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Editorial

What Does the Bible Teach?

Miracles Had Served Their Purpose And Came To An End

TO UNDERSTAND ANY passage or teaching from the Bible it is necessary for one to look at the background of what is being said, because if we do not read to understand the passage or the teaching in its specific context, we can easily misunderstand and draw an entirely wrong conclusion which may be devastating spiritually. One must, therefore, ponder the fact of why a certain thing was said or done about which we read in the Bible.

Contextually speaking, when the Lord, after His death, burial and resurrection had sent His disciples to preach His gospel to every creature, He had promised them, "And these signs will follow those who believe: In my name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick and they will recover." Some think today that this promise of the Lord applies to all who believe in Christ, and so even today some preachers are trying to cast out demons and heal the sick, thinking they have the power to miraculously heal the sick. But none of them tries to take up serpent and drink anything deadly because they know what will follow!

First, why did Christ say to them, "these signs will follow those who believe"? (Vs 17). He was speaking at that time to His disciples whom He had chosen in the beginning to preach His gospel message after He would go back to the Father in heaven. Not only

were they to preach the gospel to the people of their own generation but they would also write those account in the New Testament books of the Bible for all other people who would live after them. They were His witnesses before whom He had performed many signs and miracles to make them believe that He was indeed Christ, the Son of God. (John 20:30, 31). His primary reason for coming into this world was to save sinners. (1 Timothy 1:15). And now, after His propitiatory death on the cross for the sinners and resurrection from the dead as He was preparing to go back to the Father in heaven, he had assembled with them for the last time on this earth to give them the souls saving Great Commission, but He observed that some of them still didn't believe in Him who He really was, the Christ, the Son of God. (Matthew 28:16-17; John 14:7-11)). So much so that the Lord had to rebuke them for their unbelief and hardness of their heart. ***To them, the unbelieving disciples, Christ had said, "And these signs will follow those who believe....." Those who believe amongst them.*** These words were not spoken for those who would believe in Christ thereafter by hearing the gospel. Just like when God had spoken to Abraham in the Old Testament and had asked him to take His only son to the land of Moriah and offer him there as a burnt offering. (Genesis 22: 1-2). We understand that not everyone else had to do that, but only Abraham, because this command was given to him alone by God. It is the same in the case of the disciples to whom Christ was speaking at that time. Because some of them did not believe in Christ as they should have, Christ told them, those signs would follow those who believe.

Secondly, what was the purpose of those signs Christ had promised His believing apostles would do? It is very clearly stated in the next two verses of Mark 16:19, 20: "So then after the Lord had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God. And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word through the accompanying signs. Amen" So we learn that the purpose of those signs was to confirm the word they were preaching. It should be carefully understood that the New Testament of the Bible was not written at that time, therefore miracles attended them to establish and to corroborate the gospel message they were preaching. Miracles and signs served to support with evidence the divine authority by which they proclaimed Christ. Miracles in the first century were supernatural proofs by which the truth was established—shown to be genuine and authentic. The same inspired

truth was later written down, committed to record in the New Testament by those providentially prepared men whom the Lord had selected. Now you and I have the access to the truth that was revealed and confirmed by signs and miracles once for all. (John 20:30-31; 2 Timothy 3:16-17). To produce faith miracles were required and performed in the first century A.D. by the will of the Lord. But now, "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. (Romans 10:17). Something that has already been confirmed doesn't need to be reconfirmed again and again.

The apostle Paul, in one of his epistles to the Christians in the first century, therefore, wrote, "Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away." (1 Corinthians 13:8-10). God's will was revealed by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:21), only a part at a time. A full and complete revelation was not made known to the apostles at once. Miraculous powers, such as, prophecies, speaking in unlearned languages, and supernatural knowledge were some of the means by which the gospel truth was revealed and confirmed. But when the whole truth was completely revealed, miracles and signs had served their purpose and came to an end.

Does God Live Today?

J.C. CHOATE

WE ARE LIVING IN a time in which man has declared that God is dead. In reality they are saying that He never did exist, but even for those who thought He did, He lives no longer. Some never did believe in a creator but more and more of the believers are becoming unbelievers. But why? How could anyone deny the existence of a divine maker? In spite of all of the evidences, why would anyone take such an extreme position and close their eyes to the facts? There are numerous reasons but no doubt one of the main ones is that people are trying to escape from any responsibility that they might have toward a superior being.

In the religious world around us there are many deities or gods that are being worshipped and followed. Some of these are more

than images and idols of different kinds that have been handed down from one generation to the next. Other take different forms and are merely the result of man's imagination. All kinds of religions and practices are built around these gods.

Let us go back to the basic question: Is there a God? Is he mythical in nature, is he part of nature, is he a philosophy, or is he living personality? Who is he? Where does he live? These are some of the questions that we want to try to answer.

Let us consider the following:

1. God lives today. He has always lived and will continue to live forever. There is really no other conclusion that we can reach when we consider the facts of the case. For instance, take the world and all the things in it. Where did it come from? It is here and we are a part of it. Could all of this have just happened? It is the result of an accident? Surely not. As one looks at the earth, its animals, fowls, water life, plants, and even human life, one is able to see the beauty of it, its order, and the intelligence behind it. Man has come out with the theory of evolution in an attempt to explain these things, but a theory is no more than an opinion. It is certainly not a fact and therefore cannot satisfy those who want to know the truth about creation. Since something cannot come from nothing, the only possible conclusion that we can reach is that there had to be a creator, and we call that creator God.

