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Pleading for the Restoration of Pure New Testament Christianity

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What Does the Bible Teach?

*IS CHRISTMAS
From God Or Man?*

MILLIONS OF PEOPLE AROUND THE WORLD EVERY YEAR CELEBRATE DECEMBER 25th as the special religious “holy day” because they believe it marks the date of Christ’s birth day. It may, however, come as a surprise to you to learn that Christmas is a religious observance of wholly human origin. The Bible, which is the source of learning about Christianity, is completely silent concerning any special festivities to commemorate the date of Christ’s birth day. The observance of Christmas did not originate in the apostolic age, and is thus without divine sanction. As a matter of fact, the word Christmas, which means “Mass of Christ”, not even once appear anywhere in the Bible, and it is not possible to determine in what month, or on what date or day Jesus was born. The Bible gives two accounts of the birth of Jesus, they are found in Matthew chapters 1 and 2, and in Luke chapter 2. No mention is made of Christ’s date of birth. We are living in the year of our Lord, A.D., Anno Domini, and all the time before His birth on earth is known as B.C., before Christ. All people on earth, therefore, accept and admit, advertently or inadvertently, when they write a date on any piece of paper or document that almost two thousand years ago Jesus Christ was born on earth. But in what month and on what day or date Christ was born, the Bible is silent about it. No command is given for Christ’s birth day to be observed in any way. Also, no example is found in the entire New Testament of any

celebration of Christ's birth. And inasmuch as there is neither precept nor example for its observance, faithful Christians do not keep or observe or celebrate Christmas as a religious festival.

In origin Christmas is Pagan. More than three hundred years after Christ was born, some believers in Christ had begun observing Christ's birthday, influenced by the Pagan society around them, as they had been observing certain days of the year celebrating special days in commemoration of their gods and goddesses. First they began celebrating the birth day of Christ on different days of the year, such as, January 6, March 18, 20, 24, April 2, 17, May 20 etc., but in A.D. 354 the Bishop of Rome declared that December 25th, a Pagan feast day, which was observed throughout the Roman Empire in honor of Saturn, a Roman God of agriculture, and Brumal, "The Birthday of the Unconquered Sun," should be observed by Christians in honor of Christ's birth. *"The Pagan Saturnalia and Brumalia were too deeply entrenched in popular custom to be set aside by Christians who were influenced by the Pagan festival with its riots and merrymaking and was so popular that "Christians" were glad of an excuse to continue its celebration with little change in spirit and manner."* (Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of religious knowledge). However, this date of December 25th was not accepted by some, therefore, they began celebrating Christmas on January 6th, as the Eastern Orthodox Church does even today. It is also interesting to note that many of the festivities and things connected with Christmas, such as, Christmas Tree, Yule-log, Santa-Claus or Father Christmas, etc. had their origin in Paganism.

On the other hand, if God desired from people to celebrate His Son's birth day, then He would have certainly revealed to us in the Bible, just as He has revealed every other thing that we need to know, believe and practice. He would have told us when and how we should observe Christ's birth-day, just as He has told us to commemorate Christ's death on the first day of the week by partaking of the Lord's Supper, as His faithful followers observe everywhere on the first day of every week. (Matthew 26:26-28; Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26). But there is neither a command nor example about observing and celebrating Christmas. God has not even revealed the day or date or month in which Christ was born. Why? **God knows man's idolizing tendency, and perhaps this may be the reason why God has not revealed in which month or on what day or date Christ was born.** He doesn't want man to glorify and worship and give importance to a particular day, and remember

Him only once in a year, as most people do today. Christmas is the only day of the year when almost all church buildings are full with worshippers, that is the day when most people become more religious, loving, kind, forgiving, and giving. Christmas day has become so important, influential and powerful for most people today that they sing, "A man will live forever more because of Christmas day." Friends, **Christianity is not "once a year" religion.** Christ said: "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross **daily** and follow Me." (Luke 9:23).

Although Christmas is observed and celebrated today with much zest, enthusiasm, excitement and fanfare by people all over the world, but this does not mean that it is right and acceptable to God. God is happy only when people do those things which He has commanded. (1 Samuel 15:22). God has given us the Bible to be our guide in all religious matters, faith and practice. Popular opinions, human traditions are not a safe guide. Christ said, "These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me teaching as doctrines the commandments of men." (Matthew 15: 8, 9). In the book of Proverbs 30:6, the Bible says, "Do not add to His words, lest He rebuke you, and you be found a liar." An apostle of Christ, at 2 John 9 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." Is Christmas in the doctrine of Christ? We must also remember what the apostle Paul said to some Christians who were observing particular days and seasons which were not intended for them, "But then, indeed, when you did not know God, you served those which by nature are not gods. But now after you have known God , or rather are known by God, how is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage? You observe days and months and seasons and years. I am afraid of you, lest I have labored for you in vain." (Galatians 4:8-11). The basic reason for not observing Christmas or Easter or any other special religious "holy days" is the simple fact that the Bible, and the New Testament in particular, nowhere teaches us to do so. The Bible, God's book of inspiration and revelation should be our guide in all religious matters, faith and practice. We should not offer to God "holy days" and worship of human Pagan origin.

WHO IS JESUS CHRIST THAT CHRISTIANS FOLLOW?

J.C. CHOATE

MANY WHO HAVE heard of Jesus Christ are confused and do not know who He really is. Millions believe in Him, but millions more do not. Who is Jesus Christ?

