what is revealed in the Bible.

Tragically, we cannot appeal only to denominationalism for such perversion. Many preachers in the Lord’s church have chosen the popular way in departing from the living God because of unbelief (Hebrews 3:12). Departures have been amply documented thus averting any basis for denial. The Bible has become “God’s love letter to his children,” or “God’s ideal,” or “God’s general guidelines,” but not God’s all-sufficient pattern of salvation. Why can’t men just do what the Bible says?

### A.D. 70

Somehow, the destruction of Jerusalem has taken on greater significance than once thought. The imagination of man is a wondrous thing. We can imagine all sorts of ideas when we set the wheels in motion. What about the Jews, the Judgment, the Resurrection? Some say the end of the world has already come, that the resurrection has occurred and that Judgment has been pronounced on all men. The Jews, bless their hearts, are caught in an unthinkable dilemma and we are all living in some sort of unreal, ethereal, eerie, borrowed time.

The Bible does speak of the destruction of Jerusalem. There would be signs warning of its destruction that men could observe (Matthew 24:1-34; Hebrews 10:25). The temple and all records of tribal ancestry would be destroyed. Today no Jew can trace his ancestry to verify his tribal genealogy. No Jew can say he is of the priestly tribe of Levi. The temple, the meeting place of God with his prophets, was utterly destroyed. That, and that alone, is the significance of the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Anything more than that provides a “buffer zone” between the end of the Mosaic period and the Christian dispensation. Paul wrote to both the Ephesian and Colossian churches that Jesus had taken the old law (the Law of Moses) out of the way and nailed it to his cross! The Mosaic period ended when the church was established on the first Pentecost after the resurrection of Christ. This is what the Bible says!

The church of Christ has always been attacked by the more populous and popular human sects. It will always be. But there is a more devastating force than denominationalism. It is the emotionally driven thinking of well-meaning people within the church itself who take upon themselves the impossible task of “helping God out” in deciding what God meant to say. Why can men not just do what the Bible says! God does **not** need our help, we need his word!

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## THE BONES OF JOSEPH

DANIEL DENHAM

GENESIS 50:22-26 RECORDS a most remarkable event. It tells us about the closing years and death of the great patriarch Joseph. The event that stands out in the text is the solemn charge he gave to his children shortly before his death. He declared unto them in verse 24, “I die: and God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land unto the land which He sware to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.” He then took an oath that bound his descendents to “carry up {his} bones from” Egypt and return his mortal remains to Canaan (v.25). Upon his death, his children “embalmed him,” without doubt after the Egyptian fashion, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt” (v. 26).

The book of Hebrews refers back to the event, when it recorded: “by faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones” (Hebrews 11:22). Thus, the event of Genesis 50:24-26 was a faith driven one.

Joseph was a great man of faith. This is seen in his conduct as a slave while in the house of Potiphar, the prison house into which he was unjustly cast, and in the royal palace as the prime minister of Egypt. However, it is never more evidenced than in his command concerning the preservation of his bones in anticipation of the return of the Hebrews to Canaan-land. Several key lessons can be learned by taking a few moments to reflect on the account of the bones of Joseph.

**TRUE FAITH LOOKS BEYOND DEATH** The text of Genesis 50 recorded five events surrounding the death of Joseph at the age of 110 years. He had lived a long and rich life. It had been one filled with intrigues, tragedies, and triumphs. His betrayal by his brethren, his temptation by the wife of Potiphar, his imprisonment, and ultimately his vindication were each tests of his character. Through all of this he was sustained by his faith. When it came time to die, that faith is evidenced in his final words.

The “last words” that men speak prior to death are considered of great importance. Often they reflect what is foremost in the mind of the one passing from this life. They can be pitiable or poignant depending upon the character and strength of the individual facing death.

As he faced death, Joseph the promise of God concerning Israel’s then future exodus from Egyptian bondage. Showing his confidence in the goodness of God and in his word, Joseph declared it shall “surely” come to pass. He earnestly desired to share in some small way in the glorious entrance of his people into the promise land. He longed to have his body placed beneath the sod of his birthplace. This was a natural longing. He wanted to go home. He desired not the glorified houses built for the royal dead and their chief servants in Egypt. The pyramids held no special fascination for him as an eternal dwelling, as the Egyptian religion would encourage him to believe. He preferred the temporal resting-place of his native land’s soil. Though he could not see Canaan in life, his earthly remains would be there in death. He looked beyond death and by faith looked forward to the time when Israel would

go forth by the mighty hand of God. He could see Canaan before him. I am also persuaded by the context of Hebrews 11:22 and the stress that is placed therein on “sojourning” in anticipation of the greater promise land that Joseph by the eye of faith even looked beyond the physical land of Canaan to that spiritual clime that awaits the righteous of all the ages!