2. God is all-powerful. Since no human being has the power to match the great feats of creation, then we must conclude that the creator, God himself, is higher than man. Even with man's intelligence and his ability to do the things that he does —such as going to the moon— the question comes back: who gave man his intelligence? Furthermore, who made the moon for him to go to? A superior being, of course, did this. *God* did this. He is all-powerful and is still in control of things even though the majority are blind to him.

3. God is everywhere. He is definitely a personality but he dwells in the form of a spirit. He cannot be confined to a certain part of the world or to a specific. He is the creator of the earth, and also of the solar system. He is in all of these places. He can see, hear, know, and do all things. He works today on the earth through the law of nature, which he set in force and by which law the world is controlled. He may be seen everywhere through his works.

4. God is one. But it is said that there are many gods and goddesses in the world. How can we know whether there is one or

many? If there is but one, how may we know which one he is? First of all, through the process of elimination. How can a rock, river, fire, image, and such like, be god? These are a part of the over-all creation. How could any living man be counted as God when all are born the same way and all sin and all must die? So, we must narrow our search down further by saying that if a “god” can be seen and touched, he cannot be the one we are looking for. If he is a myth, fable, tradition, lifeless, powerless, and helpless, he is not God. Then who is the one true God? The one already described—the divine one, the living one. He is the one to be obeyed, served, and worshipped by intelligent creation.

This one God is further described and pictured in the book called the Bible. You are invited to turn to its pages and read of him, his works, and his continued dealings with man. The whole story of creation is there and it harmonizes with all the true facts of nature and science today. Read and study and you too will surely believe in God. Then you will confirm with millions of others that God truly lives today.

THE GODLY IN CRISIS

NEAL POLLARD

AN IMPORTANT FACT that we learn from the book of Psalms about David's life is that he prayed to and praised God at least as often in prosperous times as he did in the pits of infirmity and hardship. The Psalms are overflowing with statements like, “thy loving kindness is better than life (63:3), “enter into His gates with thanksgiving” (100:4), “from the rising of the sun unto the going down of the same the Lord's name is to be praised” (119:62), and countless, similar statements. David realized what so many others forget, that God is the God of every hour of every day. David's spirituality was not one-dimensional; that is, David's contact with God was not limited only to his troubled moments. Sadly, God only hears from some of His children when they need something. Obviously, those individuals are not living a full life in Christ.

With regard to the problem of crisis, however, the godly inevitably turn to the Holy Father. To whom else can the righteous turn with their supplications and meet with as great and assurance of help? David said, “Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord” (Psalm

130:1, 2). The reason David would so turn is very simple. The Hebrews writer sums up his trust in God by proclaiming, "The Lord is my helper" (Hebrews 13:5). From Psalm 120:1, we examine an episode of crisis, David's reaction, where David turned, and the end of the matter.

THE REALITY OF CRISIS - "In my distress. . ." Adversity is one of the common denominators among men. In spiritual matters, those who live godly suffer because of their courageous convictions (I Timothy 3:12). King David once noted, "Many are the afflictions of the righteous" (Psalm 34:19). In his suffering, Job concluded, "Man that is born of woman is of few days and full of troubles" (Job 14:1). To that, Paul and Barnabas would add that "we must through much tribulation enter into the Kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). In II Timothy 2, as a natural part of being a disciple of Christ, Timothy was exhorted to "endure hardness" (verse 3) just as Paul, for preaching Christ, often had to "suffer trouble" (verse 9). Distress is a reality!

THE REACTION TO CRISIS - "I cried. . ." David did something very human. He reacted to his trouble. Under the weight of suffering, the knees of the most valiant warrior buckles. Under twice the weight, the knees of the godly, Christian soldier humbly bend in prayer. The advice of James was, "Is any among you afflicted? Let him pray" (James 5:13). Along with wearing the whole armor of God, the godly should be found by God "praying always with all prayer and supplication. . ." (Ephesians 6:18). David knew that he needed help in his crisis.

THE RESCUER FROM CRISIS - "Unto the Lord. . ." David surely knew that, while man might forsake him, God never would. Yes, David knew his help came from the Lord (Psalm 121:2). Paul affirmed, "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your request be made known unto God" (Philippians 4:6). We do not marvel to read the following words of David: "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble" (Psalm 46:1).

THE RESULT OF DAVID'S PRAYER IN CRISIS - "And He heard me." James 5:16 ends with the words, "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." Peter said, "For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil" (I Peter 3:12). To His disciples, Jesus declared, "Ask, and it shall be given unto you" (Matthew 7:7). The Lord hears the prayer of the righteous (cf Proverbs 15:29). The reason God listened to David's prayer was

because David was God's child. The confidence of the prayer of the child of God is immeasurable!

Though problems are inevitable, they should never be deemed insurmountable by the Christian. God hears and answers the prayers of the godly. With that in mind, the song of the suffering will ever be, "I will not fear what man shall do unto me" (Hebrews 13:6).

