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EDITORIAL

Doctrine Of The Church Of Christ

Very often people write and ask us to let them know, What is the doctrine of the church of Christ? At the outset, let me point out to you that there is no such thing as the doctrine of the church of Christ. In the Bible, we do read of the doctrine of Christ, but not of the doctrine of the church of Christ. Concerning the doctrine of Christ we read: "Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds." (2 John 9-11):

Jesus Christ has all the authority, in heaven and on earth. (Matthew 28:18). That authority He does not share with any man on earth. His doctrine is found in His New Testament, which is the second part of the Bible. Abiding in His doctrine means to speak where His New Testament speaks, and to be silent where His New Testament is silent. Going beyond His doctrine means to practice such things which His New Testament does not authorize. For instance, Christ's New Testament says: "He who believes and is baptized will be saved." (Mark 16:16). Now, if someone teaches that only faith is essential for salvation and that baptism is not necessary for salvation, then that is not the doctrine of Christ. Again, at Ephesians 5:19 we are told, "Speaking to

one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord." So we are to sing and make melody or music in our hearts, that is, when we sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs in praise of God, the music is to be made in our hearts and not on some instrument that we have invented. To sing, is the doctrine of Christ. But to sing and sing with the accompaniment of musical instruments, is to go beyond the doctrine of Christ.

The apostle Paul wrote at Romans 16:17,18, and said, "Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned and avoid them. For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the heart of the simple."

Church of Christ means people who have believed in Christ, have repented of sins, and have been baptized (immersed in water) for the remission of sins, and thus have been added by the Lord to the number of the saved ones, which is His church. (Acts 2:41,47). Church of Christ does not have a doctrine of her own; His church follows only His doctrine; and this is the distinctive mark of Christ's church. There is no place of any creed books in the church of Christ. No man, whoever he may be, has any authority, in any congregation of the Lord's church, to make any rules or laws to be followed by His people. All Christians must follow the doctrine of Christ alone. As we have noticed, He has all the authority, and he is the head of His church as we read in Ephesians 1:22,23 & Colossians 1:18.

What Is The Conscience?

J.C. CHOATE

The scriptures speak any number of times about the conscience. The story is told of the scribes and Pharisees bringing to Jesus a woman who had been taken in adultery. According to the law of Moses she was supposed to be stoned to death. They probably thought Jesus would release her and then they could accuse him of not keeping the law. But Jesus simply stooped down and with his finger wrote on the ground. Then he said, "He that is without sin among you; let him first cast a stone at her." Then it says, "And they that heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at

the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord: And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more." (John 8:7-10).

The enemies of Christianity laid their hands on Paul in Jerusalem, and would have killed him had it not been for the Roman soldiers. After speaking for himself before the crowd and to the Roman Centurion, the chief priests and the Sanhedrian council were called in, "And Paul, earnestly beholding the council, said, Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day." (Acts 23:1). Of course Paul, himself, had previously been a persecutor of the Lord's people, and now he was being persecuted by his own Jewish brethren, but he declared that at all times he had done what he had done in all good conscience.

Paul said in Romans 9:1, "I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my *conscience* also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost." Concerning obedience to our government, he says, "Wherefore we must needs be subject; not only for wrath, but also for *conscience* sake," (Romans 13:5). In 1 Corinthians 8:7 he speaks of those who have a *weak conscience*. Then he speaks of a *seared conscience* in 1 Timothy 4:2, or a dead conscience, because one has gone against what he knows is right or wrong so often, and of a *defiled conscience* in Titus 1:15, that is, where one has begun to mix error and truth in his thinking and way of life.

You can see from these verses that the conscience is spoken of often in the scriptures and is described as being in different conditions. But what is the conscience? The dictionary would define it as having to do with the heart, mind, and soul. It is the knowledge accumulated from infancy, on which one relies to make judgments or decisions concerning whether to believe something or not to believe, or whether to do something or not to do it.

There are many people who advocate that all that matters even in religion is that one not be opposing the feelings of his own conscience. There is a flaw in this reasoning, however, which must be pointed out. The conscience approves or disapproves, on the basis of the knowledge which has shaped it. If a person has been taught all of his life that a lie is the truth, his conscience will agree. For example, if one has been taught that "faith only" saves, he will have a *good conscience* concerning that doctrine. If he has been taught that one church is as

good as another, he will himself teach that doctrine, in all good conscience. And so on with everything else. In other words, one's conscience either approves or disapproves on the basis of what he has been taught and what he has come to believe.

In order for a person to have a good conscience in a scriptural sense, his conscience must be knowledgeable of God's word, and then when he acts on that knowledge his conscience agrees that he has done the right thing. If one is governed by a conscience that is void of a knowledge of God's will, even though he may have a "good conscience" in believing and doing what he does, his conscience is misleading him.

For example Peter said, "The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ." (1 Peter 3:21). Peter is saying that one is being baptized to be saved, and of course that is based on his knowledge of God's will, that he believe in God, repent of his sins, and confess Christ as the Son of God, as this and numerous other passages of scripture emphasize. The inspired writer also says that this is not done to physically take a bath, to cleanse the body of dirt, but in order that one might have a good conscience toward God. If a person knows what the Lord requires, how can he have a good conscience unless he does what God has commanded?

