

# THE BIBLE TEACHER

*Pleading for the Restoration of Pure New Testament Christianity*

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## What Does the Bible Teach?

### *God Is Not The God Of Ambiguities*

SOME PEOPLE THINK as long as they sincerely believe in God and do whatever they think is right to do to please God, God will accept and bless them. But this is certainly not true of the God about whom we read in the Bible. The true and the living God is not the God of ambiguities. He means what He says and says what He means. **If He expected from man to follow his own feelings and instinct to do His will, He would not have given us the Bible.** Why has God given us the Bible? He wants us to know His will about everything He expects from us. In the Bible God has told us, where is man in his relationship with God; what is sin; how man can restore his relationship with God which was broken because of sin; what God has done to provide man the way of salvation; what He expects man to do to be saved from sin; how should man worship God, etc. etc. The fact of the matter is, if man want to go to heaven by pleasing God, he must listen to God and do exactly God has specified in His Bible. Man cannot save himself from his sins, and neither can he go to heaven on his own terms. God always means what He says and has always done that which He has said, whether to punish the disobedient or to bless the obedient. Just as in the case of our first parents, God had told them not to eat from the tree which was in the midst of the garden, and He had warned that if they would they would surely die. But as time went by the devil said to the woman, "You will not surely die." She listened to the devil and did eat and so did Adam, after listening to his wife. God kept His

promise with them. They were driven out of the garden; became separated and alienated from God. Their fellowship with God was broken, they had died spiritually. Man became sinner. (Genesis 3).

In the book of Leviticus we read the story of two priests of the Old Testament temple of God, it says, "Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it, put incense on it, and offered profane fire before the Lord, which He had not commanded them. So fire went out from the Lord and devoured them, and they died before the Lord." (Leviticus 10:1,2). Why were they punished? Because they had offered a fire which the Lord had not commanded. According to Leviticus 16:12 it was to be a specific fire "from the altar before the Lord", not just a fire or any fire! Another example of how God treats disobedience is found in 2 Samuel 6:1-8. There it says King David was bringing the ark of God to a certain place. The carriers of the ark were two men Uzzah and Ahio. "And when they came to Nachon's threshing floor, Uzzah put out his hand to the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen stumbled. Then the anger of the Lord was aroused against Uzzah, and God struck him there for his error; and he died there by the ark of God." Why did God do that? In Numbers 4:15 we read God had told them, "they shall not touch any holy thing, lest they die." No doubt, Uzzah was sincere in doing what he did to save the ark from falling. But he forgot what God had said concerning "holy things." You see, God doesn't think as we think. (Isaiah 55:8, 9). God didn't spare even Moses, His servant, when Moses had disobeyed God at Kadesh by striking the rock instead of speaking to the rock as God had asked him to do. In Numbers 20:12 we read: "Then the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, "Because you did not believe Me, to hallow Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them." What a punishment for Moses and Aaron! For a long forty years they had labored and toiled and had faced untold hardships to bring the congregation of the Lord into the promised land, as God had asked them to do. But now, as they had almost gotten there, they were told, "entrance is denied to you." Why? Because you did not speak to the rock as God had commanded, and instead struck the rock. Does it make sense? May be not to us. But to God it did. He always means what He says.

Why do you think would the Lord say to many on the day of judgment, as we read in Matthew 7:23 "Depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness"? Who were those people? They were those

who claimed to be very religious, followers of the Lord, many of them preachers too, as it says: "Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?" Christ said, "And then I will declare to them, I never knew you." Man! What a horrific tragedy! **All their life on earth they had thought they were walking with the Lord, yes, working many wonders in His name, praying and preaching in His name. But the Lord doesn't even recognize them!** Instead He would say to them, "depart from Me you who practice lawlessness!" (Matthew 7:22-23). What lawlessness had they practiced? According to them, they had prophesied, cast out demons, done many wonders, and all these in His name!

To be right with God one must seriously ascertain whether the things one is practicing and following are taught in the New Testament of Christ through whom God speaks to us today. (Hebrews 1:1,2). "Not everyone" Christ taught, "who says to Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven." (Matt.7:21). It is absolutely imperative therefore to make sure: have I obeyed the command of the Lord to be saved? (Mark 16:16). The religious name I am called by, is it in the Bible? (Isaiah 62:2; Acts 11:26). The church I am member of, is it mentioned in the Bible? (Matt.16:18; Romans 16:16). The way I worship, is it authorized by God in the New Testament of Christ? (John 4:24; Acts 2:42; 20:7). Am I living each day by following the example of Christ's life on earth? (1 Peter 2:21). **What will the Lord say to each one of us on the day of judgment?**

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## THE CHURCH OF THE BIBLE

J.C. CHOATE

*Lesson Thirteen*

The Church Today

The Lord's church was established almost two thousand years ago (Acts 2) but it exists today just as it did then. "But how would this be possible," you might ask. By simply following the New Testament pattern of the church.

Some are under the impression that in order to prove that the

church today is the same church as was originally established by the Lord we would have to trace it from year to year all the way back to the day of Pentecost. However, this is not true. In the first place, we have the Lord saying that his kingdom or church would never be destroyed but that it would stand forever (Daniel 2:44; Luke 1:33; Hebrews 12:28). This means that the church has existed somewhere in the world since its beginning on up to this time. It did not have to exist everywhere all the time for this to be true. In the next place, we have the seed of the kingdom (Luke 8:11) preserved in the words of the New Testament. If it produced Christians in the days of the Apostles, it will produce Christians today. If those who became Christians in apostolic times made up the church then, the same would be true today. Hence, it is possible for the Lord's church to exist wherever the New Testament exists, provided those that have it will do what it says.