HOMOSEXUALITY: Alternate Lifestyle Or Sin?

KEVIN RANDIES

RECENT STATISTICS SHOW that the number of homosexuals is growing/rapidly all over the world and the world is being told to be tolerant of their "alternative lifestyles." It is said, "They are not hurting other people, and people should simply accept them." However, God is not tolerant when it comes to homosexuality. Paul, in his epistle to the Romans, sets forth God's stance: "And like-wise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which was meet." (Romans 1:27.) Notice the five key words that have been italicized in the preceding passage. These five key words written by Paul set forth five truths concerning homosexuality:

1. Homosexuality is not natural. Paul said that homosexuality is "leaving the natural use of the woman." Natural is from the Greek word *phusikos*, which means that which is produced by nature, inborn, and according to nature. Many claim that they were born homosexual. However, Paul disproves this false belief. Therefore, one can conclude from Paul's teaching here that every man is inborn with a natural heterosexual preference. When God saw that it was not good for man to be alone, he then created woman and gave man and woman the following instruction: "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh." (Genesis 2:24.) It is clear that God's plan since the beginning of time has been for men to be with and marry women, neither men with men nor women with women. Therefore, it is impossible for one to be born homosexual, because it is not natural or inborn from God.

2. Homosexuality is lust. Paul said that the homosexuals in

Rome “burned in their lust one toward another.” Lust is from the Greek word orexis, which literally means “a reaching” or “stretching after.” Therefore, lust is a general term that Paul uses here to represent every kind of lustful desire. Lust is an evil act that Christians are told to avoid. For example, in his first epistle to the church at Corinth, Paul said, “We should not lust after evil things.” (1 Corinthians 10:6.) Therefore, Paul states that homosexuality is a lustful and therefore sinful desire where men burn for other men and women burn for other women. The apostle John states that the world is full of lust. “For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.” (1 John 2:16.) Therefore, the apostle John says one that commits such a lustful act as homosexuality “is not of the Father,” and “the love of the Father is not in him.”

3. Homosexuality is unseemly (shameful). Paul refers to homosexuality as “working that which is unseemly.” “Unseemly” is from the Greek word aschemosune, which means unseemly or unseemliness. Paul says that homosexuality is shameful and unseemly. It is ironic that homosexuals have taken the word “gay,” which means happy, to represent their wicked lifestyle. However, Paul clearly sets forth that homosexuals are not happy, joyous, and proud as they would lead one to believe, but are shameful, unseemly, and embarrassed. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Task Force on Youth Suicide issued a report in January of 1989 concluding that lesbian and gay youth may constitute “up to the thirty percent of completed suicides annually” and that “homosexuals of both sexes are two to six times more likely to attempt suicide than are heterosexuals.” An important question must then be asked, “If homosexuality is such a ‘gay’ activity and sexual preference, then why are so many homosexuals committing suicide?” Paul says the reason is that it is an unseemly and shameful act. Homosexuals are not “gay.”

4. Homosexuality will bring a recompense. Recompense is from the Greek word antimisthia, which literally means “a reward, requital” and can be used in a good or bad sense. Paul uses it in a bad sense in Romans 1:27. Paul is saying that homosexuals will get their just recompense (reward) for their wicked and sinful lifestyle, which is eternal damnation. Paul said, “God gave them up unto vile affections.” (Romans 1:26.) These people were so wicked that God literally gave them up unto their own wickedness and sin. These “vile affections” that one partakes in will certainly be punished by

God. Paul said, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness." (Romans 1:18.) Paul clearly states that no one who is wicked will be able to avoid or escape God's wrath. His wrath will be revealed upon all ungodliness and unrighteousness. Therefore, the just recompense from God for homosexuals will be eternal damnation. For example, Sodom and Gomorrah were filled with homosexuality and many other kinds of wickedness. They received their just recompense because of their homosexuality and other "grievous sins." "Even as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire." (Jude 7.)

5. Homosexuality is an error. Error is from the Greek word plane, which means "a wandering, a forsaking of the right path, whether in doctrine or in morals." Therefore, Paul says that homosexuality is the error of man. Unfortunately, many people are committing the error of homosexuality. It is an error that is punishable by eternal death and the loss of a precious soul. Homosexuality is not a right alternative lifestyle and has never been authorized or approved by God. The Bible clearly states that homosexuality is a sin that will lead a soul to death.

How Can You Judge A Person?

MIKE MCDANIEL

JESUS SAID, "JUDGE NOT, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye fudge, ye shall be judged: again. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brothers eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother; Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye." (Matthew 7:1-5.)

THE RIGHT KIND OF JUDGING

The Bible teaches a right kind of judging and a wrong kind of judging. Many think that Matthew 7:1-5 forbids all judging. It does not. If it did such would contradict what Jesus said in John 7:24, "Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous

judgment.” It would also contradict other principles found within this same chapter of Matthew. “Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.” (7:6.) That requires that a judgment be made. How can one obey that command of the Lord unless one makes a judgment as to who the proverbial dogs and swine are?

“Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?” (Matthew 7:15-16.) That requires that a judgment be made as to who the false prophets are. We are to judge men by their fruits. We are to judge other people by the doctrines they teach. (1 John 4:1.)