1. Jesus Christ existed with God in the beginning. Hebrews 1:3 describes Him as being the brightness of God's glory, and the express image of His person. John 1:1, called Him "the word," says that He was with God in the beginning, and that He was God. This means that He is one of the Persons of the Godhead, along with the God and the Holy Spirit. God is described as being eternal, having no beginning and no end, so the same is true of Jesus Christ. (Isaiah 63:16.) He is said to be the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8); the beginning of the creation of God (Revelation 3:14); and the first and the last. (Revelation 22:13.)

2. Jesus Christ was the creator of all things. In Genesis 1:1 we read that "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." The Hebrew word for God is the plural form, which includes the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit. In Genesis 1:26 God said, "Let us make man in our image..." Paul further explained in Colossians 1:16,17, speaking of Jesus Christ, "All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist."

3. Jesus Christ was born of the virgin Mary through the power of God, having no earthly father. His unique birth was prophesied many centuries before by the prophet Isaiah: "Therefore the Lord Himself shall give you a sign; Behold a virgin shall conceive, and bear a Son, and shall call His name Emmanuel. In Matthew 1:20,21 it was said that, "that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call His name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins." From these verses we can see that Jesus was born miraculously, that He was more than just a man.

4. Jesus Christ is the Son of God. He emptied Himself of the rights powers inherent in the Godhead, and subjecting Himself to God, his Father, becoming a brother to humans by His physical birth. (Philippians 2:3-8.) He came into the world to save man from

his sins. "For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." (Luke 19:10.)

5. Jesus Christ performed miracles to prove that He was the Son of God. John wrote concerning His miracles, "And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book: but these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His name." (John 20:30,31.)

6. Jesus Christ died on the cross so that all who believe in Him might be saved and have the hope of eternal life. We read the words of the apostle Paul, "Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; by which also you are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures." (1 Corinthians 15:1-4.)

7. Jesus Christ promised to save the obedient in His family, which he called "My church." (Matthew 16:18.) He died for this body of people, and all those who are washed in His blood are saved and added to His church. It is called His body, of which He is the head. It is also described as His bride, wearing His name. (Ephesians 5:23, 25; Acts 2:47; Ephesians 3:15; Acts 4:12.) One day he will come back for that saved body of people.

8. Jesus Christ is the second person in the Godhead. (Matthew 28:19, 20.) There is one God, one Lord (Christ), and one Spirit (Ephesians 4:1-6.) Christ has authority in heaven and on earth. (Matthew 28:18.) He is presently sitting at the right hand of the Father, reigning as King of kings and Lord of lords. (Revelation 17:14.) One day He will come again to take His people, the church, to heaven where they will dwell forevermore. He promised, "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would not have told you. I go to prepare a place for you, and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also." (John 14:1-3.)

Do you believe in Christ? He warned in John 8:24, "...if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins." Believing in him includes obeying Him, and obeying Him including being baptized, for He said "He that believes and is baptized shall be saved." (Mark

16:15, 16.) After being baptized into him (Romans 3:6.) one must be faithful (obedient) to Him until death to go to heaven. (Revelation 2:10.)

Why I Am A Christian

JOHN M. BROWN

THE APOSTLE PAUL wrote the following to the Christians in Colosse. "As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving. Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power." (Colossians 2:6-10.)

I AM A CHRISTIAN BECAUSE OF WHAT THE CHRISTIAN POSSESSES!

What does the child of God have? In Christ we have forgiveness (Matthew 26:28); a right relationship and fellowship with God (1 John 1:3); fellowship with others in fellowship with God (1 John 1:7); hope (Hebrews 6:19); the privilege of prayer (1 Peter 3:12); and freedom from the power of sin. (Romans 6:1-14.) Truly the Christian has "something that the world can't give!"

Those that are those in Christ to the end of life have the following: (1) a LOVE that will never be fathomed; (2) a RIGHTEOUSNESS that will never be tarnished; (3) a PEACE that will never be understood; (4) a JOY that will never be diminished; (5) a REST that will never be disturbed; (6) a HOPE that will never be disappointed; (7) a GLORY that will never be clouded; (8) a LIGHT that will never be darkened; (9) a PURITY that will never be defiled; and (10) a LIFE that will never die!

In the well-known 23rd Psalm, David wrote, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou are with me...." (Psalm 23:4.) In a very real sense, we are all walking through the valley of the shadow of death! Death is the common lot of humanity. (Hebrews 9:27.) But the Christian has hope of something beyond this life, and victory over the grave! (See 1 Peter 1:3-4; 1 Corinthians 15:51-58.)

What does the Christian possess? Jesus said, "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." (John 10:10.)

I AM A CHRISTIAN BECAUSE OF GRATITUDE!

What did Jesus do for us? The Bible says that Jesus, the One who knew no sin, became sin for us, the ones who had sinned, that we might be made "the righteousness of God in him." (2 Corinthians 5:21.) He died for all (2 Corinthians 5:14) and thereby "tasted death for every man." (Hebrews 2:9.)

When we contemplate Jesus' suffering and sacrifice, we see the heinousness of sin, the greatness of God's love, and the magnitude of Christ's gift! Consider Jesus, after His back had been lashed and scourged until the blood ran; consider the cross placed upon His back; with the eye of faith, see Him staggering down the old stone streets of Jerusalem and up to the hill called Calvary; watch Him as He is nailed to the cross, lifted between Heaven and earth; think of the pain as it raced across His body until He cried, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" Remember that He said "It is finished" and dropped His head on a pulse less chest. Why? Why all that agony, suffering, humiliation, and pain? It was for us that He died! The prophet Isaiah, seven hundred years before Christ endured these cruelties, had written of His suffering on our behalf: "But he was wounded for our transgression, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed." (Isaiah 53:5.)

When we consider what Jesus did for us we are compelled to honor, love, serve and obey Him! John wrote, "We love him, because he first loved us." (1 John 4:19.)