God has always given his people a pattern to follow. He gave Noah a pattern to follow in building the ark (Genesis 6). He gave Moses a pattern for the tabernacle, with the warning, "*See that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain*" (Hebrews 8:5). And so in the New Testament we have unfolded the perfect pattern of the Lord's church. As Noah and Moses were expected to follow the patterns that were given to them, so must we follow the pattern for the church. And as Noah and Moses followed God's pattern for the ark and the tabernacle, and God was pleased with the results, so when we follow the pattern of the church, God will be pleased with the results inasmuch as the church will exist just as he intended, without addition or subtraction (Revelation 22:18,19).

All of the marks of identification of the church are clearly laid down in the New Testament. The Lord tells what the church is, who established it, where it was established, when it was established, the name by which it was known, the name of its members, how to become a member of it, the worship of it, and the work of it. It tells who the head is, the purchase price of it, the saviour of it, etc. It leaves no room for doubt as to what it is and its function. The pattern is as clear as God's word is clear.

So all we need to do is to study the Bible that we might know the one true church of the Bible. When we learn the truth about it, and follow it, then we will become members of it, and thus the same church that Christ originally established. Seed produces after its kind and the word of God will produce Christians and members of

the Lord's church today just like it always has in the past.

The church of Christ may be found around the world. It is here and everywhere. It may exist anywhere and at any time that man will do what the Bible teaches. It will cease to exist in any part of the world where the people cease to do God's will.

The church of Christ today is growing and spreading because it follows the Bible only. It condemns division and exalts Christ. This is the one church you can read about in the Bible. It is not a denomination or a combination of denominations. It is not protestant, Catholic, or sectarian. Then what is it? Simply the Lord's church. That is all.

The Lord's church has no earthly head or earthly headquarters. It exalts no man. It has no super organization styled by carnal wisdom. Each congregation is independent with its own local organization of elders and deacons, preachers, teachers, and members. One member is not elevated above the others since the church has no clergy or laity.

Christ's church has always had its enemies and so it has enemies today. The religious organizations of men oppose her because they resent a church that would not follow their example. They resent the church because it will not fellowship them and bid them God speed. They are keenly aware that there is someone trying to follow the Bible only, when they are following the teachings of men. They are conscious that the church of the Bible follows only Christ and wears his name, while they follow men and wear the names of men. Their weapons against Christ's church are not truth, but consist of prejudicing the hearts of the people, misrepresenting it, etc. But their labors are in vain.

The Lord's church has been victorious through the ages. All of the enemies of this world and all of the devils of hell cannot stop her. She may be small in number in comparison to those around her, but it will be the few that will be saved (Matthew 7:13,14). Christ has but one church and he will return one day for that one church (Ephesians 5:27; John 14:1-6). He is the King of his kingdom and will come for it to deliver it up to God (1 Corinthians 15:24). He has but one bride (Revelation 21:9) and he is coming one day to receive that bride, the one that wears his name. What about the others? He will profess unto them that he never knew them. He will root them up (Matthew 15:13). They will be gathered up and cast into the fire.

Our plea today is for pure New Testament Christianity. Return to the word of God and let it be your guide. Know the Bible and then

you will know the truth. Do what it says and you will be saved and added to the Lord's church, the one that you read about in the Bible.

If you are not a member of the church of Christ we encourage you to become a member. Believe in God, repent of your sins, confess Christ as the Son of God and be baptized that you might be saved (Mark 16:16; Romans 10:10; Acts 2:38). Then the Lord will add you to his church and you will be a Christian (Acts 2:47; Acts 11:26). Will you do that? No one is going to force you to do it, but if you will study your Bible we believe that you will want to be just a Christian and thus spend the rest of your life in trying to live for the Lord and to spread the borders of his kingdom.

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## THE GREATEST TEST

KENNETH DAVIS

IN THE NEW TESTAMENT WE read of those who had "great faith" and some with "little faith." Faith is of great importance and yet it is not the greatest test of spirituality. There is found in John 8:31-59 an incident in the life of Jesus that tells us about the "greatest test." Jesus was at the Feast of Tabernacles as this event occurred. Jesus was addressing those who "believed on him." From what Jesus said, we know that more than just belief is necessary. He tells them "...if ye continue in my word then are ye my disciples indeed." While they had believed on him more was necessary in order for them to be "disciples indeed."

Jesus continued by saying that certain benefits arise from continuing in his word. They would know the truth and the truth would make them free. When Jesus mentioned freedom, the Jews said they had never been in bondage. This was false. They had been in bondage many times beginning with **Egypt**. Moses led **them out, but** they had been in bondage many times after that. Even as they spoke they were under Roman domination.

They missed the point. Jesus was speaking of the bondage of sin. Jesus mentioned Abraham as their father but said they were trying to kill him (Jesus) because his work had no place in them. He told them that if they were Abraham's seed they would do the works of Abraham. God had promised Abraham that his "seed" (Jesus) would be a blessing to the whole world. But the Jews were seeking to kill the "seed" (Jesus.)