Another way of putting it, if one has been taught that it is wrong to take strong drink, to steal, or to do other bad things, but he does them anyway, he is going against what he has been taught—he is going against his conscience and that causes him to feel guilty and condemned. The conscience, in this way, may be a safeguard against bad behaviour, and on the other hand it will encourage one to do those things which are right.

But let it be stressed again that in spiritual matters the only time one can "follow his conscience" and be right is when the conscience is governed by God's word. Without that knowledge, even though the conscience may approve of his actions, it is misleading him. Don't allow yourself to be deceived. Read and study the Bible to know what God wants you to do. Do that and then you will have a good conscience, but not until.

Teaching Children About God

BETTY BURTON CHOATE

"In the beginning, God . . ." (Genesis 1:1)

"Mother," Aseema said, "Every Sunday we go to worship; and at home we study about God and we pray to Him. But we can't see God, and we don't hear Him talking to us. How do you know there really is a God, and how do you know that we understand the truth about Him?"

"Some of my friends believe in different gods, and they go to temples," said Anthony. "At school, Manoj was laughing at me because I pray to thank God for the food before I eat. He says there is no such thing as God—that I am only talking to myself."

"Those are important questions," Mary answered. "You're getting old enough to be responsible to God. You should understand what it is to believe in Him and to obey Him and to become a child in His spiritual family."

"Do you remember the story of the apostle Paul's visit to the city of Athens, recorded in the seventeenth chapter of the book of Acts? As he was walking along the street, he saw idols of every kind set up, with altars for worshipping them. Then he saw an altar with the inscription, 'To The Unknown God'. He spoke to the people and said, 'Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you.'

"God who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. Nor is He worshipped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things. And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their pre-appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, For we are also His offspring."

"Everywhere, and through all the ages, people have had within

themselves the need to worship a Being greater than themselves. That was why the people of Athens had made idols, and why so many people make different religions and gods—they have the need to worship, but they don't know the true God.

"God made the first man, Adam, as a spirit-being, like Himself when he breathed life into him and made him a 'living soul'. He made Adam different from the animals in other ways, too. He gave him a conscience to learn right from wrong, and he made him able to feel emotions and to think and learn. These likenesses to God within all humans cause us to look for God, trying to understand Him.

"All of the things that exist in the world also help us to know that there must be a Being greater than humans. Nothing makes itself. Not even a math problem works itself out, and the bread doesn't make itself. So how could the world make itself, or how could it just happen to gradually develop itself? That never happens. Only a being smarter and more powerful than a human could have made humans—and all the other things that are so complicated humans don't understand them very well yet.

"Look at a tree. People can make imitation trees, but no one can make even a little twig that is living. Only God can give life and breath, as Paul said in Athens.

"Everyone feels the need to worship God, but the problem is that when people don't know the true God, they make up gods. Then they worship what they have made themselves. Anthony, get your Bible and read in Isaiah 40:18-20 how God described what people did."

Anthony turned to the chapter and read, "To whom then will you liken God? Or what likeness will you compare to Him? The workman molds a graven image, the goldsmith overspreads it with gold, and the silversmith casts silver chains. Whoever is too impoverished for such a contribution chooses a tree that will not rot; He seeks for himself a skillful workman to prepare a carved image that will not totter."

"Aseema, from your Bible read Isaiah 44:15-17, where there is the description of a man who cuts a tree."

"Then it shall be for a man to burn, for he will take some of it and warm himself, Yes he kindles it and bakes bread; Indeed he makes a god and worships it: He makes it a carved image, and falls down to it.

Aseema read on, "He burns half of it in the fire; with this half he eats meat; He roasts a roast, and is satisfied. He even warms himself and says, 'Ah! I am warm, I have seen the fire.' And the rest of it he makes into a god, his carved image. He falls down before it and

worships it, prays to it and says, 'Deliver me, for you are my god.'"

"But how can we know who is the true God?" asked Anthony.

"We can know by several things," answered Mary. "The teachings about God in some religions sound like myths—just stories that people have made up. Then the things people are taught to do in some religions are not right—some religions say that it is all right to lie; some even ask for human sacrifices—so when those religions are followed, people have trouble because of the wrong things they do.

"When you read the scriptures of the different religions, you will see some truths in each book. But they also have some wrong teachings. The only book that has been proved to be true and not to have any wrong teaching is what we recognize as God's word—the Bible.

"To learn the truth about God means that you have to study seriously, keeping your mind open, and asking always that God will help you to understand what the truth is. That is another important way that we can know the true God—when we become His children, we can see, day by day, that He is answering our prayers and helping us in our lives. Just as life comes only from God, God Himself is the only living God."

Parents have the serious and precious responsibility of helping their children to learn the Father-child relationship with God. From the earliest age, the teaching of God's presence and love should begin. Long before a child can understand the actual words that are said, he can understand the tones of love and faith and reverence he hears from his parents as they talk to him of God. This is the beginning of faith and even of understanding.