I can not but follow the One who gave so much for me! If another made the supreme sacrifice in giving his life for your benefit, that you might live, would you be thankful and appreciative and hallow his memory? That's what Jesus did! To fail to appreciate the gift, and honor the giver is the height of ingratitude indeed.

Yes, gratitude compels me to love Him! And because He said that if I love Him I will keep His commandments (John 14:15), then gratitude and love, entwined and inseparable, obligates me to be a Christian!

The Mist That Watered The Earth

J.H. MATTHEWS

GENESIS IS A RECORD of origins. Its statements are simple and in their simplicity, sublime. The history of creation, at once majestic and profound, beheld as it must have been by celestial and eternal beings only, is spoken in language that a father might speak to his child. Men of learning have made light of it as though it were the product of ignorance and superstition, or a patch-work of mythical tradition. Others, no less learned, receive it as the only rational and worthy account of the origin of things, humbly believing it is more reasonable to accept the Genesis record than some theory that would account for the creation without a creator. To them the idea of a world without a maker raises more and greater difficulties than it solves. "By faith we understand that the worlds have been framed by the word of God, so that what is seen hath not been made out of things which appear." (Hebrews 11:3.)

This simple narration is often misunderstood, even by some who believe it to be a revelation from God. It is frequently heard that no rain fell on the earth before the flood. The basis for this statement, we are told, is the language of this ancient record that "no plant of the field was yet sprung up; for Jehovah God had not caused it to rain upon the earth: and there was not a man to till the ground; but there went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground." (Genesis 2:5, 6 ASV.)

It is suggested that before the flood the earth enjoyed a "greenhouse effect" by reason of the mist, but since the flood, rain has replaced the mist.

The attentive reader will note that the writer carefully states the time when rain had not yet fallen. Was it after the creation of man? It was when "no plant of the field was yet sprung up, and there was not a man to till the ground."

Why say Moses wrote of conditions after the creation of man when a child can read that it was before? Nothing is here said of earth's condition after man appeared, but of that state before creation was complete, when not a single plant was in the ground, nor had a blade of green grass yet appeared.

The absence of vegetation is accounted for by the fact that our present-existing atmospheric conditions had not yet been established - God had not yet caused it to rain upon the earth.

If plants can grow without rain, the writer could not give the absence of rain as the reason they had not yet appeared; for it is not a true statement that plants had not appeared for a lack of rain, and then relate that something other than rain serves as well or better?

Some refer to "the mistakes of Moses." Not I.

Moses made no such mistake.

The Bible should be read reasonably and with common sense. Reason declares that if plants cannot grow without rain - and this truth is acknowledged by the author of Genesis - when plants grow, rain must have fallen.

It is not possible for plants to grow without rain today and, this being true then, the divine penman notes that truth. It was earth's condition prior to the creation of man. Then, proceeding to notice the changes required to sustain plant life, he declares "there went up a mist from the earth and watered the whole face of the ground."

Now, earth is able to sustain living things - plants, and all life dependent upon plants, including man.

The mist, we are told, was an alternate means of watering the earth before rain fell. If the mist was not rain but another way to water the earth before it rained, one thing is certain. The garden of Eden was not watered in that way, nor any other garden. Because the Scriptures say that the time when rain had not fallen was *when "no plant of the field was yet sprung up. and there was not a man to till the ground."*

In the garden of Eden were plants and a man to till the ground. Moses here wrote of earth when it was barren and before Adam was made.

What is rain? Is it not a mist, or vapor, that rises from the earth, condenses when it meets cooler air, and falls again? How did Moses know atmospheric science? He wrote of the beginning of rain and its necessity in making earth a habitable place for man. "There went up a mist from the earth and watered the whole face of the ground." Reason also insists that in order for the mist that went up from the earth to water the face of the ground it had to fall upon the ground after it ascended from the earth.

This is exactly what rain does. Now, earth is ready for the final touch of the Creator's hand, and that accomplishment follows: "The Lord God formed man... and planted a garden." (Genesis 2:7,8.)

It is written that He (God) "draws up the drops of water which distill in rain from its vapor, which the skies pour down and drop

upon man abundantly.” (Job 36:27.)

Here, “vapor” is the same word as “mist” in Genesis 2:6 and, in Job’s day was understood to refer to how rain forms and falls upon the earth, as it does today, and as it has done from the beginning.

Moses spoke of its origin in the passage referred to. What a bleak world it was and would be without rain which our Father makes to fall “upon the just and the unjust.”

If rain was not a part of creation week then creation was not complete when God “rested from all his work” and “finished” what he had made. (Genesis 2:1,2.)

Rain did not have its beginning in the days of Noah. No evidence exists that it did. Nor did it “evolve” after creation week ended. It began on the day the mist went up from the earth and watered the whole face of the ground.

The flood, not rain, came as a result of sin in Noah’s generation and is so written in these records, probably the most ancient known to man, certainly the most reliable.

Watch Those Erroneous Statements!

CHARLES COOK

WE HAVE ALL HEARD remarks that immediately struck us as erroneous. Nowhere are they more often made than in religious circles. (Politics might be a possible exception)! On

national television America’s most widely known and popular evangelist regularly states: “Accept Jesus into your heart, and join the church of your choice” The statement sounds good to those untrained in Bible doctrine, but in the light of the holy scriptures it is a false teaching. You cannot “join” the church of Christ, the one true church mentioned in the Bible. Further, according to the Bible, “accepting” Jesus into one’s heart is a different process than that suggested by today’s popular evangelists.