Later, the Jews said that God was their Father. Jesus reminded them that if God were their Father, they would love him, that is Jesus, because he came from the Father. In John 14:15 Jesus states the greatest test of spirituality—"If ye love me, keep my commandments." The greatest test of our spirituality is love for Christ. These people were already believers, they had faith. But there is need for more. That faith must also be coupled with love and that love will cause us to obey him. When Paul wrote the great chapter on love he stressed that love was greater than faith. He said, "And now abideth faith, hope and love, these three, but the greatest of these is love." (1 Corinthians 13:13.)

If you and I would be truly spiritual, we must not only have faith, but that faith must bring about love in our hearts for Christ and love will cause us to keep his commandments. Truly this is the greatest test of spirituality.

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## *God's Power: It's Whisper And It's Thunder (Job 26)*

JAMES RICKARD

THE POWER OF GOD SEEN in His created universe is truly awesome. Even the power that modern man has been able to harness is marvelous. Just in the last few decades man has harnessed the power of the atom to the extent that atomic generators produce vast amounts of electricity with which to light homes and cities, power great industrial machines, and benefit our lives in hundreds of ways. Unfortunately, this same power has been and can yet be used as horrible weapons of mass destruction which threaten to destroy our civilization. However it is "a drop in the bucket" compared to the power of God we see in His universe.

In Job 26 the writer expressed amazement at God's power seen in the creation. He raised his eyes to the sky and saw the thick, heavy clouds filled with water, yet they did not burst. (8.) He looked into the starry heavens and saw the beauty of the night skies. (13.) (The beauty and grandeur of which no artist could ever copy.) Then his eyes beheld the vast expanse of the heavens and the earth and he saw the great horizon that separates darkness from light. (10.) Then he noted how God stirred up the angry sea by His great power.

(12.) In another instance he observed that, "The waters wear the stones." (14:19.) Job was so impressed and amazed by this display of God's power that he could scarcely take it in. Yet, he recognized that this amazing display of power was only the "outskirts of his ways," and only a "whisper." (14.)

Job then asked this profound question, "But the thunder of his power who can understand?" (14.) He realized that God had power so much greater than what was displayed in His created universe that it was like the mighty roar of thunder compared to a whisper! If all the marvels of the universe are but the outskirts of His ways, and only a whisper of his power, what then is the thunder of His power?? It seems that Job may have sensed this thunderous power when he asked this question, "If a man die, shall he live again?" (14:14), and later answering it by making this profound observation, "But as for me I know that my Redeemer liveth, and at last he will stand up upon this earth: and after my skin, even this body is destroyed, then without my flesh shall I see God." (19:25,26.)

This strongly suggests that the roaring thunder of God's power was revealed when He brought forth His Son and our Savior from the grave.

Paul recognized this thunderous power when he wrote to the saints in Rome that Christ "was declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead; even Jesus Christ our Lord." (Romans 1:4.) Again, Paul recognized God's thunderous power when he wrote to the Ephesian Christians about the exceeding greatness of "the strength of his might which he wrote in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and made him to sit at his right hand in the heavenly places." (Ephesians 1:19,20.)

Could all the mighty power existing in the created universe bring one forth from the grave? No! Could all the schemes ever devised by the fertile minds of the world's greatest intellects bring one up from the grave? No! Could all the combined knowledge and expertise of the world's greatest medical experts bring one forth from the grave? No! When Adam, the first man, sinned and was driven out of the Garden and away from the tree of life, he was doomed to death and destruction. (Genesis 2:16,17; 3:22-24.) However, God in His great mercy, before He drove man from the Garden, promised him a Redeemer. (Genesis 3:15.) This hints of His thunderous power! Moreover, as a consequence of this sin, the human race was doomed to die. Thus, without the power of the



resurrection of Christ no one can escape the ultimate penalty of sin. (Romans 3:23; 6:23.)

In 1 Corinthians 15 Paul, with great eloquence and logic makes the case for the resurrection of Christ and the subsequent blessings it brings to a hopeless world. "For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive." (21,22.) Thanks be to God that our corruptible bodies will put on incorruption, and our mortality shall be changed to immortality by the power of our Lord's resurrection, and thus death will be swallowed up in victory. (53,54.) However, this can only occur "if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwelleth in you, he that raised up Christ Jesus from the dead shall give life also to your mortal bodies through his spirit that dwelleth in you." (Romans 8:11.) But, God's spirit dwells only in His children, that is, those who are in Christ. "For ye are all sons of God, through faith, in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ did put on Christ. (Galatians 3:26,27.) And because ye are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father. So that thou art no longer a bondservant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God." (Galatians 4:6,7.)

Thanks be to God for His unspeakable gift. (2 Corinthians 9:15.)

## ***"Press Toward the Goal!"***

J.L. LEIFESTE

*"BRETHREN, I DO NOT COUNT myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:13-14).*

Sometimes, we frustrate ourselves with our forgetfulness. At other times, we wish we could forget certain things. Sometimes, when we reach forward, we show order and good results. At other times, we show that we need to be better organized and more fruitful.

In the above scripture, the apostle Paul uses "forgetting" and "reaching" as parts of pressing toward a goal, like running in a race (see 1 Cor. 9:24-25). However, in this instance, *"things...behind"* refers to **past** occurrences and *"things...ahead"* refers to **future** objectives. The prize will be the eternal glory and delight of having a joyful life with God.