In Exodus 13:19 Moses’ fidelity to the charge of Joseph is clearly sent “And Moses took the bones of Joseph with him: for he had straitly sworn the children of Israel saying God will surely visit you: and ye shall carry up my bones away hence with you.” The ornate sarcophagus and the bones that it bore would remind Israel daily of God’s providence and care for the nation, as well as remind them of the great faith of the patriarch. The funeral trains that bore the remains of Abraham Lincoln and Franklin Roosevelt had profound influence on their respective generations. Hundreds and even thousands lined the tracks and openly wept as the trains wound their ways through hamlets and towns and across country. The imagination of an entire people was captured by what these solemn processions symbolized. One can but imagine what effect the coffin of Joseph had upon the mind of any faithful, God-fearing Hebrew during the journey to Canaan.

Joshua 24:32 records the completion of the mission. “And the bones of Joseph, which the children of Israel brought up out of Egypt, buried they in Shechem in a parcel of ground which Jacob bought of the sons of Hamor the father of Shechem for an hundred pieces of silver: and it became the inheritance of the children of Joseph.” The example of Joseph’s faith calls upon us to look beyond death even to our own Canaan-land beyond the Jordan death, surrounding no more (II Peter 3:11 -13; II Corinthians 4:18).

### **TRUE FAITH LEANS UPON THE PROMISES OF GOD**

As noted earlier, the true faith of Joseph took God at its word. Jehovah had promised to visit the children of Israel in their affliction and lead them out of Egypt with his mighty hand. God would not do this until the time of Moses. Yet Joseph believed God, and gave instructions concerning his bones.

True faith takes God at his word! It takes careful note of what God has promised, as well as what he has not promised. It also recognizes that God cannot lie (Hebrews 6:13). Lying is incompatible with the holy and righteous nature of God. He cannot

be God, and yet be able to lie. Were he to lie, he then could not by definition be God! This is an immutable fact. Faith bears confidence that what God has promised. **“He is able also to perform”** (cf. Romans 4:16-25). True faith *acknowledges* the promises of God and then acts upon them, while doubt or disbelief discounts and ignores them.

A key thought arises that one purpose of the Bible is to provide the sufficient, historically verifiable evidence showing the track record of God in his dealings with men so as to establish sufficient ground for confidence in God! This is why **“faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God”** (Romans 10:17). Without sufficient evidence, faith is no foundation. As one writer has said, **“Evidence is the very meat and marrow of faith.”**

### **TRUE FAITH LEARNS TO EMPHASIZE THE GOOD**

The great prophecy that God made concerning the visitation to lead Israel out of Egypt had its “downside.” It meant that a time of brutal and bitter oppression was awaiting the *children* of Israel while in Egypt. There would be a period of suffering, affliction, and bitter bondage” (cf., Genesis 15:13-14). After the death of Joseph, there arose a pharaoh who “knew not Joseph.” He did not remember nor care about all Joseph had done for Egypt. The new Pharaoh enslaved the Israelites, and forced them to build his treasure cities. Many Israelites perished beneath the taskmaster’s whip. Innocent babies were slaughtered. God had foreseen the evil that the Egyptians would do!

Joseph would surely be mindful of this in the waning hours of life, but he was powerless to prevent the coming storm. His was then upon the welcomed relief the visitation of deliverance and blessing that the prophecy pointed to ultimately. His faith caused him to stress the end of the prophecy, and to encourage his people not to despair, but to keep all things in proper perspective. The ultimate will of God cannot be thwarted by the evil that men do. All accounts will be squared. Truth and righteousness ultimately triumph, though dark be the day of conflict. The entire life of Joseph is assurance of this very thing. The solemn promise of Christ in Revelation 2:10 stands: **“be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.”**

Let us learn from the bones of Joseph the great lessons of faith. Perhaps, if we looked more beyond the temporal and leaned

upon God's promises then we will learn, as Joseph did, to emphasize in life the good that will come by and by! God desires that we not believe in his existence but also that he is **"a rewarder of them who diligently seek him"** (Hebrews 11:6). Faith in God's provisionary good is needed. Romans 8:31 ought to be emblazoned upon the tablets of our heart, **"if God be for us, then who can be against us?"**

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## *Which Moral Direction Will You Choose?*

LARRY V. SMITH

LIFE HAS TAUGHT ME THAT WITHOUT COURAGE, there is no morality. Sir Winston Churchill once said "Without courage, all other virtues lose their meaning."