In New Testament times people did not “join” the church; they rather “obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you” (Romans 6:17). On Pentecost Day, when Peter and the apostles delivered the teaching (doctrine) of Christ regarding salvation, the Jews in Jerusalem were cut to their hearts and obeyed Christ. Acts 2:47 records that they were then “added to the church.” The Lord has only ONE church, and he adds people to it upon their

obedience to his doctrine. It is absolutely erroneous to say “go join the church of your choice.” There is only one true church; and it cannot be joined. It is promised in scripture that the Lord himself will add obedient believers to his church. Since there is only one church, then there are no “choices” for men to make—except to obey Christ.

Another evangelist, while teaching people on the subject of “How To Get To Heaven,” stated: “You can get to heaven without money, friends, church membership, and a lot of other things.” On the surface this sounds like a knowledgeable remark, and was obviously made to provoke thought, but it is plainly unscriptural! Yes, you can go to heaven without money, or friends and a lot of other things... BUT YOU CANNOT GO TO HEAVEN WITHOUT CHURCH MEMBERSHIP! The evangelist cited the thief on the cross as an example of one going to heaven without church membership and baptism. Again, the problem is Bible ignorance! The

thief lived and died under the Old Covenant. He did not live in the New Testament age where baptism, which puts one into Christ, and results in church membership, is a requirement for salvation (Mark 16:16). When Jesus gave marching orders for his followers in the New Testament age, he commanded baptism as a condition of salvation (Mark 16:15-16). When Peter preached the first gospel sermon in the church age, by inspiration he commanded men to be baptized for forgiveness (Acts 2:38). Those responding were then added by the Lord to his church (Acts 2:47). In I Corinthians 12:13 Paul said that Christians are “baptized into the one Body...” In Ephesians 5:23 Paul clearly teaches that only those in the church, the body of Christ, will be saved and go to heaven. Church membership is a must!

Irresponsibility in religion is rampant. We should all be very careful how we hear (Mark 4:23-24), and what we speak (James 3:1).

The Truth About Instrumental Music

WELDON LANGFIELD

THE MOST OBVIOUS difference between the church of Christ and man-made religious bodies is the absence of instrumental music in our worship. Some conclude that we can't afford organs or pianos; others feel we just don't like them. Actually, the reason for their

non-use is that God doesn't want them in the worship of his church. Why?

BECAUSE OF THE AUTHORITY PRINCIPLE

The Bible teaches, simply stated, that whatever is not authorized by God is disallowed. This principle is found throughout the word of God. Solomon wrote, "Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee and thou be found a liar" (Proverbs 30:6; see also Revelation 22:18-19). John wrote, "Whosoever goes onward and abideth not in the teaching of Christ hath not God" (II John 9). Paul likewise wrote, "That in us ye might learn not to go beyond the things which are written" (I Corinthians 4:6). We, then, must remain within the limits of what the scriptures authorize. Because of the kind of music God wants.

In each instance of musical worship on the part of followers of Christ in the Bible, only singing was practiced. Before the crucifixion, the Bible says of Christ and the disciples, "And when they had sung a hymn they went out into the Mount of Olives" (Matthew 26:30). Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "I will sing with the spirit and I will sing with the understanding also" (I Corinthians 14:15). Both the Ephesian and the Colossian congregations were commanded to simply sing (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16). James exhorted, "Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise" (James 5:13). It is no more correct to add instruments to Christian worship than to add cupcakes to the Lord's Supper. God has authorized only vocal music in worship to him.

WHAT ABOUT INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC IN THE OLD TESTAMENT?

Careful Bible students realize that God both authorized and commanded the use of instrumental music in Old Testament times. Psalm 150 is one of many passages which indicate this. There Israelites were commanded to "Praise him with trumpet sound ...psaltery and harp...timbrel...stringed instruments and pipe..." etc. Yet in the Old Testament, the burning of incense, a physical priesthood, and animal sacrifices were all necessary to please God.

It must be remembered the Old Law was nailed to the cross (Colossians 2:14). We are under the New Testament now, and must obey its precepts.

THE EVILS OF SECTARIANISM

CLIFFORD PAYNE

THE LAW OF conformity is exceedingly real and ever present. While it is quite necessary and desirable in numerous ways for the well-being of society, its influence can be, and has been, exploited in devious ways. Brembeck and Howell point this out by noting:

All types of political persuaders have made us feel keenly sensitive regarding what a "good American should do." The Senator cries, "It's un-American; it defies the flag." The sales clerk parrots almost automatically, "This is what they're wearing this year." The commercial advertiser urges, "Smoke the cigarette that millions smoke." The campaigner pleads, "Get on the bandwagon," and the party promoter contends that his candidate is, "Just one of the many plain folks which make up this great country of ours." The adjustment psychologist suggests to his students in calm academic tones, "For the greatest comfort never be the first to start something new nor the last to discard the old." (Winston L. Brembeck and William S. Howell, *Poi, A Means of Social Control* (New York: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1952), pp. 86, 87).

The Apostle Paul was well aware of the pressure to conform and the possibility of its evil proclivities in spiritual matters. Thus he admonished, "And be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" (Rom. 12:2). Included in not being "conformed to this world" is conformity to worldly religious doctrines such as comprise denominationalism. But, unfortunately, that so many have conformed is evidenced by the prevailing tendency to justify the confusion of sectarianism. To further augment the matter, it is quite observable that the influence of sectarianism is becoming increasingly stronger year by year. This is entirely natural, for any movement as numerically large as denominationalism customarily wields significant power for conformity. As Brembeck and Howell observe: "Experimentation has indicated that when given a choice to go along with majority or expert opinion we generally are influenced more by the majority or general public opinion, thus conforming to the larger group." (*hoc. cit.*) Accordingly, then, as denominationalism numbers many more

than does New Testament Christianity, most conform to its conflicting doctrines than to the “expert opinion” of the Bible.