Paul wrote the above words to Christians. In order to press toward the goal, a person must first become a Christian (see Rom. 3:23; Jn. 14:6; Acts 4:12). The person must believe that Jesus is the Son of God (Matt. 28:18; Jn. 3:16; Acts 8:37), repent of sins (Acts 3:19), confess belief in Jesus (Rom. 10:9-10), be baptized in water for the forgiveness of sins (Matt. 28:19; Acts 22:16; 8:36-38), and begin living faithfully according to New Testament teaching (Titus 2:14; Rev. 2:10).

### **Forgetting Things Behind**

In becoming a Christian, a person becomes a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17). From the Christian viewpoint, there are several factors in “forgetting things behind.”

We must “forget” the sins we committed before we came to Christ. When we become Christians, God forgives our sins, and He will remember them no more (Acts 2:38; Heb. 8:12). We **do** need to remember the bad results which were caused by our sins; we do not want to repeat those mistakes. A Christian knows the shame of sin (see Rom. 6:21; 1 Tim. 1:12-16). However, “forgetting things behind” means that we do not let our mind dwell upon, or worry over, the sins from which we have been freed.

Even after we become Christians, and while we are striving to live faithfully, we will sometimes stumble and sin. There will be things we failed to do and things we should not have done. When we stumble, we must repent of sins, ask forgiveness, and—when possible—make corrections for the wrongs. When we keep trying to serve God, He continues forgiving our sins by the blood of Jesus (1 Jn. 1:7-9). So, “forgetting things behind” means forgetting **all** of our forgiven sins.

Christians are no longer slaves of sin. We are changed into servants of righteousness (Rom. 6:17-18, 22). Forgetting things behind means we must not let ourselves desire to return to worldly ways or even worldly thinking (Lk. 9:62; Phil. 4:8-9; Col. 3:1-2).

As a Christian, perhaps you have accomplished some good things in the past. You should not be satisfied and rest upon past achievements. Forgetting things behind means we must continue preaching the gospel and glorifying God through Christ by good works, teaching, ministering to the saints, and abounding in the work of the Lord (see Acts 8:4; Eph. 2:10; 3:21; Col. 3:16-17; Heb. 6:10; 1 Cor. 15:58).

## Reaching Toward Things Ahead

The Christian should continually examine himself or herself (2 Cor. 13:5; Gal. 6:4), then improve his or her thoughts and actions for pressing toward the goal.

Reaching forward should include studying the Bible (see Matt. 28:20; Acts 17:11; Rom. 15:4; Eph. 3:3-4; 2 Tim. 3:15-17; 2 Pet. 3:18). We should always try to read and interpret the scriptures carefully and prayerfully (see 2 Tim. 2:15). It is essential that we carefully hold to God's word as our only source of divine truth (1 Pet. 3:15; Eph. 4:13-16; Jude 3; 1 Thess. 5:21; Jn. 8:31-32).

Then, to our own daily life, we should apply the commands, good examples, and lessons learned, such as relying upon God for all things (Isa. 41:10; Rom. 8:38-39; 2 Cor. 1:3; Heb. 13:5-6).

Also, reaching forward should include growing in love (see Mk. 12:30-31; Jn. 14:23-24; 15:17; 1 Cor. 16:14; Eph. 3:17-19; 4:15-16; Col. 3:14; 2 Pet. 1:7-8; 1 Jn. 3:16; 4:19). To understand the true meaning of love, we need to read 1 Corinthians 13.

Moreover, reaching forward includes remaining faithful to God (Jn. 8:51; Rom. 8:13; Gal. 5:22; Heb. 2:1-4; 3:12-14; 4:14; 10:23, 26-27, 29; 1 Jn. 2:24-25).

Pressing toward the goal is a conscientious, continuing, daily process (Lk. 9:23). As the above characteristics work in our lives, we see worldly things becoming less important and the eternal prize becoming more important (see 2 Cor. 4:16-18). This helps us run the race with more endurance.

Forget the things behind, reach forward to things ahead, and press toward the goal!

*"Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us" (Heb. 12:1).*

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# JUST WHAT IS THE CHURCH?

DILLARD THURMAN

## BEGINNING OF THE CHURCH

WHEN PAUL WROTE, *"According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord"* (Eph. 3:11), he therein included the church into which all the saved of earth would be gathered. So,

in eternity, God had made provision for Christ to build His church! To this end the gospel proclamation in prophecy and preparation set the stage for its inauguration in the fulness of time when all prophecies about it were fulfilled. In this study, we want to examine promises of ages past that pointed forward to the gospel message, and the church's beginning.

### Noticing What the Prophets Said

The writer of Hebrews attracts our attention: *"But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us."* (Heb. 9:11-12). Surely this puts our Lord above all priests gone before, even as His *"more perfect tabernacle"* would tower over that known by Israel! We immediately begin searching for that message that would usher in His church! We are arrested by a prophecy found in Isa. 2:2-3; and Mic. 4:1-2: *"And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; for he will teach us his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem."* This great prophecy clearly sets forth the **Time** = *Last Days*; **Place** = *Jerusalem*; and **Persons** = *All Nations*. Thus we must look for these to be fulfilled when the church is established!