Teaching the lost and fulfilling the great commission demands making a judgment. (Matthew 16:15-16.)

Converting the erring child of God from the error of his way to save his soul from death (James 5:19,20.) requires making a personal judgment as to the condition of their soul.

These points clearly demonstrate to us that not all judging is forbidden. Indeed some judgment is authorized in certain situations. If we are overtaken in a fault, we hope someone will have enough good judgment to judge that we need to be restored and will help us. (Galatians 6:1.) We should welcome that which is designed to help us.

THE WRONG KIND OF JUDGING

Is there not a wrong kind of judging? Yes there is and Jesus strictly warns us against such in Matthew 7:1-5. The judgment here restricted is the harsh, **hypercritical** judgment indicated by the word “**mote**” in verses three through five and **hypocritical** judgment indicated by the “**beam**” in one’s own eye in verses three through five.

A person who has a beam (a huge item like a plank) in his own eye cannot appropriately judge the mote (splinter) which is in the eye of the other person. Jesus calls such a person a hypocrite. He only sees the faults of others. He is a faultfinding mote hunter. His attitude is wrong. He is self-righteous, blinded to his own faults, and constantly on lookout for the faults of others. This reminds one of the Pharisee in Jesus’ story of the Pharisee and Publican in Luke 18:10-12. He used himself as the standard, and by so doing, comparing himself with the Publican, he could only see the

Publican's faults. He was using himself as the standard for righteous judgment when **the only standard for righteous judgment is the word of God!**

Paul said, "For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare our-selves with some that commend themselves; but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise." (2 Corinthians 10:12.)

That is like the story of the two preachers who were talking about another preacher who was preaching in a gospel meeting nearby. One of the preachers had heard him preach the previous night. So the one who had not heard him asked the other who had, "How good is he, is he as good as you?" "No," he answered, "He's about like you."

Let us be warned against self-made standards in judgements. That kind of judging will cause us to be condemned. Let us not be hyper-critical or **hypocritical**. And when judgments have to be made so that we as Christians might obey the commands of God, let us exercise righteous judgment with the word of God as our only standard.

"BECAUSE OF" OR "IN ORDER TO"?

BASIL OVERTON

THE LORD JESUS CHRIST promised that he would build his church. (Matthew 16:18.) After he was crucified, was buried, and raised from the dead, he ascended into heaven, and then built, or established his church in Jerusalem on the Jewish Day of Pentecost that followed his ascension. He baptized his twelve apostles on that day with the Holy Spirit to guide them into all truth. (John 1:32-34; 16:13; Acts 2:1-3.)

THEY SPOKE AS THE SPIRIT GAVE THEM UTTERANCE

After the apostles were baptized with the Holy Spirit they "began to speak as the Spirit gave them utterance." (Acts 2:4.) What the apostle Peter preached on that day is recorded in Acts Chapter two. He told the great crowd about Jesus and then said, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom you have crucified, both Lord and Christ. Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, men and brethren, what

shall we do? Then Peter said unto them. Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." (Acts 2:36-38.)

The people on Pentecost who asked "What shall we do?" were pricked or cut to their hearts by the Holy Spirit's message which Peter preached. They were convinced by that message that Jesus was both Lord and Christ, and that they were lost.

SOME MISUNDERSTANDINGS

Some have insisted that the baptism of Acts 2:38 is Holy Spirit baptism. However, Holy Spirit baptism was a "promise of the Father" to certain ones for special purposes. (Acts 1:4; 11:14, 15.) A promise of the Father cannot also be a command of the Father! The baptism of Acts 2:38 was a command of God; it is to be obeyed by lost, convicted sinners.

Others have urged that "for the remission of sins" in Acts 2:38 means "because of remission of sins." They say it means one is to be baptized because his sins have already been remitted or forgiven. Even if this were true, baptism would be none the less essential, for if God commanded people, whose sins were already remitted, to be baptized because their sins were remitted, they would have to be baptized to obey God. One cannot hope to be saved who disobeys God! However, "for the remission of sins" in Acts 2:38 could not mean "because of the remission of sins," for that would mean that repentance would be "because of the remission of sins." Peter said: "Repent and be baptized." The coordinate conjunction "and" connects things of equal rank in sentence construction, therefore, whatever baptism is "for," repentance is also "for" in Acts 2:38. Furthermore, scholarship will not allow that the Greek preposition *eis* translated "for" in Acts 2:38 can mean "because of," but instead it means "in order to," "unto," etc., and is so rendered in some translations.

If we should remove from Acts 2:38 "and be baptized" (and some have been trying to for years) it would then say: "Repent every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins." What would "for" mean in this kind of Acts 2:38? Whatever "for" means with "and be baptized" removed from the text, it also means with "and be baptized" in the text!

CHRIST SHED HIS BLOOD FOR THE REMISSION OF SINS

When our blessed Lord Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper he

gave thanks for the cup and then gave it to his apostles and told all of them to drink from it. Then he said, "For this is my blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." (Matthew 26:28.) Obviously, our Savior meant that the fruit of the vine in the cup was symbolic of, or represented his blood.