Unquestionably, we must be frequently alerted to the evils of sectarianism, or we, even as New Testament Christians, may find ourselves becoming more inclined to compromise with it. Indeed, too much compromise is tragically reflected already by Christians. A few of the many evils of denominationalism will be advanced for consideration.

Denominationalism Promotes Agnosticism and Atheism

The Master was aware of this fact, for in John 17:21, after praying that His disciples would be one, He says: “... that the world may believe that thou hath sent me.” This thought is also repeated in verse 23. He knew that the unity of His followers would be a potent instrument of persuasion. If Christian unity is persuasive, the lack of it must be unpersuasive; hence, conducive to agnosticism and infidelity in general. The very nature of denominationalism denotes division and the lack of unity; therefore, it is plainly disobedient to Christ’s prayer for oneness.

Even sectarian Bible scholars have been unable to escape the forceful implication of Christ’s plea for unity. Matthew Henry remarks: “Now Christ here shows... the good fruit of the church’s oneness; it will be an evidence of the truth of Christianity, and a means of bringing many to embrace it.” (*Matthew Henry’s Commentary*, Vol. 5, pp. 1165, 1166). Albert Barnes is no less aware of the power of Christ’s words: “All that is needful now, under the blessing of God, to convince the world that God sent the Lord Jesus, is that very union among all Christians for which he prayed...” (Barnes’ Notes, Luke and John, p. 359). Also interesting are the remarks of John Chrysostom, written hundreds of years ago: “He saith these latter words immediately after the other, to show that peace hath more power to attract men than a miracle; for as it is the nature of strife to separate, so is that of agreement to weld together.” (*The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, St. Chrysostom, Vol. 14, p. 304).

We can surely sympathize with the wretched heathen who is accosted by numerous denominational missionaries proclaiming incompatible doctrines, with each one declaring that his doctrine is from God. It is readily understandable why so many remain unconvinced and satisfied with what they have. But, on the other hand, think how effective the efforts would be if every denominational missionary simply proclaimed the gospel of Christ! But not only abroad, for think also how persuasive the influence would be if all

sectarians in this country were New Testament Christians only! As long as denominationalism continues we can expect agnosticism and atheism to be one unhappy result.

Makes Divided Picture of Christ and the Church

Ephesians 5:23 stipulates that "Christ is the head of the church," which is accepted, at least in theory, by sectarianism. However, each group composing sectarianism claims to be the body, or church, of which Christ is the head. If denominationalism, the whole, be scriptural, as denominationalists contend, each sect, as a part of the whole, must be scriptural. But the unavoidable result of this combination is a spiritual monstrosity of head and numerous bodies. Whether physical or spiritual, this is anomalous and quite unacceptable. It is, nevertheless, an accurate and inescapable presentation of denominationalism.

The Bible presents a normal and pleasing picture of Christ and the church. Just as it notes that "Christ is the head of the church," Ephesians lucidly states that "There is one body" (Eph. 4:4). That is as it should be: One head, Christ, controlling one body, His church.

It Divides Homes Religiously

The high percentage of families divided religiously is most distressing. For Christians it is encouraging to see that marriage counselors, and many others who are professionally concerned with the matter, are now emphasizing with vigor the value of religious compatibility in the family. Of course, the Bible stresses this need. But, as sectarianism is tantamount to religious division, it can be nothing but a barrier to religious harmony in the home. When the husband goes one place for worship and the wife another, there can never be the closeness which God intended. If there are children, they especially suffer the ill effects of this religious division. Their perplexity over such confusion is aptly depicted in the following story, for which the writer is indebted to Leroy Brownlow: A little boy in a religiously divided home asked, "Does God do all things well?" The mother responded, "Yes! He most certainly does." The little fellow then queried: "Then why didn't God make just one church so we could all go to church together?" Such a regrettable situation is not to be ascribed to God, for He "is not the author of confusion" (1 Cor. 14:33). It is His wish that a family be spiritually united, attending the services of one church, His church. Denominationalism must assume much of the blame when the family is torn with religious division and strife.

IT MAKES GOD CONTRADICTORY

This charge, like the others mentioned, is extremely serious. But the validity of it can be quickly evinced. If sectarianism receives God's approbation, the various doctrines of the groups constituting sectarianism must receive His approval. This would consequently mean that at times the Lord would be obliged to both approve and disapprove the same doctrine. Let us illustrate: According to some denominationalists, God has given the doctrine of the impossibility of apostasy. But, according to other denominationalists, He has given the doctrine of the possibility of apostasy. He certainly cannot approve of both without being flagrantly inconsistent. As sectarianism embraces many such incongruous doctrines, God must either approve of sectarianism, and show Himself contradictory, or fully deprecate it. Denominationalists contend that He approves; hence, they make the Lord contradictory.

This can be further illustrated with profit in this manner: No sectarian preacher would dare preach the many conflicting doctrines of denominationalism, for his listeners would not permit it. They would declare that he was grossly inconsistent and maybe even double-tongued. Yet, the same people would profess that it is all right for fifty denominational preachers to propound fifty various doctrines. If it is scriptural for fifty men to preach fifty incongruous doctrines, why would it be wrong for one man to do it? Assuredly, for fifty men to do so scripturally means that God approves all fifty doctrines. But what would be the difference between one man proclaiming fifty conflicting doctrines and the Lord approving fifty such doctrines? We can see that there would be no difference.

Denominationalism in many ways obviously gives rise to much evil. Because of that Paul tells us to "mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them" (Rom. 16:17). The admonition could not be any plainer: As servants of God we should "mark" and "avoid" divisive denominationalism. Let this be our rule.