### Church Vs. Kingdom Idea

Many find it difficult to see where scriptures speaking of the kingdom apply to the church. Review the prophecy of Isaiah and Micah, as it states: *"the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains."* Just what was *the mountain of the Lord's house* and in what *mountains* would it be built? Any word used figuratively must retain the same figurative meaning in the paragraph in which it is used. This rule of grammar leads to the conclusion that they spoke of the *mountain of the Lord's house* as its *government*, thus declaring that the government of the Lord's house would tower over all governments established by men (as we shall see later in Daniel's prophecy.) What is the Lord's house? Paul in writing to Timothy said, *"That thou mayest know how thou*

*oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.”* (1 Tim. 3:15). So, we learn that house of God is the church! That is what was to be established at Jerusalem in the last days! This is evident in the words: *“But Christ as a Son over his own house; whose house are we.”* (Heb. 3:6). Thus the saints are referred to as *“the household of God.”* (Eph. 2:19).

### **The Prophecy of Daniel 2:31-45**

But we must also study Nebuchadnezzar’s dream in Babylon (Dan. 2:31-35). The great figure troubled him until Daniel gave him the interpretation (Dan. 2:36-45). It was explained that the Babylonian empire, which fell in 536 B.C., was represented by the head of Gold. Following it, the Medo-Persian empire, which fell in 330 B.C., was represented by the breasts and arms of silver. The Macedonian empire of Alexander the Great, divided among generals in 323 B.C., was represented by the belly and thighs of brass. Lastly, the Roman empire, under the Caesars from 30 B.C., was represented by legs of iron, and feet of iron mixed with clay. At the end of Daniel’s interpretation, he gave this prophecy: *“In the day of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever.”* (Dan. 2:44). To the time, place and persons of the prophecies of Isaiah and Micah, we can now add an appendage: the church (where Christ would be King) would be established after the fall of the Babylonian, Medo-Persian, and the Macedonian empires, and in the reign of the Roman Empire. This surely was in mind when saints were told: *“Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved.”* (Heb. 12:28). This helps in our search!

### **The Gospel Preached in Preparation**

Coming to the New Testament for our search we read: *“In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”* (Mt. 3:1-2). Luke informs us that it was in the reign of Tiberius Caesar (Lk. 3:1-2). Since we have come into the Roman rule, we ask, is this the beginning of the church? John did not begin his preaching from Jerusalem; he did not address the Gentiles; and did not mention *“the last days.”* John said, *“The kingdom is at hand.”* It had not been established, but rather, was approaching! Keep in mind that John

was not in the kingdom, for Jesus said, *“Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding, he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.”* (Mt. 11:11). Now, if the least in the kingdom was greater than John the Baptist, then John could not have been in the kingdom! He, John, had taught it was nigh! He did not begin preaching from Jerusalem; his preaching embraced only the Jews; and John never mentioned the “last days.” He had not fulfilled the words of the prophets!

### **Preaching in Christ’s Ministry**

Jesus also began preaching the gospel of preparation for the church. But He began his preaching in Capernaum: *“From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”* (Mt. 4:13-17). It was recorded: *“He came unto his own, and his own received him not.”* (Jno. 1:11). Notice, Jesus did not begin in Jerusalem; He did not say it was the last days; His preaching did not embrace all nations; and He also said the kingdom was *“at hand”*—not then present. Too, Jesus sent forth His twelve disciples in Galilee, saying, *“Go not in the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand.”* (Mt. 10:5-7). Later He sent forth the seventy, two by two, as harbingers before His face. This time the message was to be: *“The kingdom of heaven is come nigh unto you.”* (Lk. 10:9). Again we find lack of fulfillment of prophecy. They did not go forth from Jerusalem; their teaching did not embrace all nations; and nothing is said of *“the last days.”* We must conclude the church had not yet been established!

### **What More Is Said of Beginning**

During His personal ministry, Jesus taught His disciples to pray for the kingdom to come (Mt. 6:9-10), showing that it had not then been established. Yet later, Jesus promised, *“I WILL build my church”* (Mt. 16:18). He plainly said the disciples were yet to enter the kingdom (Mt. 18:3). There are ample texts to show the disciples were still expecting it. *“They thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear.”* (Lk. 19:11). At the last supper Jesus said, *“I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come.”* (Lk. 22:19). Even at the time of Christ’s burial, Joseph of Arimathea *“waited for the kingdom of God.”* (Mk. 15:43). However,

these passages show that the time was rapidly approaching for its beginning!

Jesus made promise: *“Verily I say unto you, That there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power.”* (Mk. 9:1). This shows the kingdom had not come; but some present would live to see it (signifying that some would not [Judas]). But notice that it would come with power! Then after His death and resurrection, His disciples asked before He ascended: *“Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?”* But He replied, *“It is not for you to know the times or seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power when the Holy Spirit is come upon you, and ye shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.”* (Acts 1:6-8). Mark this well! Jesus said the kingdom would come with power; they were to receive power when the Holy Spirit come on them. Now tie this in with what He had said earlier: *“That repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things. And behold I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high.”* (Lk. 24:46-49). They did wait in Jerusalem, until that great Pentecost!