Hymns are another important way to keep our children conscious of the presence of God. Mothers who sing hymns of worship and praise will not usually be of the spirit to scream and quarrel and to use abusive language.

We teach through our love of the Bible and our love of learning what it says about God and our relationship with Him. But in our homes, and especially with young children, we teach far more by the radiance of our own faith and love for God than through the actual words we may say.

“He Being Dead Yet Speaketh”

JIM FAUGHN

I had an interesting experience some time ago. I dialed the telephone number of a woman who had lost her husband several months earlier. At least I thought it was her telephone number that I had dialed.

I began to wonder, though, because of the message I listened to on the answering machine. I was listening to a *man's voice*! In the short time I had to listen to the voice, I thought I recognized it. It was the voice of the woman's *late* husband!!

Various forms of technology allow us to hear and see people who are no longer here. Their words and actions can still influence us.

However, this possibility existed long before any of our modern means of reproducing images and voices. Consider what is said about Abel in Hebrews 11:4: *“By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh.”*

I suppose it could be called our legacy, our influence, our impact, or any number of other things. In Abel's case, God said that his life continued to “speak” thousands of years after his death.

I wonder what “message” we are leaving on our “machines.”

God Challenges Us To Give!

BILL BROWN

“Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over shall men give into your bosom. FOR WITH THE *SAME MEASURE* that ye mete withal IT SHALL BE MEASURED to you again. (Luke 6:38). (Emphasis mine. B.B.) This personalizes the teaching on giving. Challenge means “a dual to a contest”. Without this contest we are buying ourselves a place in the lower regions. Read carefully (Rom. 10:1-3).

There is hardly a subject that is misunderstood and so badly neglected as the matter of using our substance and wealth for the Lord.

"Honor the Lord with thy substance, and with the *firstfruits* of all thine increase". (Prov. 3:9). "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein". (Psa. 24:1). God has reason for everything that he has asked us to do. We may not understand why, but remember "for without faith it is *impossible* to please God: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him". (Heb. 11:6). When the Lord asks us to give, he has a nobler motive than just raising money.

But then the question arises, "Why should we give?" When the real purpose of giving is clearly understood, true New Testament Christians will give cheerfully, liberally and overflowing (II Cor. 9:12-14).

"Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine: thine is the kingdom. O Lord, and thou art exalted as head above all. Both riches and honour come of thee, and thou reignest over all and in thine hand is power and might: and in thine hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all". (I Chron. 29:11-12). "Now unto him that is able to do exceeding *abundantly above* all that we ask or think, *according* to the power that worketh in us". (Eph. 3:20). "For it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure". (Phil. 2:13).

"And God is able to make all grace abound toward you: that ye, always having *all sufficient* in all *things*, may abound to every good work: Now he that ministereth seed to the sower both minister bread for your food, and multiply your seed sown, and increases the fruits of your righteousness". (2 Cor. 9:8,10).

The Bible Speaks—God Challenges Us to Give!

God challenges us to give because through participation it brings joy through achievement. (Phil. 1:3-11). This then brings about personal spiritual growth. (II Cor. 9:6-7). The Lord, during his personal ministry, challenged a young man concerning salvation. Jesus told the young man to "go and sell what you have and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasures in heaven: and come, take up your cross, and follow me". (Mark 10:21).

There are four classes of givers:

1. The covetous man who gives but then regrets it. "And Jesus said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth". (Luke 12:15). In painting the blackest picture of human degradation in all the Bible, the Holy Spirit guided Paul in

placing covetousness near the head of the list, in fact he placed it between thieves and drunkards. (I Cor. 6:10; Rom. 1:28-30).

2. Those who resent any and all teaching on giving as they are unteachable. (Matt. 6:19-21; Mark 10:17-22).
3. Then those who are ignorant of the teaching of the scriptures on the subject of giving. These people can be taught the truth. (II Cor. Chpts. 8, 9).
4. Those who are liberal, for they learned what the scriptures teach on the subject of giving and do accordingly. (II Cor. Chpts 8, 9; Phil. 1:5-6).

Giving is a test of our love in every respect. "Beware lest thou forget Jehovah thy God, and lest thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of my hand hath gotten me this wealth . . . for it is he that giveth the power to get wealth". (Deut. 8:11a, 17-18). Our giving is a barometer of our love. But because of covetousness our giving is not what it should be. (James 4:3). God will never withdraw His right and title as absolute owner of all things. (Psa. 24:1).

Can We Understand It Alike?

CLEM THURMAN

Our Lord, just before He was taken to be crucified, prayed for all believers: "*That they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me; and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world might believe that thou didst send me*" (Jno. 17:20-21). In spite of that prayer, there are nearly four hundred denominations—in this country alone—all claiming to follow Christ, but each different from the others in worship, doctrine, authority, organisation or some other vital aspect. Such division is clearly condemned in the Scriptures (1 Cor. 1:10-13; Eph. 4:1-6; etc.), but it continues, even among sincere people who in other ways are valiantly striving to please God.