THE STONES CRY OUT

GERMAINE LOCKWOOD

ARCHAEOLOGY HAS OFTEN shown theories against the Bible to be false. Scholars of the "deconstructionist" approach do not believe

the history of Israel in the Bible before the Babylonian captivity.

Philip R. Davies presented this view in his book, *In Search of Ancient Israel* published in 1992. However, in 1993, an inscription was found in part of a stone stela by archaeologists at Tel Dan in Israel. This inscription in stone includes "House of David" and "King of Israel." It is written in old Hebrew script of the ninth century B.C. It is part of a stela that was put up at Dan by an Aramean king who had won a victory over Israel. This inscription in stone shows that the Kingdom of Israel, the Kingdom of Judah and King David, are historical and not fictional. The theories of the deconstructionist scholars are fictional. The Bible is right.

You can read about the "house of David" inscription in the book, *Biblical Dan* by archaeologist Professor Abraham Biram published in 1994 by the Israel Exploration Society in Jerusalem. There is an article "David Found at Dan," in the *Biblical Archaeology Review*, March/April 1994. There is an article in the *Jerusalem Post International Edition*, "In Pursuit of History," Nov. 25, 1995, pp. 18, 19. The deconstructionist scholars are wrong; but the Bible is right.

There is the Moabite Inscription, the Mesha Stela, which is in the Grand Louvre Museum in Paris. The king of Moab, Mesha, had this stone monument inscribed to claim a ninth-century B.C. victory over Israel and fighting against the house of David. This is parallel with 2 Kings 3 in the Bible. This stone monument was found in the ruins of Dibon (Dhiban) to the east of the Dead Sea. Archaeologist Professor Andre' Lemaire of the Institute of Semitic Studies, College de France has published the text with translation, which is in the *Biblical Archaeology Review* of May/June 1994, pp. 30-37. Again this refutes the false claims of scholars who deny the historical accuracy of the Bible before the Babylonian captivity of Judah. This ninth-century B.C. Moabite inscription, the Mesha Stela stands as a monument to the existence of the Kingdom of Israel, the House of David, and the king of Judah. (2 Kings 3.) The Bible is historically accurate, but the theories of the deconstructionist scholars are false.

A third monument is the Merneptah stela. It is also known as the Israel stela. It was found in the funerary temple belonging to Pharaoh Merneptah. He ruled from 1213 B.C. to 1203 B.C. The hieroglyphic inscription stated, "Israel is laid waste and his seed is not." Yes, Israel existed as a people in 1203 B.C. The unbelieving scholars are wrong. The Bible is right. An enemy of Israel had testified to the existence of Israel in a stone monument about 2 meters, or 7 feet high. There is a good picture of the Merneptah stela in an article by Egyptologist Kenneth Kitchen of the University of Liverpool in the

Biblical Archaeology Review, March/April 1995 on page 52.

There is a fourth monument by an enemy of Israel, the Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser. It was found at Nimrud, south of Nineveh by A. H. Layard and is now in the British Museum. King Jehu of Israel is pictured in stone, bowing on his knees before the Assyrian King Shalmaneser III. Above the stone picture inscribed in cuneiform is: "The tribute of Jehu, son of Omri..." Jehu was king of Israel from 842 to 814 B.C. Yes, the Bible is historically accurate, but the scholars are wrong.

So then, there are four stone monuments inscribed by enemies of Israel about Israel. They are historical witnesses to the history of Israel before the Babylonian captivity period. They are written in stone. They are the Tel Dan "House of David" stela inscription, the Moabite inscription on the Mesha stela, the Egyptian Merneptah stela, and the Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser. Yes, the stones cry out! The deconstructionist scholars are wrong, but the Bible is right.

Some archaeologists have rejected the Biblical history of the invasion and conquest of Canaan by Israel under the leadership of Joshua, which is recorded in the book of Joshua in the Bible. However, Israeli Archaeologist Amnon Ben-Tor led excavations at Hazor just north of Lake Kinnereth, the Sea of Galilee. They found a stratum of great destruction by fire of the city of Hazor. Even mud bricks had been burned to glass. They also found Canaanite and Egyptian statues of gods and kings that had been mutilated. Archaeologist Amnon Ben-Tor was interviewed by Hershel Shanks in the video *Biblical Archaeology From the Ground Down*.

"Joshua turned back at that time and took Hazor, and struck its king with the sword; for Hazor was formerly the head of all those kingdoms. And they struck all the people who were in it with the edge of the sword, utterly destroying them. There was none left breathing. Then he burned Hazor with fire" (Josh 11:10-11). Yes, the excavation of Hazor shows that Hazor was destroyed and burned with fire as recorded in the book of Joshua in the Bible. Statues of the Canaanite and Egyptian gods and kings were mutilated, which shows that it was neither the Canaanites nor the Egyptians who destroyed Hazor. They would not have mutilated their own gods. Israel destroyed Hazor. The Bible is historically accurate. You can put your trust and faith in the Bible. It is the word of God.

In Deuteronomy 18:15-19, God promised Moses that He would raise up a prophet from the people of Israel like Moses. Listen to what God said, "I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren and will put My words in His mouth, and He

shall speak to them all that I command Him. And it shall be that whoever will not hear My words, which He speaks in My name, I will require it of him”(Deut. 18:18,19).

Understand that God has sent His prophet Messiah Jesus who has spoken the word of God to you, the new covenant. You will be judged according to the New Covenant. It was foretold in Jeremiah 31:31-34. Messiah Jesus fulfilled the messianic prophecies.