### **The Beginning Fulfills Prophecy!**

They returned to Jerusalem (Acts 1:12) and waited for that promise. *“And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. . . And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men out of every nation under heaven.”* (Acts 2:1-5). To a confused, astounded multitude, Peter spake: *“This is that which was spoken by Joel: And it shall come to pass in the Last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit on all flesh.”* (vs. 16-17). The kingdom was to come with power (Mk. 9:1), which was the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8), which came on Pentecost—for this was the birth of the kingdom of God on earth! Notice the fulfillment of prophecy: It was in *the last days*, it went forth *from Jerusalem*, and Jews of *all nations* were gathered. This same preacher later preached this same gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 10). This was during the Roman empire rule as Daniel foretold!

That church was fully established after Peter had preached the first gospel sermon, declaring Jesus Christ as the risen Lord (Acts 2:22-38). Those who crucified the Christ cried out, *"What shall we do?"* and Peter's reply was direct and plain: *"Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."* *"Then they which gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls."* *"And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved."* (Acts 2:41, 47). On that first day, that church had 3,000 members; and the Lord was adding to it daily! No longer was it spoken of in the future tense! It was alive and well! Study the commission in Mt. 28:18-20; Mk. 16:15-16 and Lk. 24:46-49. Then compare it with what Peter preached!

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## "Love the Lord thy God"

CLEM THURMAN

Whether or not the lawyer was sincere in his questioning, Jesus certainly was sincere in the answer He gave: *"What commandment is the first of all? Jesus answered, The first is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God, the Lord is one: and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength"* (Mk. 12:28-30). The apostle wrote later, *"He that loveth not knoweth not God, for God is love. Herein was the love of God manifested in us, that God sent his only begotten Son into the world that we might live through him. . . We love, because he first loved us"* (1 Jno. 4:8-9,19). God's love was more than just some kind of "feeling" toward the people of the world. His love prompted action: *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life"* (Jno. 3:16). The Greek word for "love" in this and other passages which speak of God's love is the word, *"agape."* It is this kind of love we must have.

*"Agape"* love is the commitment, or will, to do what we should for the one loved. In other words, love seeks the good of the one loved. God loved the world, and gave the world what it most needed — the Savior. The husband that loves his wife does what is best for her. Jesus said, *"If ye love me, keep my commandments. . . He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me."*



.. *If a man love me, he will keep my word*" (Jno. 14:15,21,23). Love for the Lord seeks to please the Lord by doing what He wants us to do. Once we make the commitment to seek to please the Lord, nothing He requires is a burden: *"This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous"* (1 Jno. 5:3). It is not a "chore" to do something for one we really love. And love for God must have the true motive in what we do in the spiritual realm.

The Scripture says, *"The love of Christ constraineth us."* Another version read, *"The love of Christ leaves us no choice."* His love for us compels a reaction from us, that is the point. And that love demands that we live as He directs: *"The love of Christ constraineth us. . . He died for all, that they that live should no longer live unto themselves, but unto him who for their sakes died and rose again"* (2 Cor. 5:14-15). Because we believe He died for us, we respond with "agape" love: we make a commitment to live for Him. The result is stated two verses later, *"If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: the old things are passed away; behold, they are become new."* When *"we love because he first loved us"* (1 Jno. 4:19): our purpose changes, our commitment changes, our life changes. To please Him, we *"seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness"* (Matt. 6:33), and a new and different way of living is the result.

Yes, the great commandment is, *"Love God."* This changes us from within, and the *"new man"* that results shows Christ living in us (Gal. 2:20) as we are seen as *"lights in the world, holding forth the word of life"* (Phil. 2:16).

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## ***Families Need*** ***MORAL COURAGE***

JEFF A. JENKINS

GOD'S PEOPLE WERE ON THE verge of the long-awaited entrance into the Promised Land. They had been in Egyptian captivity, had crossed the Red Sea, and had wandered in the wilderness. The warnings from God were clear, and they had heard reports from their own leaders. Although this was a land that physically was beautiful (flowed with milk and honey), spiritually speaking it was treacherous. The giants were not only formidable

in their physical stature but would also create chaos among the families of God's people. To overcome these obstacles would take tremendous courage from the leaders of the families.

As the Israelites stood on the brink of this momentous journey, God reminded the people through His man Moses of the type of moral courage needed to traverse this dangerous land. In Deuteronomy 6, we see four principles that will help any family find the moral courage needed in a difficult world.

### **Remember to Teach**

Our children will not learn moral courage through osmosis. They will not learn moral courage by watching television. They will not likely learn moral courage from their friends. They will learn moral courage through what we teach them. In Deuteronomy 6:1-5, we read God's charge to His people as they prepared to enter the land of promise. In verses 6-7 of this great chapter, we read, "These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up" (NASB).

The Bible is clear that the responsibility to rear children is placed squarely at the feet of the parents. God says "you," not the government, not the school system, not even the church. He says you "shall," which indicates this responsibility is not an option. Not "if you choose to do this," or "if you have time to do this," but "you must!" He says you *must* teach.

We are always teaching our children by what we do and what we say. All parents, especially those with small children, need to remember that our children are like sponges, soaking up every word they hear. He says you must teach these commandments. These are God's demands for our lives. God attaches a promise to this injunction. If you do this, it will be well with you and your children (Deuteronomy 6:1-2).

### **Remember to Thank**

Although "thank" and "you" are simple words to say, they carry a tremendous reminder of what others have done. Recently, while greeting people as they left our assembly, I handed a couple of our young boys a sticker on their way out the door. Their mother stopped them in their tracks and said, "Do we need another lesson to remember our manners?" She simply wanted to remind them to say thank you.