We believe that we should "*strive to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*" (Eph. 4:3), and that there is "*one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God*" (Eph. 4:4-6). But

when we plead for the unity of all believers, we often get the reply, "We all believe the same Bible, but we just can't all understand it alike." The implications of that statement are really staggering! It implies one of the following: [1] Truth can mean different things to different people, [2] God does not want us to understand it alike, or [3] God deliberately gave us a message which He knew would confuse us! Now, I don't know about you, but I am not ready to accept any of those conclusions.

I believe it should be obvious that if we understand the Bible at all, we understand it alike. Let me illustrate. A math teacher gives a problem to his students: "What is the product of three and two?" One may answer, "Five," because he added the two numbers. Another may answer, "One," because he subtracted. But every student who **UNDERSTOOD** the problem would give the only correct answer, "Six." To say that the students did not understand the problem alike is incorrect. The truth is that some did not understand the problem at all. But every student who understood it arrived at the correct answer. The same principle applies to the Scriptures. If two people do not agree on what that Book teaches, it is not because they don't understand alike: it is because someone doesn't understand it at all.

Jesus Christ Reveals to Us the Truth of God

We serve a God who loves us: "*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son. . . Who loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood*" (Jno. 3:16; Rev. 1:5). It has never been God's purpose to confuse man, but to lead him through the truth: "*For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace*" (1 Cor. 14:33). The gospel is "*the power of God unto salvation*" (Rom. 1:16), and Jesus sent the apostles to preach that gospel to every creature, making the promise, "*He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved*" (Mk. 16:15-16). They preached that gospel, and they committed it to writing for us: "*Every Scripture is inspired of God . . . You received it, not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God*" (2 Tim. 3:16; 1 Thes. 2:13). Did God give us a message which we are incapable of understanding?!

In that prayer for unity (Jno. 17), the Lord said of the apostles, "*Sanctify them in the truth, thy word is truth*" (v. 17). To deliver and confirm that truth is one reason Jesus came to this earth: "*I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me . . . For this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth*" (Jno. 14:6; 18:37). To see what is required in following Christ, just read Jno. 8:31-32, "*If ye abide in my word, then are ye truly my disciples; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.*"

Only the truth can make you free, nothing else can do it. The apostle wrote, "*Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth*" (1 Pet. 1:22); obeying something else will not purify the soul. Some contend that truth is relative, that it can mean different things to different people who are in different situations. But Jesus came to reveal the truth to all mankind, and through that truth to bring a "*common salvation*" (Jude 3) to all the lost. Did He fail in His mission to earth?!

We Must Know the Truth to Be Made Free

The Lord never promised that the truth would free all men. Instead, "*Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free*" (Jno. 8:32). Unless we **KNOW** the truth, it will never make us free. The Lord emphasizes the knowledge of the truth. So do the apostles. The apostle Peter preached, "*Let all of the house of Israel know assuredly that God made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom ye crucified*" (Acts 2:36). The apostle Paul preached, "*The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know his will*" (Acts 14:22). He wrote of his own desire to "*know him and the power of his resurrection*" (Phil. 3:10). To know Christ, to know His word, to know His will for our lives—to know the truth and live by it—this was and is our purpose in this life.

We are exhorted, "*Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, handling aright the word of truth*" (2 Tim. 2:15). The apostle Paul declares of his writing to us, "*Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ*" (Eph. 3:4). We **CAN** understand the truth: God says so! And why would He tell us to study and learn, if it were impossible for us to do so? Why tell us to know the truth, unless we can know it? God promises us His blessings, but read the conditions in 2 Pet. 1:3-4, "*His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that called us by his own glory and virtue, whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises.*" Notice: the only way to receive the promised blessings of God is through the knowledge of His truth.

We Must "Understand it Alike"

Many still contend that it is impossible for people with diverse backgrounds, cultures and education to "see the Bible alike." But is it? Look at the exhortation of the inspired apostle, "*Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be*

perfected together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (1 Cor. 1:10). Now, is that possible? Or does the Lord require of us something that is impossible? For believers, the answer is obvious.

There are three requirements in 1 Cor. 1:10 that we need to understand. [1] "*All speak the same thing.*" While many will claim that is impossible, Peter answers, "*If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God*" (1 Pet. 4:11). If all speak as God's word, all will have to speak the same thing. Diverse teachings result when people speak in matters or in ways that God's word does not speak. [2] "*No divisions among you.*" This is what Jesus prayed in Jno. 17:20-21, this is precisely God's will for us. Again, some will say that is an ideal that is impossible to achieve. But Christ prayed for it (Jno. 17:20-21), God commanded it (1 Cor. 1:10) and Paul taught it (Eph. 4:1-6). God does not divide His people. He brings them together. [3] "*Same mind and same judgment.*" When we are guided by the same truth, we will be united in mind and judgment. For instance, how many Lords are there? If we turn to the word of God and read, "*Jesus is Lord . . . There is one Lord*" (Rom. 10:9; Eph. 4:5), we will be of one mind and one judgment. The truth will not provide various (or contradictory) answers. The same principle is true with any other subject on which the Bible speaks.