The good news is that Messiah Jesus died for our sins according to the scriptures. He was buried. He rose the third day according to the scriptures. Yes, this is good news. You can have redemption, the forgiveness of your sins in Messiah Jesus. You can have eternal life in the heavenly New Jerusalem. Believe in Him! He is the Son of God as written in Psalm 2:7. He is the only sacrifice for our sins, which was foretold by Isaiah 700 years ahead of time. Listen to Isaiah (53:5, 6): “But He was wounded for our transgressions. He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned every one, to his own way; And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.” Jesus fulfilled Isaiah 53. He is the Divine demonstration... “repent and let every one of you be baptized, immersed, in the name Jesus Christ, Yeshua Mashiakh, for the remission, forgiveness of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). Through your own faith in Messiah, you need to be buried with Him under the water in baptism then raised up out of the water to walk in newness of life (Col. 2:12); buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead (Col. 2:12). “And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16). Amen!

Let's Pierce Our Ears

MIKE SINAPIADES

WITHOUT READING ANY further, possibly the title of this article will cause many readers to raise a serious eyebrow, questioning the status of the author's mind.

The young generation, readily attaches itself to what we may call, for lack of a better words, “the piercing culture” (I am sure there are many exceptions), in their effort of a visible demonstration

that they belong to, or they desire to be a part of something. They have started piercing their ears, noses, lips, cheeks, tongues, belly buttons, etc. In these pierced places they insert rings, tiny golden or silver balls, or perhaps some precious or semiprecious stones at times interwoven by artful filigree work. The above observation is not limited to the young people only; we have older ones who are following suit. During the 60's and 70's, we had what most of us will remember as the "flower children." Today we have another fad, the "piercing culture."

Ear piercing is a custom as old as Methuselah. Many nations of antiquity wore earrings, especially women, although men were not excluded from the practice. Some wore these for ornamental reasons, others as a charm, or as an emulate to thwart off evil spells.

Israel of old, the chosen people of God, also followed this custom. But in one respect, it was for a different reason. In Exodus 21:5, 6 we read: "But if the slave plainly says, 'I love my master, my wife and my children; I will not go out as a free man,' then his master shall bring him to God; then he shall bring him to the door or the door post. And his master shall pierce his ear with an awl: and he shall serve him permanently." Again we read: "And it shall come about if he says to you, 'I will not go out from you,' because he loves you and your household. Since he fares well with you; then you shall take an awl and pierce it through his ear into the door, and he shall be your servant forever. And also you shall do likewise to your maid servant" (Deut. 15:16,17).

When the people of God were guided and directed by the Law of Jehovah, slavery existed. The Law regulated this institution from being brutally tyrannical or foolishly indulgent. In fact, masters were instructed to treat their slaves not as bond servants, but as hired servants or sojourners" (Lev. 25:39, 40, 43). Later, when the servant or the slave was to be freed, if there had developed such a deep and abiding affection between the slave and his master, the slave had the right to use his liberty to chose to remain in his master's house. If the master accepted the request, he would take the slave before the elders and then, as they returned home, he would proceed with the simple ceremony. He directed the servant toward the door and literally placed his head next to it. He then would take the earlobe of the person, pierce it with an awl, and put a permanent ring through it. This simple act, described in Deuteronomy 15:16,17, signified to the world a permanent and unalterable servitude. What a lesson! The service of love always outstrips indignity and surpasses in

duration all other forms of service!

In this ancient practice, both for us and the subsequent generations of Christians, there is a powerful lesson! The apostle Paul in writing to the Christians at Corinth reminded them, "You have been bought with a price..." (1 Cor. 6:20). For he stated, "I am crucified with Christ..." (Gal. 2:20), and then, addressing himself to all Christians he wrote, "And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts" (Gal. 5:24).

Dear reader, did you notice the sharp contrast between these statements and the old practice of piercing the ear lobe in the Old Testament? Not only pierce the ear, but crucify the entire body, for Jesus. Is this not the supreme idea underlined in the same apostle's words found in Romans 12:1-2? And is this not the basic meaning of the Savior's words who stated, "If any man will follow me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me" (Matt. 16:24).

How marvelous it would be, if every single Christian who has not taken his or her commitment to the Lord seriously, would have the "ears pierced," (the heart), by laying his head against the Door, Jesus Christ, and offer his entire body to be a living sacrifice for His service! How wonderful it would be as our "pierced ear," signified unalterably our separation from this world, in favor of a true and genuine allegiance to Christ! The effects upon this world would be tremendous! Though in the world, yet not of the world! Though still in the flesh, yet guided and directed by the Spirit.

In this odd Old Testament custom, I observed yet another more sublime thought which underlines the willingness of the slave to stay close to his master. In his inspiring statement of Exodus 21: 5, 6, we hear the marvelous confession of the devoted servant, "I love my Lord", "you are bought with a price..." (1 Cor. 6:20). The constraining power is the love of Christ, our Master. We love Him because He loved us first. Why should we desire to be freed from Him?

Our heavenly Father, at the expense of His Son's life, redeemed us from the slavery of sin. He has emancipated us from the bondage of this cruel taskmaster who ultimately destroys both body and spirit. Jesus willingly died so that He may translate us into His Heavenly kingdom of freedom, security and love. He now calls us His own, members of His body. But are we satisfied? Are we dedicated to Him and the work of His Kingdom, the church? Is our genuine love for Him translated into a perpetual loving service? The words of Simon Peter, "To whom shall we go Lord, You have the words of eternal life," remind me of the unwillingness of the Old Testament

servant/slave to depart from his master.

Brethren, to show love and dedication to the Master and our God let us “pierce our ears.”