How can you show love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness or self-control in the face of opposition without courage (Galatians 5:22-23)?

Unfortunately, if you are like me, there is a constant struggle between what I want to do (my desires), and what I should do (my ethical duties).

Even the apostle Paul had problems in this area. He said, "For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do - this I keep on doing.... So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me" (Romans 7:19, 21 niv).

As you can see, this struggle of summoning the courage to do the right thing is nothing new.

The problem with not having the courage to do the ethically and morally correct thing is that we begin to rationalize the omission or commission of our morally bankrupt decisions and actions to the point that morality loses its value. A rationalization is no more than an excuse for why we did something we knew to be wrong or a method of talking ourselves into doing something we know is wrong. It is also a way of trying to calm our consciences when we have neglected to act upon something we know that we should have done.

Right and wrong do not change because of popularity or lack

of it. Right is right, even if you are the *only one* doing it, and wrong is wrong if *everyone* else is doing it. It takes courage to stand for right, and it often takes courage to stand against wrong (evil), especially when wrong is popular. Without courage, all other virtues lose their meaning because they will not be used.

- It takes courage to stand for trustworthiness when a lie would be more expedient and popular.
- It takes courage to be respectful when disdain or apathy is the popular thing to do.
- It takes courage to accept the responsibility of standing for the voiceless, the widows and the orphans, when it would be more popular to stand with the powerful.
- It takes courage to stand for fairness when you see discrimination and prejudice rear their monstrous heads.
- It takes courage to be caring, compassionate and forgiving to someone when everyone says he or she does not deserve it.
- It takes courage to be a good citizen and do your share when others ignore the rules and take advantage of those following the established order.

The question really becomes, “Where do I find the moral courage to stand for right when all about me seems to stand for wrong?” Let’s face it; no one wants to be the subject of public ridicule or not part of the group.

### **Making a Choice**

For the Christian, doing the right thing is a duty, and all of the courage we need is supplied in Scripture.

The Bible is replete with examples of people summoning the courage to do the right thing in the face of all types of opposition: Abraham in leaving his fatherland (Genesis 12:1-9); Gideon, in destroying the altar of Baal (Judges 6:25-31); the three Hebrews who refused to bow down to the image of Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 3:16-18); Daniel persisting in prayer regardless of the edict against praying (Daniel 6:10); Peter and John, in refusing to obey men, rather than God (Acts 4:19; 5:29).

In addition, the Bible recounts many instances of personal bravery: Joshua and Caleb (Numbers 13:30; 14:6-12); Deborah (Judges 4); David (1 Samuel 17:32-50); Nehemiah (Nehemiah 6:10-13); Esther (Esther 4:8, 16; 5-7).

Scripture goes on to say that “The wicked man flees though no one pursues, but the righteous are as bold as a lion” (Proverbs 28:1). Ezekiel 2:6 states, “And you, son of man, do not be afraid of them or their words. Do not be afraid, though briars and thorns are all around you and you live among scorpions. Do not be afraid of what they say or terrified by them, though they are a rebellious house.”

In 1 Corinthians 16:13, we are told, “Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong.” And Philippians 1:27-28 states, “Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved—and that by God.”

James Segars of Dayspring once wrote: “God has blessed us abundantly in the past. And we, like Paul, thank God and take courage. We take courage for the future, whatever the future holds.” We can face the future with all of its uncertainty, with all of its problems and trials. We can face it with courage because we know that the Lord will be with us. God will take care of us.

Romans 8:31, 38-39 says “What shall we say then to these things, if God be for us, who can be against us.... I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (kjv). God is for us.

God is with us. We therefore shall not fear what man shall do to us. It does not matter what the future holds here on this earth.

We can take courage, because we know that God is going to help us as we stand. He will be with us, and He can overcome every enemy. Second Timothy 1:7 states, “For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline” (niv). That text provides a great thought for us in our own lives.