The Lord commands us, "*Content earnestly for the faith, which was once for all delivered to the saints*" (Jude 3). Warnings are given about falling away from the faith (1 Tim. 4:1) or returning to unbelief (Heb. 3:12). But if there is one faith (Eph. 4:5) for which we all are to contend earnestly (Jude 3), then we must all "understand it alike." Unity, which the Lord commanded, would not otherwise be possible.

Friend, God has given us the truth. He tells us to study and learn that we may know the truth. And He requires that we "*all speak the same thing,*" have "*no divisions*" and be of "*the same mind and judgment.*" To do that we must search the Scriptures for understanding, for it will come in no other way. And when we understand the truth, we will understand it alike. Religious division results because some do not understand the truth which God has revealed, and because others are not willing to abide by the truth they do understand. Let us ever be willing to "*search the Scriptures, whether these things be so*" (Acts 17:11). And let us always have the attitude Jesus expressed in another prayer, "*Father, not my will, but thine, be done*" (Lk. 22:42). Then, and only then, can we have the unity for which He died.

Is The Church Of Christ Sectarian?

STEVE HIGGINBOTHAN

The distinctive and unique plea of the New Testament church has often been misunderstood as being sectarian by the religious world in general, and more recently, by even some of our own brethren. By making the claim that only those who are members of the church of Christ or Christ's church will be saved, some have accused us of being narrow and sectarian.

One brother in Christ stated that the church of Christ was comparable to a "pick up football game" in the parking lot of a large football stadium. The boys in the parking lot think they are the only game in town, while the stadium is filled to capacity with fans watching a game in progress inside the arena.

Under the slogan of "*We are Christians only, not the only Christians,*" another brother has said that we have crystallized and become, to a large measure, what we set out to oppose. He says, "Somehow those of us who make the plea for people to be Christians only have let that plea come out to the world something after this fashion: 'Come over to us, and be Christians only because after all, we are the only Christians.' That is arrogant, that is wrong, that is self-righteous, that is sectarian."

Are we really guilty as charged? When we make the claim that only members of the church of Christ (Christ's church) will be saved, have we become sectarian? Absolutely not! For when we say that the **church of Christ** alone will be saved, we are speaking of the church of Christ in its Biblical sense (the body of all saved people), not a sectarian sense (one religious body among several other bodies). In fact, it is rather ironic that those who accuse us of being sectarian are the very ones who are sectarian (Romans 2:1). For when they say that there are Christians outside the church of Christ, they are using the term "church of Christ" in a sectarian manner that is foreign to the Scripture.

N.B. Hardeman once accurately stated, "There is but one church built on Jesus Christ, and that is the church about which you read in the Bible and of which **every Christian on earth is a member**. With this we ought to be content . . . My friends, God's church upon this earth is God's people wherever they are, and whosoever they may be." (*The Hardeman Tabernacle Sermons*).

No, we are not sectarian for teaching that one must be a member of the church in order to be saved. This is what Paul taught. Take time to read (Ephesians 2:16, 4:4, 5:23). There are but two realms wherein a man can stand today; the kingdom of God (the church of Christ), or the kingdom of Satan. Hence, it is not sectarian to teach that no one outside the church of Christ (i.e. church of the Lord, the New Testament church, the church of the firstborn ones . . .) can be saved. Only those who are in that one, universal body of called out people will be saved. Are you a part of that body?

Lessons From A River-Gathering

NEAL POLLARD

Her stormy banks encase a short, shallow river that winds through Palestine, beginning its descent at Mount Hermon and terminating its flow at the Dead Sea. She falls a full 2,500 feet from start to finish. Yet, her topographical features are far from her most valuable characteristics. Through God's Word, we are able to assemble as eyewitnesses to some important events and vital lessons that took place at Jordan. We see these through faith's eye.

Notice a few of the landmarks erected at her waters.

Two Choices—Genesis 13:8-13. Both needing room to expand with their herds, Abraham and Lot were faced with a dilemma. Abraham chose to sacrifice, giving Lot first choice of either Canaan or the well-watered plains of Jordan. Lot chose comfort, picking the place resembling paradise. Abraham demonstrated great faith by choosing to follow the golden rule. Lot showed shortsightedness by opting for an area whose neighbors were the sinful Sodomites. Abraham's choice led to blessing (he received the land of promise, met Melchizedek, and had a son through whom Christ would eventually be born). Lot's choice led to destruction (he lost his wife, his sons-in-law, his possessions, his and his daughters' virtue). Matthew 6:24 tells us that we must also choose either God or this world. The Jordan River, if it could speak, might say, "the world might look good and provide brief pleasures, but one day it will all go up in smoke."