The propositioned phrase "for the remission of sins" in Matthew 26:28 is precisely the same as "for the remission of sins" in Acts 2:38 in both the English and the Greek texts. Surely, no one would argue that Jesus shed his blood "because of the remission of sins," or because the sins of those for whom he shed his blood were already remitted or forgiven!

Obviously, Jesus shed his blood in order that sinners could obtain the remission or the forgiveness of their sins. All this means that alien sinners who believe in Christ as the Son of God are commanded by the Lord to repent and be baptized in the name of, or upon the authority of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins which Christ made available for all the lost when he shed his blood on that old rugged cross!

IT WOULD BE JUST AS ESSENTIAL

Even if "for the remission of sins" were not in Acts 2:38, baptism would be just as essential, because Peter was guided by the Spirit of God in what he said to those pierced hearts of convicted sinners who cried out and asked what they should do. If the Holy Spirit's answer to them had just been: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ," both repentance and baptism would have been essential to their salvation. If God told us to do something and did not tell us what we would get out of doing it, we would still have to do it to obey God! Without obeying God we cannot hope to receive his mercy and grace by which to be saved.

The Authority Of Jesus

JERRY W. CARMICHAEL

AUTHORITY IS AN EVERY day part of all our lives. We all have over us, someone who makes the rules and has the final say. On the job it is the boss. When we were children it was our parents. In civil matters it is the law. The Bible teaches that in religious matters, Jesus has been given all authority. "*All power (authority) has been given to Me in Heaven and on Earth...*" (Matthew 28:18.)

God spoke in various ways to other groups of people in years gone by, but “*in these last days*” (the Christian age), He speaks to us “*by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom He also made the worlds...*” (Hebrews 1:1, 2.)

With all the religious confusion that exists in the world today, it is relatively simple to find out who is telling the truth and who really is pleasing God. Those who obey the words of His Son, and the words of those who were authorized by His Son to write what they learned from Him and the Holy Spirit are the ones who are pleasing Him. (John 14:25,26; 16:12-15.)

If the teaching or practice of a religious group disagrees with the teaching in the New Testament (words of the Son), then that doctrine and practice must be rejected if we wish to continue to abide by the authority of Jesus.

Undenominational Christianity

GLENN COLLEY

FOR A MAN TO say that he is a member of a particular denomination, is to suggest something which most folks have never seriously considered. They have accepted the concept of denominationalism for so long that it comes as second nature to them. They reason that it must be God's will because there are so many respected people in the system called “denominationalism.”

WHAT DOES THE WORD “DENOMINATION” MEAN?

Webster says that to denominate is, “Having a definite name or designation.” In the religious world it implies the idea that many different religious bodies, or sects, having declared and named themselves, are independent of all other “Christian” bodies. Nevertheless, they all believe that one can go to heaven from any of the various denominations. While they would like for people to join their denomination, they do not believe membership in their sect is essential for going to heaven. One sect is as good as another for going to heaven, according to them. To put it another way, they view the church of the New Testament as a big circle divided like a pie. The whole represents the church, and each piece represents a different denomination.

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS

The vast majority of folks in these denominations have never really considered what the Bible has to say about Christians and the church. If they did, and they truly wanted to please God, they would leave the denominational idea and seek to follow the simple New Testament pattern. The New Testament teaches church membership which is absolutely undenominational.

Did you know that a person can be a faithful Christian, actively serve Jesus Christ, live his life, die, and then go home to heaven for eternity, having never joined any denomination? It is true, The Bible doesn't teach membership in denominations, It does teach us about the church, but it isn't many divided sects, it is one church—and it belongs to Jesus.

A LIST OF SEVEN ONES

In Ephesians 4:4-6 there is a list of seven “ones.” That is, seven things of which there is only one of each. Pay attention to this passage. A man simply cannot believe in the concept of denominationalism and also believe this passage. It says, “There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.” There are plainly as many bodies as there are Gods! There is one God. There is one body. That body is the church. In that same book of Ephesians, chapter one, verse twenty-two, Paul says, “And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all.”

A NEW TESTAMENT EXAMPLE

There is a New Testament example of Christians who began “denominating.” The Corinthians. They decided to divide into different groups, or sects, and name themselves after various preachers of the Word. Paul leaves no room for confusion as he responded to this arrangement which is interestingly similar to the denominational arrangement today. He wrote in 1 Corinthians 1:10-15, “Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that every one of you

saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul? thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius; lest any should say that I had baptized in mine own name."

What does God want? Many different churches, divided by different names and doctrines as we have today? Certainly not! This passage says, "...speak the same thing ...same mind...same judgment." It does not say "many divisions are good," it says,... "no divisions..."

CONCLUSION

When a man is scripturally baptized, the Lord adds him to the church. Later, in the letter to the Corinthians. Paul wrote, "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond of free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit." (1 Corinthians 12:13.) Remember, that body is His church. Colossians 1:18 says, "And he is the head of the body, the church..."

The church of Christ taught and described in the New Testament, is not a denomination. The Bible no where calls it that. It is simply the church. May we all study our Bibles and be faithful members of the church of Christ's choice.