Jesus Is The Savior

DENNIS LOYD

AS PETER AND JOHN made their defense before the Sanhedrin, Peter referred to Jesus with two titles. He called Him “Prince and Savior” (Acts 5:31). Along with other notable titles given to our Lord such as King of kings and Lord of lords, Prince and Savior, add to the fact that we are to be His subjects, faithful and loyal and submissive. King, Lord and Prince all attest to His royalty, but Savior reminds us of His sacrifice on our behalf. That is why John the forerunner introduced Him as the “Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). Jesus said of Himself that He came to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10). Jesus is the Savior; He is our Savior. Four entities are suggested in the Scriptures as needing to be saved and consequently benefiting from the coining of Jesus.

Jesus Is the Savior of His People

When the angel appeared to Joseph to assure him of Mary’s virginity, he told two things about the baby Mary was carrying - His name and His mission. “You shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21). In Paul’s sermon at Antioch of Pisidia, he affirmed the same truth. Speaking of David and God’s use of him, Paul said, “From this man’s seed [David’s], according to the promise, God raised up for Israel a Savior - Jesus” (Acts 13:23). Just as the ancient prophecies had looked forward to the coming of the Messiah, the confirmation to Joseph said that Jesus came first for His people, the Jews. Tragically, they did not accept Him for who and what He was. John acknowledged that the Jews did not want to accept Him. “He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him” (John 1:11).

Later Jesus bemoaned their rejection of Him: “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing” (Matthew 23:37). Rather than accept His reason for coming, the Jews were torn between trying to make Him a king and trying to kill Him. Their preconceived ideas as to what their Messiah should be hindered their acceptance of the meek and mild Jesus. He rebuked the cities

where he had done many mighty works “because they did not repent” (11:20). His own people rejected their Savior.

Jesus Is the Savior of the World

As a result of His conversation with the Samaritan woman, many from Samaria came to hear Jesus. They explained to the woman: “Now we believe, not because of what you said, for we ourselves have heard Him and we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world” (John 4:42). Ironically, the apostle John must have recalled that assessment by the Samaritan believers, because many years later John asserted the same truth in 1 John 4:14: “And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world.”

Jesus often reminded His disciples that His scope was broader than the Jewish world. He said on one occasion, “And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd” (John 10:16).

Once John told the Lord that the disciples had found one who was not part of their number casting out demons in Jesus’ name. John said, “We forbade him because he does not follow us” (Mark 9:38). Jesus rebuked that sense of exclusion. He wanted these men to understand that many besides the Jews would come to Him as the Savior. He said, “Do not forbid him, for no one who works a miracle in My name can soon afterward speak evil of Me. For he who is not against us is on our side” (vv. 39-40). Just as Jesus had told the fishing disciples to cast their nets wide, He cast His own net equally wide. Jesus is the Savior of the world.

Jesus Is the Savior of the Body, the Church

“For the husband is the head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body” (Ephesians 5:23). In this wonderful essay on the nature of marriage, Paul connects the marriage relationship to the one we have with Christ. Lest anyone misunderstand what Paul has said, he concludes, “This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church” (v. 32). Understanding that Jesus is the head of the church and the Savior of the body clarifies several important facts about the church.

First, Jesus purchased the church. Paul says, “He gave Himself for her.” What He expended of Himself testifies to the value He sees in the church. Paul told the Ephesian elders that Jesus purchased the church with His blood (Acts 20:28). Because He loved the church, He paid the supreme price.

Second, He purified the church. In Ephesians 5:26, Paul says He sanctified and cleansed the church with the washing of water. Through

baptism, individuals have been set apart, even purified, for the purpose of God. Jesus said in John 15:3, "You are already clean through the word which I have spoken." And in John 17:17, Jesus prayed, "Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth."

Finally, Jesus is prepared to present the church to Himself. He wants that church to be without spot, wrinkle or blemish. He wants it to be a glorious church. Using this same parallel in Revelation, John describes the New Jerusalem "coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" (21:2). No spots, no wrinkles, no blemishes exist to mar that pure, chaste, set-apart one. Jesus is the Savior of the body.

Jesus Is the Savior of the Individual

Augustine said, "God loves each one of us as if there were only one of us." Jesus said He knew His sheep and called them by name. So in the midst of thinking of Jesus as the Savior, we should think of Him as our Savior. One familiar episode from the life of Peter clearly illustrates this great truth.

In Matthew 14, Jesus fed the 5,000 plus and then retreated to the mountain to pray. The disciples headed to the opposite shore by boat. Sometime between 3 a.m. and 6 a.m. a storm arose, and Jesus came walking on the water. Whether Jesus came to calm the storm or merely to join His disciples, the text does not make clear. Whatever His reason, Peter dominated the situation with his request to walk on the water. "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to You on the water" (v. 28). At the Lord's invitation, Peter stepped out of the boat and into the waves of the sea. Very quickly he began to sink, and he cried out, "Lord, save me!" Jesus had to save Peter from more than the water. He had to save him from himself. Arrogance had pushed Peter into this predicament. Jesus had to save him from such attitudes that made him too bold and too aggressive.

As Jesus was about to go to the cross, He offered encouragement about what Peter could become. In Luke 22:31-32, after Jesus had instituted the Lord's Supper, He singled out Peter for some special instruction. He gave him a warning - "Satan has asked for you." He gave him an assurance - "I have prayed for you." And He gave him confidence - "When you have returned to Me" - and a responsibility - "strengthen your brethren." A message like that could do everything for us. In truth, it is for all of us.

Roughly 130 years ago, Philip Bliss wrote the words and music to a hymn that captures the majestic truth of this message - "Hallelujah! What a Savior." He is Prince and Savior. And what a Savior He is for the Jews, for the world, for the church and for each of us.