Twelve Stones—Joshua 4. At the changing of the guard, God told

Joshua that he would work through him as he did through Moses. One of the earliest events of Joshua's leadership signified that God was with him as Joshua led Israel across the dry riverbed of the parted Jordan River (Joshua 3). Then, in Joshua 4:2, as soon as the last Israelite had dusted the sand from his feet, Joshua commanded a man from every Israelite tribe to gather a stone from the Jordan. These stones were set up, in the place where the feet of the priests who bore the ark of the covenant stood, as a *memorial*. These twelve stones were later set up in Gilgal (Joshua 4:20). There, they celebrated the passover (Joshua 5:10, 11). The twelve stones were to serve as a reminder to Israel that God had delivered them, just as he had delivered them from the tenth plague in Egypt. The Lord's Supper was instituted by our Lord as a reminder of how he delivered us from the pain of sin and death (cf. I Corinthians 15:54-56). As sacred as the gathering of the stones was to Israel, the Lord's Supper should be to Christians who have passed through the water of baptism to inherit the promised home of the soul.

Seven Plunges—II Kings 5. Naaman was doomed to die. Neither his name, his rank, nor his nationality could save him. He was a leper. Naaman needed a solution. The servant of Naaman's wife was an Israelite he had taken captive in a raid. She told Mrs. Naaman about Elisha, to whom Naaman went for healing. Although he was given clear, simple instructions as to what would restore his life, Naaman scoffed at Elisha's command. He was furious that his long journey south from Syria would be culminated by dipping seven times in this Jordan. He questioned why he had to leave his homeland, where flowed the superior Amanah and Pharpar Rivers. Yet, when he came to terms with the simplicity of the task, he complied and was made clean (II Kings 5:14). At Jordan, we are taught the significance of baptism. Many refuse to be baptized because they fail to see what possible significance there could be in baptism. The New Testament teaches us that the leprosy of the soul is healed by baptism (cf. I Peter 3:21). The plan of salvation is so simple. Perhaps some figure God would expect a greater task of us to receive pardon from our terrible sins. At Jordan, we notice how important obedience is to God. His authority is clearly outlined in the Bible, though undermined by faithless humanists of all ages. At Jordan, we learn that where God specifies, we are not at liberty to generalize.

Crossing the Jordan affected the lives of Moses (who was forbidden to cross), David (who crossed it in flight), Elijah and Elisha (who crossed it miraculously), and Jacob, among others. Because Christ fulfilled all righteousness by being baptized of John [at the Jordan] (Matthew 3:15), the Jordan affects our lives too. And, because all of us will one day face the swelling current of death, the appearance

of Christ as the perfect man and Son of God will mean more to the faithful Christian than any earthly thing when we cross the river of time. Samuel Stennett, in his beautiful song, writes,

"ON JORDAN'S STORMY BANKS I STAND, AND CAST A WISFUL EYE,

TO CANAAN'S FAIR AND HAPPY LAND, WHERE MY POSSESSIONS LIE.

WE WILL REST IN THE FAIR AND HAPPY LAND,
JUST ACROSS ON THE EVERGREEN SHORE,
SING THE SONG OF MOSES AND THE LAMB,
AND DWELL WITH JESUS EVERMORE."

When we gather at the Jordan in our Bibles, we face the grand stories and symbols of God's power, mercy, and love.

What Can Wash Away My Sins?

B.J. CLARKE

The above question is the opening line to one of my favorite songs. God has clearly revealed the answer to this question unto us in His Word. Yet, some individuals have the audacity to presume that their answer to this question is more accurate than the one given by God.

1. Some would contend that just being a good, moral, upright person is enough to cleanse us from the dark blot of sin. However, the man described in Acts 10 was as good and moral and upright as they come. He was a devout man, one that feared God with all of his house. He was a man of prayer, benevolence and because he was just, he had a sterling reputation even among his rivals. His name was Cornelius. Even though he was morally good, he needed to hear words from a gospel preacher whereby he might be saved (Acts 11:14). As good as he was, his sins still needed to be cleansed.

2. Still others would affirm that being good and kind to your fellow man justifies you in the sight of God. I have sat down with members of the Lord's Church who talked about how "Brother So and So" is just the greatest fellow you'd ever want to meet. "He's a fine Christian; why he'd give you the shirt off of his back." And yet, forgotten is the fact that this

"good ole fella" is also guilty of being unfaithful to his wife, his children and his Lord. I have also heard preachers practically preach unfaithful members right into heaven just because they helped to build the church building or because of their assistance with some other work project. DEAR FRIENDS, BEING A GOOD NEIGHBOR AND HELPING OUT IN A PINCH IS FINE, BUT IT ISN'T ENOUGH TO SAVE US FROM THE WAGES OF SIN!! We need to learn that doing a few good deeds doesn't cancel out the sin of neglecting the assemblies of the church. We need to learn that moral indiscretions and sexual immorality are not forgotten by God just because we'd give people the shirt off of our backs!

3. What can wash away my sins? NOTHING BUT THE BLOOD OF JESUS! Our hope can be built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness. Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins (Hebrews 9:22). The following passages teach that only the shed blood of the Son of God can atone for our sins: (Matthew 26:28; Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:14; Hebrews 9:12-14; I Peter 1:18, 19; Revelation 1:5; 5:9; I John 1:7; Acts 20:28). "O precious is the flow . . ."

It's Time To Remodel The Church!