Elders in the Church of the Lord

CLEM THURMAN

GOD SPECIALLY SELECTED Paul and Barnabas to go among the Gentiles to preach Christ, and even directed where they were to go (Acts 13:1-4). When they were completing their tour of preaching, the Scriptures tell us that on their return they visited the churches that had been begun, "*Confirming the souls of the disciples. . . And appointed for them elders in every church*" (Acts 14:22-23). The apostle Paul wrote to Titus later, "*For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that were wanting, and appoint elders in every city*" (Titus 1:5). That was, and is, God's plan for the church: "*Elders in every church.*"

It would take a book to study in detail the elders' qualifications and work, but let us in this brief lesson try to see what elders are and what their chief work is to be.

Various religious groups use such terms as. “elders, pastors, bishops, deacons, presbyters, priests,” etc. with regard to various governing bodies in the religious world. Many of these terms are rooted in the Bible, but the denominational use of them is not. When we speak of elders, we are discussing those who meet the qualifications that are listed in 1 Tim. 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-11. And please note that the Lord’s plan is, “*Elders in every church*” (Acts 14:23). That is plural. And there is no authority in Scripture for having one elder (or pastor, or bishop) over one church or over a number of churches. When we speak of elders, we are speaking of a group of men in a local church (1 Pet. 5:2), having the qualities of character and life listed in 1 Tim. 3 and Titus 1, and selected by the congregation in which they serve.

THE TERMS USED FOR THESE CHURCH LEADERS

The Scriptures use three distinct terms to apply to elders of the church, each with its own unique connotation. The term “ELDER” is from the Greek “*presbuteros*” and simply means “an older man.” But its use in the Scripture is rooted in God’s governing of Israel. They had “*seventy elders*” selected during the time of Moses, who were charged with making various decisions about the nation’s government (Num. 11:25, etc.). The husband of the “*worthy woman*” was one of the elders of the city (Prov. 31:23), who had the responsibility of governing the city. In the time of Jesus, “*the chief priests and the elders*” were the ones who decided that Jesus should die and then took Him before Pilate for the sentencing (Matt. 27:20,41). Peter and John were arrested and tried before a court of “*rulers and elders and scribes*” of the Jews (Acts 4:5). It is no accident that God chose the term “*elders*” to apply to those who were to make decisions in the local congregation of believers.

The apostle Paul called to him the “*elders*” of the church in Ephesus, and told them they were “*bishops*” in the church (Acts 20:17,28). These two terms, “*elders*” and “*bishops*,” are also used interchangeably in 1 Tim. 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-11. The term “BISHOP” is from the Greek “*episkopon*” which means “overseer.” The idea of this word is that of “*one who guards, protects, cares for*” (Thayer’s Lexicon). The apostle Peter told elders to “*take the oversight*” of the church, which parallels what is stated in Heb. 13:17, “*They watch in behalf of your souls.*” These men as bishops are “*overseeing*” or watching over the church, protecting members against all spiritual dangers. They are particularly charged to guard against “*wolves in*

sheep's clothing" (Matt. 7:15) whose false teaching would subvert the faith of some: "*Whose mouths must be stopped*" (Titus 1:9-11). Bishops must tend to, and care for, the souls entrusted to them.

The third term used in Scripture for an elder is "SHEPHERD" which is from the Greek word "*poimeen*" and is also translated as "*pastor*." This word is used with regard to the elders in Eph. 4:11, 1 Pet. 5:2, etc. Jesus refers to Himself as "*the good shepherd*" and says, "*The good shepherd layeth down his life for the sheep. . . I know mine own, and mine own know me*" (Jno. 10:11-14). The psalmist wrote, "*The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; he leadeth me beside still waters; he restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness*" (Psa. 23:1-3). This tells us much of the work of elders-shepherds. They tend to the spiritual needs of the flock of God: providing food, protection and guidance. They must know the flock, and the members are urged, "*Know them that labor among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; and to esteem them exceeding highly in love for their work's sake*" (1 Thes. 5:12-13).

Peter writes, "The elders I exhort. . . Tend the flock of God which is among you, exercising the oversight" (1 Pet. 5:1-2). The word for "*tend*" (or "*feed*" in KJV) is the Greek "*poimanein*," which is a verb form of "*shepherd*." Note that all three of our terms are in this one passage. "*Elder*" is from "*presbuteros*" (v. 1), "*oversight*" is from "*episkopon*" (v. 2) and "*tend*" is from "*poimeen*" (v. 2). The elder is a bishop is a shepherd. All three terms are applied to the same group of men, without distinction among them. Whoever is an elder is a bishop, and every shepherd of the Lord's church is an elder.

LEAD— "ELDERS THAT RULE WELL"

Elders are "*rulers*" in the church, but their rule is not that of authoritarian-type rule. They rule by the fact that they are leaders whom the people are willing to follow. Paul wrote, "*Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor*" (1 Tim. 5:17). Again we read, "*Remember them that had the rule over you. . . Obey them that have the rule over you*" (Heb. 13:7,17). The marginal reading has instead of "*rulers*" either "*guides*" or "*leaders*." The elders' rule is not like that of a king, but like that of a loving, caring "elder brother." The warning is given to them, "*Exercising the oversight. . . not lording it over the charge allotted to you, but making your-selves examples to the flock*" (1 Pet. 5:2-3). As elders they are

to lead people in the same way a shepherd leads sheep—not by trying to drive them, but setting the pattern of the right path to take. Much of the elder’s leadership results from his example of faith, purity and dedication.