God blessed His people by allowing them to live in cities they did not build and in houses they did not construct. They were blessed to eat from vineyards they did not plant and to be able to drink from wells they did not dig (Deuteronomy 6:10-11). God said that His desire was for them to enjoy all of these blessings. However, He warned them not to forget how they received these wonderful blessings. His words to His people are, "Then watch yourself, that you do not forget the LORD who brought you from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery" (v. 12). God wants His people to be thankful.

As we attempt to equip our families with the moral courage needed to survive, we must watch ourselves so that we do not forget to give thanks. The old saying is true, "If we will just think, we will thank." Our heavenly Father has always wanted His children to enjoy what He gives us. The fact is, "Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow" (James 1:17).

Paul reminded the people of Athens that God gives us all things, even the air we breathe. "The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things" (Acts 17:24-25). Our God is not only responsible for the physical blessings in our lives, but He also gives us every spiritual blessing we enjoy (Ephesians 1:3).

It is true that we are as blessed as any people who have ever lived on the face of the earth. Our children have more things, money, etc., than any children before them. In our rush to provide for them, may we never forget to remind them constantly that all of these blessings are because of God. Parents, our children need to hear us say thank you to one another. They need to hear us say thank you to others. They need to hear us regularly express thanks to God when we pray.

### **Remember to Translate**

In Deuteronomy 6, two arresting statements emphasize the need for translating moral courage into our lives. The first is in verse 18, "You shall do what is right and good in the sight of the LORD." It is not enough just to teach our families what is right; it is important that we show them what is right. Children need to see parents do what is right, sometimes for no other reason than it is the right thing

to do. Our children will learn not only from the instruction they hear, but they also will learn from the example they see.

The other passage that allows us to see how important it is for us to translate our teaching into real life is Deuteronomy 6:20: "When your son asks you in time to come, saying, 'What do the testimonies and the statutes and the judgments mean which the LORD our God commanded you?'" Notice, the text does not say "if"; it says *when*. If our children see us living for God, they will ask us, "What is the meaning of all of this?" "Why do we pray and give thanks for all of our meals?" "Why do we do our best to attend all the services of the church whereas others place sporting events, school or work activities before church?" "Why do we do good deeds for others (prepare meals, visit the elderly, etc.)?" "Why do we worship God the way we do when others seem to be more interested in entertainment than worship?" Parents, if we are portraying moral courage in the way we live, it will not be a matter of *if* our children will wonder why, it will be a matter of *when*.

### **Remember to Tell**

God then told parents the answer to the preceding question. It is the primary motivation for all moral courage. "Then you shall say to your son, 'We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, and the LORD brought us from Egypt with a mighty hand. Moreover, the LORD showed great and distressing signs and wonders before our eyes against Egypt, Pharaoh and all his household; He brought us out from there in order to bring us in, to give us the land which He had sworn to our fathers'" (Deuteronomy 6:21-23).

God is saying that when your children come to ask you why you are living the way you do, be sure you tell them the answer. Tell them how God has always provided for you and how He has always protected you. When our children question our commitment to obeying God, our service to others, our love for living for Him, we must tell them why. We must tell them about a time when we were slaves in sin, living under the rule of our adversary.

If our families are going to live with moral courage, we must tell them about God's amazing grace (Titus 2:11) and His wonderful love (John 3:16). We must tell them how our Father reached down with His mighty hand and lifted us from sin. We must tell them that without Christ we would not be able to live morally courageous lives.

May God help us as we live in this world to remember to teach our families all the commandments of God, to thank Him regularly

for every blessing we enjoy, to translate what we learn into the way we live our lives, and to tell our families about the amazing grace of our Lord.

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## **WHY WORSHIP** ***Without Instruments?***

BRUCE McLARTY

THE TERM “A CAPPELLA” came into the English language from Latin by way of Italian. It means “in the style of the chapel (church).” Today, it is commonly used to express “without instrumental accompaniment.”

From the beginning of Christianity, Christians sang in their worship without the use of musical instruments. Today, those who worship without musical instruments are a minority of believers in comparison to those who claim to be Christian. However, our practice is not as rare or peculiar as it might first appear. For the first 1,000 years of church history, instrumental music in worship was not only unknown; it was also vigorously opposed by Christian writers. Although it was later accepted in the West, the Eastern (Greek Orthodox) Church has continued to regard instrumental music in worship as a non-biblical practice that is contrary to the spiritual nature of worship.

What are the reasons for insisting on a cappella music in Christian worship? Is this matter significant, or is it merely a stubborn tradition that has no relevance in the present age? These are the questions to which we now turn our attention.

### **New Testament Evidence**

The early Jerusalem church was born into a world of music. Existing as it did for the first few years of its history in the shadow of the Jewish temple, the first-century church was exposed to a large variety of musical instruments. There were numerous types of cymbals, harps and lyres (1 Chronicles 25:6-7). However, the early church used none of them. Instead, its worship assemblies included psalms, hymns and spiritual songs performed only with human voices and hearts (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16).

In light of the extensive use of instruments in the Old Testament and in the first-century world, it is amazing that no mention is in the

New Testament of such instruments in connection with the worship of the church. Apparently, when the early Christians were instructed to sing, the clear meaning of those instructions to them was to sing without instruments of music.