ALLEN WEBSTER

They're at it again. We are hearing, "Let's remodel the church. It's old and run-down. Nobody wants to be part of an old church. It needs updating." They are not talking about the building, but the church! They have outgrown the Scriptural blueprint and feel that the church of Christ needs modernizing to fit the modern times. Humm . . . do we need to remodel?

We would not argue that the church is old. It has been in the mind of God longer than dirt has been brown (Ephesians 3:11). It has been a part of American culture nearly as long as there has been American culture. It has been on earth going on two thousand years.

It is old, but is it outdated? There are many old things that need no updating. Nobody's arguing for a new constitution just because times have changed. Bull dozers are not waiting to level St. Peter's Cathedral

for a more modern approach to art. The White House is old but the President does not seem to mind. The sun has been around for a while, but it faces no political fight to keep its job. Folks have been feasting on food for a few thousand years, but no one seems to want to change this practice.

Do we need a new church for a new age? Let's start with the foundation. Do we need a new foundation? Who has come up with a better one? "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (I Corinthians 3:11); "And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone" (Ephesians 2:20).

Do we need a new temple on the foundation? "In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit" (Ephesians 2:21-22). No one has come up with a better idea than individuals washed in the Lamb's blood and sealed with the Spirit to make up the spiritual building of the church. Only those who have obeyed God's form of teaching (Romans 6:17) by death to sin (repentance, Romans 6:1), burial in water (baptism, Romans 6:4) and resurrection (to a new life, II Corinthians 6:17) have been chiseled to fit God's spiritual house. Those who were not taught truth have not been added to the house by Nazareth's Chief Carpenter (Acts 2:38, 47).

We need no new windows for the building is well-lighted with the Gospel (Psalm 119:105). It still provides our light enough to walk through this world of darkness into the land that has no night (Revelation 21:25).

We need no new furnishings for the Lord's Table still fills the soul's need for a feast (I Corinthians 11:23-28) and man's knees still fit the altar of prayer (I Thessalonians 5:17). Simple worship is sufficient for the Lord was a simple Man. He never jumped or shouted, played or plucked, dramatized or sensationalized, and does not expect us to. Since we are supposed to be worshipping God, and God does not change from generation to generation (Malachi 3:6; cf. Hebrews 13:8), then our worship needs no updating.

God made the church just as He wanted it. If it needs remodeling, He will do it. The only work He wants us to do is adding to it by teaching and baptizing sinners (Acts 2:41, 47).

The New Testament: A Pattern For Our Day?

DALTON KEY

Does New Testament teaching constitute a pattern for today's church?

There is no doubt that the first century church was expected to adhere to the pattern of inspired teaching. Paul instructed the Colossian brethren, "Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Colossians 3:17). He reminded the Corinthians, "The things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord" (I Corinthians 14:37). The church at Thessalonica was warned, "If any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed" (II Thessalonians 3:14). Peter wrote, "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God" (I Peter 4:11). And John, the "apostle of love" demanded total subjection to New Testament doctrine: "Whosoever goeth onward and abideth not in the teaching of Christ, hath not God: he that abideth in the teaching, the same hath both the Father and the Son" (II John 9, ASV).

Moreover, early congregations of the Lord's church were all expected to follow the same rule and submit to the same inspired teaching in fundamental areas such as salvation from sin (Romans 6:1-4; I Corinthians 12:13; Galatians 3:27), morality (I Corinthians 6:9, 10; Galatians 5:19-21; Colossians 3:5-9), family matters (Colossians 3:18-21; Ephesians 5:22-6:4), and Christian worship. (Hebrews 10:25; I Corinthians 11:20-29; 16:2; Acts 20:7). The Colossians were instructed, "And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and that ye likewise read the epistle from Laodicea" (Colossians 4:16).

But that was long ago. What about the church today? Our original question lingers still—Does New Testament teaching constitute a pattern for today's church?

The answer comes from Jude, an inspired writer and brother to our Lord. He exhorts his Christian readers to "contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints" (June 3, ASV). Notice that "the faith," that body of truth governing and enlightening God's children centuries ago, "the sum of that which Christians believe" (Delbert R. Rose), "that alone which is contained in the Bible" (James Macknight), has been "once for all delivered." It has been delivered

once, hence we need look for no additional revelations of divine truth. And it has been delivered "for all," or for all time; it is a permanent deposit, it will never be superseded, amended or modified. As it now stands, it is a perfect, adequate, complete and inviolable deposit of truth, providing the means with which to confute the gainsayer, and resist the advocate of false doctrine:

The answer? Yes.

What is Christianity?

JOHNNY RAMSEY

Christianity means that a person has a goal, a name, a purpose, a friend, an influence and a very bright future. To be a Christian, in the Bible usage of that word, means that I am free, forgiven, happy, anchored, urgent and concerned for others. To follow the Lord is the only way to walk the sands of time on the road to glory. Any other emphasis in life falls short of full joy and depth. There are personal relationships that exist between the Lord and His loyal friends. Notice these words that form the epitome of what it means to be a Christian.