The apostle writes, *“Know them that labor among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; and esteem them exceeding highly in love for their work’s sake. Be at peace among yourselves”* (1 Thes. 5:12-13). Then he says to the elders, *“And we exhort you, brethren, admonish the disorderly, encourage the faint-hearted, support the weak, be long-suffering toward all ”* (v. 14). To do this work, it is vital that an elder be *“able to teach”* (1 Tim. 3:2). And elders must care enough to warn, encourage and support those in the church who need help at various problem-times in their lives.

GUARD—“THEY WATCH FOR YOUR SOULS”

I have always had the highest respect for the work of brain surgeons, judges, policemen and such like. They must make decisions, and take action, that vitally affects people’s lives. But the work of elders is even more serious, for their work affects souls! *“Obey them that have the rule over you. . . they watch in behalf of your souls”* (Heb. 13:17). Jesus showed us the comparative value of the physical person and the soul: *“Be not afraid of them that kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul. . . For what shall a man be profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”* (Matt. 10:28; 16:24).

The shepherd leads his sheep to those areas where there is grass, water and protection (Psa. 23:1-6). He guards them against predators, diseases, and all other enemies. So elders, as the Lord’s shepherds over His people, watch over the Lord’s people. Paul warned that elders must, *“Hold to the faithful word. . . able to exhort in the sound doctrine, and to convict the gain-sayers. For there are many unruly men, vain talkers and deceivers. . . whose mouths must be stopped”* (Titus 1:9-11). Because they care for the sheep, the shepherds take all necessary action to *“watch for their souls.”*

NURTURE—“FEED THE CHURCH OF THE LORD”

Christians are to *“long for the sincere milk of the word, that ye grow thereby”* (1 Pet. 2:2). The elders, as shepherds, are to *“feed the church of the Lord”* (Acts 20:28), or *“tend the flock of God”* (1 Pet. 5:2). It is the responsibility of the elders to see that members of the body of Christ are properly fed—that is, with the word of

God. At various times, people need different kinds of physical nourishment, because physical needs change from time to time. So it is in the spiritual realm. Jesus, "*the master teacher*," always used the teaching the applied best to the people who were present, depending on their present need. For those who mourned a death, He had one type of lesson; but for impenitent sinners, He had a different one!

Elders, in order to provide the nourishment which the members need in the spiritual realm, must know their weaknesses and strengths, their problems and triumphs. Paul exhorts elders, "*Admonish the disorderly, encourage the faint-hearted, support the weak, be long-suffering toward all*" (1 Thes. 5:14). When people are "*disorderly*" (or "*unruly*"), they are literally "*out of step*" and need to be warned, or admonished. Others may be timid, and they just need to be encouraged to do what they have learned. Still others may be weak in knowledge, weak in faith, weak in commitment: they need the support and help of the elders to become strong. And the command that undergirds all three of these is: "Be long-suffering toward all." Elders cannot be impatient, for spiritual growth and development take time and all people will not progress at the rate we would like to see.

Jesus answered the question about the great commandment with these words: "*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God. . . A second is this, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself*" (Matt. 22:37; Mk. 12:30). When the lawyer questioned, "*Who is my neighbor?*" Jesus answered with the story of "the good Samaritan" (Lk. 10:30-37). Churches of Galatia were told, "*As ye have opportunity, work that which is good toward all men, especially toward them that are of the household of faith*" (Gal. 6:10). We must care about others, and strive to help them with whatever problems they may have. Jesus did. And elders must lead us as we practice the same thing.

The one passage, I think, that really shows elders what they should be is one that tells us about "*the good shepherd*," Jesus Christ. The people followed after Him, to see His miracles and hear His teaching: "*When he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion for them, because they were distressed and scattered, as sheep not having a shepherd*" (Matt. 9:36). Jesus cared. He felt for the people. He suffered with them. They were without direction in their lives, and He felt that lostness. It is that quality that elders must have, if they would be the kind of shepherds God wants for His people. May God give us such elders, men who care for His

people and really watch for souls. And may we all cooperate and show our appreciation for such, “*That they may do this with joy, and not with grief*” (Heb. 13:17).

Why Christians Pray

CHARLES BOX

PRAYER IS ACCEPTABLE only when it comes from the heart. “... Therefore Your servant has found it in his heart to pray this prayer to You.” (2 Samuel 7:27.) There is a common need shared by most Christians—more prayer!

Even one praying person can make a tremendous difference. “The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit.” (James 5:16-18.) Have you ever asked—why do Christians pray?

CHRISTIANS PRAY BECAUSE THEY ARE OBEDIENT TO GOD

“Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men.” (1 Timothy 2:1.) God commands prayer. Those who walk in His way “pray without ceasing.”

CHRISTIANS PRAY BECAUSE THEY HAVE FAITH

Abraham was a great example of strong faith. (Romans 4:20.) Strong faith leads to strong prayer. Weak faith produces weak prayers. “But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord” (James 1:6-8.)

CHRISTIANS PRAY BECAUSE THEY ARE COMPASSIONATE

Concern for others causes Christians to pray for laborers in the harvest. “But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, ‘The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray

the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.” (Matthew 9:36-38.) Compassion and prayer are yoked together.