### **Other Concerns**

In addition to the direct instructions that early Christians had to sing, they had at least three other reasons to reject instrumental music:

**(1) Its association with the Old Covenant.** Instruments of music were, indeed, used in the worship conducted in the temple of God in Jerusalem. Many people today believe that instrumental music in worship is still appropriate based on this ancient practice. However, there are many Old Testament practices, including animal sacrifices, that the New Testament declares to be inappropriate for Christian worship: “The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship” (Hebrews 10:1 NIV84).

Church historian Eusebius of Caesarea (A.D. 263-339) wrote the following in his commentary on Psalm 91:2-3: “Of old at the time those of the circumcision were worshiping with symbols and types it was not inappropriate to send up hymns to God with the psalterion and kithara and to do this on Sabbath days. ... We render our hymn with a living psalterion and a living kithara with spiritual songs. The unison voices of Christians would be more acceptable to God than any musical instrument. Accordingly in all the churches of God, united in soul and attitude, with one mind and in agreement of faith and piety, we send up a unison melody in the words of the Psalms.”

**(2) Its association with externals.** Jesus told the Samaritan woman that New Testament worship was to be in spirit and in truth (John 4:24). Instructions about Christian singing include these spiritually focused words: “Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music *in your heart to the Lord*” (Ephesians 5:19, emphasis added). “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude *in your hearts to God*” (Colossians 3:16, emphasis added).

In another context, while not condemning the use of musical

instruments, the apostle Paul drew a contrast between the meaningless noise of a gong or a cymbal and the meaningful response of a human heart filled with the love of God (1 Corinthians 13:1). Everett Ferguson, in a work entirely devoted to the question of a cappella music in worship, writes:

“The whole self (including the emotions) is involved in Christian worship, but the mind (reason) is to be in control. Instrumental music can express feelings and emotions. Vocal music can express the will and intellect. The latter is better suited for the communion of spirit with Spirit. In vocal music there is an immediate contact. In instrumental music there is an intermediary. The voice is much more a matter of one’s self than any other gift of praise can be. Vocal music thus best corresponds to the nature of man’s relationship to God.”

**(3) Its association with pagan festivals.** As the church moved out of Judea and into the Greek world, instrumental music posed new problems for Christians. Many of their converts had formerly been involved in pagan mystery cults where a wide variety of musical instruments had been part of the wild immorality that characterized their worship. Out of concern for these young, vulnerable believers, the early church avoided instrumental music in its worship, helping the new converts to make a clear break with their sinful past. *The Oxford History of Music* observes:

“The religious use of instruments, so long an important feature of the Temple worship, was not prohibited after the destruction of the Temple in A.D. 70 in token of mourning, as was long believed, but discouraged before then in order to safeguard the purity of religious music ‘against the musical and orgiastic mystery cults in which Syrian and Mesopotamian Jews not infrequently participated.’ It was equally disapproved of by the Hellenistic-Judaic philosopher Philo of Alexandria, who wrote in the early years of the Christian era and was opposed to any kind of music in worship, and in the early Christian communities - whose interdiction of instrumental participation in service-music has been maintained to this day by the Eastern Church.”

### **The Testimony of Church History**

Although church history does not serve as our authority, it is often helpful in understanding the thinking of the earliest Christians. As mentioned before, we have no clear references of instrumental music in Christian worship for almost 1,000 years. Even then, it was not the normal or generally accepted practice. It is a shock to

most people today to find that, historically speaking, instrumental music in worship was actually the minority practice.

It is also surprising to most people to find that many writers in the first several centuries had a lot to say about instruments of music. Typical of their objections to instruments are the following:

- **Theodoret (A.D. 390-458)** - A leader of the church in Syria, Theodoret was probably the writer of *Questions and Answers for the Orthodox*: “107. Question: If songs were invented by unbelievers to seduce men, but were allowed to those under the law on account of their childish state, why do those who have received the perfect teaching of grace in their churches still use songs, just like the children under the law?

“Answer: It is not simple singing that belongs to the childish state, but singing with lifeless instruments, with dancing, and with clappers. Hence the use of such instruments and the others that belong to the childish state is excluded from the singing in the churches, and simple singing is left.”

- **Niceta (A.D. 335-414)** - A church leader in Eastern Europe, Niceta addressed the concept of “silent singing” in *On the Utility of Hymn Singing*: “It is time to turn to the New Testament to confirm what is said in the Old, and particularly, to point out that the office of psalmody is not to be considered abolished merely because many other observances of the Old Law have fallen into desuetude [disuse]. Only the corporal institutions have been rejected, like circumcision, the sabbath, sacrifices, discrimination in foods. So, too, the trumpets, harps, cymbals and timbrels. For the sound of these we now have a better substitute in the music from the mouths of men.”

## Conclusion

The New Testament instruction and example are to sing praise to God, making music with our voices and our hearts. The early church was both consistent and adamant in its rejection of musical instruments in worship. Whatever the reasons -whether because of its association with the Old Covenant, with inferior external rituals, or with pagan feasts - instrumental music was viewed for centuries as inappropriate for Christian worship and inferior to the human voice as a vehicle for the expression of the soul's worship of God.

Non-instrumental believers today continue to follow the simple, positive teaching of the New Testament on this subject and to imitate the example of the early Christians in our rejection of instrumental music in the worship of the church.