Soldier

In a stirring battle with Satan we militantly use the sword of the Spirit (Ephesians 6:17) as we fight the good fight of faith against spiritual wickedness in high places. To be sure, this is not carnal combat with physical weaponry, but it is mighty toward God (II Corinthians 10:5) and is capable of making friends for the Lord out of former enemies. Christianity has the power to bring peace to nations, families and individuals. These words remind us of this truth:

Sometimes God calms the raging storm.

Sometimes He lets the storm rage
and calms His child.

Saint

The people of the Lord are pure, holy and distinctive (John 15:19); set apart for the master's cause (I Peter 2:9). A Christian will not allow the world to deter him from His march toward heaven. He will be the

light of the world and not permit darkness to arrest his progress in spiritual commitment.

Purer yet and purer I would be in mind

Dearer yet and dearer, every duty find . . .

Disciple

A disciple is a pupil, a learner—one who adheres to the mandates of his teacher—that is what it means to follow Jesus (John 8:31; 15:8). The power and purpose of discipline is an undergirding virtue of the gospel system. Without it we would only have chaos in Christianity. Revelation 3:19 proves that God uses chastening as an act of love designed to make us better people as we correct our lives so as to better serve the Savior. Easy street is the broad avenue many compromisers seek. It takes real effort to be a disciple of Christ. We should never forget the following maxim:

Some people had rather pray for forgiveness

then fight temptation.

Too many people reject the value of discipline by always following the line of least resistance.

Fellow-laborer

Paul reminded the Corinthians that they were co-workers with the Creator. In Philippians 2:12-13 we have an even fuller statement concerning this tremendous association. To serve the Redeemer is life's grandest relationship.

I walk with the King

In pastures so green . . .

We glory in the cross (Galatians 6:14) as we partake in the glory of saving souls and edifying the brethren.

Success is not a destination; it is a road . . .

As long as we live there will be wonderful work for us to do in Jesus' name. To be a follower of the Man of Calvary makes our days so meaningful and productive.

O land of rest for thee I sigh

When will the moment come

When I shall lay my burden down

And dwell in peace at home . . .

What is Christianity? It is truly the only life that counts for time and eternity. May we pursue this magnificent obsession with the zest and gratitude it so richly deserves.

Heaven holds all to me

Brighter its glory shall be

Joy without measure

Will be my treasure

Heaven holds all to me . . .

Such hope should motivate us to pursue a closer walk with God.

Never Take Me Back There

GLENN COLLEY

The Apostle Paul wrote to the "churches of Galatia," (Galatians 1:2). His heart was firmly set on defending the liberty in Jesus, that no one would bring Christians into bondage (2:4). The specific bondage threatening was from those who persuaded the disciples to go back into the law of Moses and adopt circumcision as part of their service to God. Because the law of Christ contained no such instruction, and because binding one part of Moses law obligated the individual to *all* of Moses law, Paul fought against these Jewish enemies.

How dangerous was this "religion" which included circumcision? "After all," some might argue, "the participants were devoutly religious." Here is Paul's answer:

"Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing . . . Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace" (Galatians 5:1-4).

Even Peter was influenced by these Jewish friends who sought to pull people away from the simple law of Jesus (Galatians 2). Paul "withstood him to the face" when Peter showed the Jews favour over the Gentile Christians. Paul's frustration peaked. He couldn't believe that

even Peter, a "pillar of the church" (Galatians 2:9), would be slipping from the truth of Jesus under the pressure of these religionists.

Now consider what Paul wrote: "For if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor" (2:18). Paul is saying, "I don't want to live like that. I've destroyed the things in my life which are against Christ and true service to Him. I will not give in to this false teaching with it's offensive practices!"

I suggest that we would all do well to adopt the same attitudes toward false doctrines and worship practices today. When an individual becomes a Christian, though he is at that time a "babe" in Christ (Hebrews 5:12-14), he has made a commitment to Christ which has a definite bearing on ALL sin. In that sense he has "destroyed" or "put to death" (Colossians 3:4-6) all attitudes and actions which he knows, or will learn, are against Jesus.

Don't try to bring me down with denominationalism, for I know only Christ's church (Matthew 16:18). Don't try to bring me down with women leaders in worship, for I want only to worship according to God's will (I Timothy 2:12). Don't try to bring me down with clergy class divisions, for Jesus taught us to all be brethren (Matthew 23:8-10). Don't try to bring me down with teaching on marriage and remarriage which ignores simple teachings of the Lord, for Jesus said what He meant and meant what He said (Matthew 19:9). Don't try to bring me down with a new hermeneutic which leaves men without solid truth, for I want the illuminated path the scriptures offer (II Timothy 3:16, I Timothy 2:15). Don't try to bring me down with pleas to unify with religions which teach baptism is irrelevant and unnecessary to a person's salvation, for I want to trust Jesus for my salvation (Mark 16:16). I'm a Christian; a simple follower of Jesus. I do not want to build again the things which I destroyed.

Stand tall. We can do all things through Christ who strengthens us. Don't let others pull you down into ideas contrary to God's book. Jesus told the Devil himself, "Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word which proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4).