CHRISTIANS PRAY BECAUSE THEY ARE HUMBLE

Humility always goes before acceptable prayer. “But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: ‘God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.’” (James 4:6.) Pride is sickening to God. “Everyone proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord . . . (Proverbs 16:5.)

CHRISTIANS PRAY BECAUSE THEY ARE STEADFAST

The steadfast pray and those who truly pray remain steadfast. It would be impossible to find a single person who is steadfast to God who does not pray. “Then he spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart.” (Luke 18:1.)

CHRISTIANS PRAY BECAUSE THEY NEED FORGIVENESS

Christians recognize their imperfections and plead for God’s forgiveness. Christians share the attitude of David, “Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your loving kindness; according to the multitude of Your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.” (Psalm 51:1-2.)

CHRISTIANS PRAY BECAUSE THEY ARE GRATEFUL

“It is good to give thanks to the Lord, and to sing praises to your name, O Most High.” (Psalm 92:1.) Christians will never take their blessings for granted. Gratitude to God will be expressed often.

All should recognize the value of prayer as it contributes to our relationship with God. The faithful pray! But, only those who are faithful can expect God to be pleased with their prayers. “One who turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination.” (Proverbs 28:9.)

To become a Christian you must hear the gospel (Romans 10:17), believe in Jesus (Mark 16:16), repent of sins (Acts 2:38), confess Jesus (Romans 10:9-10), and be baptized. (1 Peter 3:21.) Once you become a Christian-pray!

LIKE A SILLY DOVE

JOHNNY RAMSEY

HOSEA HAD A broken heart. His wife was unfaithful and immoral. Jehovah had a broken heart, too. His bride was flippant and ungodly, also. Israel had wandered back to the world and committed spiritual prostitution. The book of Hosea is a classic love story that went bad. More sob than sermon is what critics of the Bible call this eloquent Old Testament book. In fourteen graphic chapters, we can see the heartache of a fearless prophet. Hosea reminded Israel that her goodness was like the morning dew. It did not last very long. *“Ephraim also is like a silly dove without heart: they call to Egypt, they go to Assyria”* (Hos. 7:11). Like a silly dove, God’s people would fly here and there as very unstable folk—flippant and undependable! Hosea’s wife was so debased that God gave a name to their third child which clearly shows the offspring did not belong to the prophet, but to some lover of Gomer’s with whom she had prostituted herself.

God showed the people of Israel that their only hope for spiritual success was *“in the valley of Achor”* (Hos. 2:14-19). In Josh. 7 is the account of the purging of sin from the camp when Achan sinned so tragically and brought defeat to the army of God’s people—in the valley of Achor! Discipline has always been a necessary ingredient in God’s plan. We err exceedingly when we bypass or overlook the value of keeping the bride of Christ pure and holy.

As a result of their compromise with worldly things, God tells the people of Hosea’s day that there would be a spiritual famine of many days without a king or priest. In bondage they would beg for a prophet and none would be found. All of this was the result of their lack of Bible knowledge. The source of all our problems today is still ignorance of the Scriptures. So many seldom ever study the sacred text, and it shows in the worldliness in our midst, and in shallow preaching and teaching.

God warned His people to leave the landmarks alone (Hos. 5:10). In our era of time, everyone cries for change and modern emphases. But, only the old Jerusalem gospel can save and edify. We must “go forward, back to the Bible!” We dare not tamper with the mandates of heaven, but must be content with the *“faith which was once for all delivered to the saints”* (Jude 3). We must be loyal to

the ancient precepts found in the Book of books!

In Hos. 7 and Hos. 8, we learn that Israel was like a half-baked cake. *“Ephraim is a cake not turned”* (Hos. 7:8). This represents folk who were burned on one side and raw on the other—totally useless. As a result, they had sown to the wind and reaped the whirlwind. Their sins did find them out (Num. 32:23). Years in captivity would teach them the bitter result of apostasy. Horrible actions (Hos. 6:10) caused God to cast them away (Hos. 9:17) into spiritual oblivion.

Israel was challenged to break up their fallow ground (Hos. 10:12) and turn back to Jehovah immediately. There was no time for delay. They were long overdue in pursuing divine matters. Despite Israel’s slothfulness, the Lord still loved them and sought to draw them back to Himself: *“I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love: and I was to them as they that take off the yoke on their jaws, and I laid meat unto them ... I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him”* (Hos. 11:4; 14:4). God’s justice demanded that Israel be given over to bondage, but it broke the heart of heaven to give them up that they might learn to repent (Hos. 11:8).

God reminds us of the great role the prophets played in warning, rebuking and leadership in Hosea 12 and Hosea 13. Kings learned to stand in awe of the lonely, devoted and loyal spokesman for Jehovah. The prophets stood as monumental reminders of the sanctity of truth and the sorrow of sin. God had allowed a king in His anger, but took him away in His wrath (Hos. 13:11). Sometimes we get what we ask for and have years to regret it: *“He gave them their request, but sent leanness into their souls”* (Psa. 106:15).

We truly need a fresh application of the brilliant book of Hosea, May our goodness be more lasting than the morning dew. May we never be like the silly dove.

