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EDITORIAL

Points To Ponder

During this time of the year, as usual, people are frequently greeting each other with a "Happy New Year." What do they mean? Most mean nothing, they just say those words traditionally. Christ, however, almost two thousand years ago, taught the secret of true happiness when He preached to a great multitude. The ingredients of genuine happiness that Christ revealed are so valuable that if followed they will bring happiness to any person not only in this world but also in the world to come, in eternity. In other words Christ, has a plan of eternal happiness for those who would follow Him. Are you looking for genuine happiness in this sinful world? Do you really want to be happy in this year and in the remaining days of your life on earth? Hear what Christ has to say.

The general opinion in the world is : Blessed or happy are they that are rich, and great, and honorable. But Christ, in His sermon on the Mount, in Matthew chapter 5, taught : "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for

theirs is the kingdom of heaven." There is no place in the kingdom of God for those who are arrogant and haughty, and therefore their happiness, if it could be called happiness, is of a few days only. We remember the story of the rich man and Lazarus that Christ taught in Luke 16 chapter. How the rich man was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day. On the other hand Lazarus was full of sores and was laid at his gate, desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table. But the picture was changed the moment they both died and went to live in their eternal place. There the rich man was pictured in eternal flame being tormented, but Lazarus was being comforted in the paradise with righteous Abraham. The point Christ was making in the story was that the rich man's happiness was of a few days only, and after that he was going to face eternal torment, because of his arrogance. Lazarus, on the other hand, was going to enter into the eternal joy of the kingdom of heaven because he was poor in spirit. Christ said, if we want to be really happy then we must possess the spirit of poverty, we must live humble before God. Those who are sensible of their spiritual destitution, are not proud or conceited and arrogant, will indeed inherit the kingdom of God, because they possess the quality of being its citizen. The poor in spirit are those who do not depend on their own righteousness, but they look to God, supplicating the Father in heaven for all necessary blessings.

Secondly, Christ said, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." The world says, blessed are the merry. But according to Christ those who mourn are happy. The happiness that the world gives, in the end brings sorrow. Think of those who seek happiness in liquor and drugs, in money and in worldly enjoyments. What do they get in the end? Only sorrow, and eternal destruction. (Galatians 5 : 19-21; 1 Timothy 6 : 7-10). But Godly sorrow, that leads one to repentance, 2 Corinthians 7 : 10, brings salvation from sin (Luke 13 : 5), and finally eternal happiness in heaven. This is the reason Jesus taught, "Blessed are those who mourn." First, we need a penitential mourning for our own sins, and then we need to mourn for the world which lies in the darkness of sins. Such mourning will result in Godly sorrow, which will lead one to genuine repentance and ultimately

to the joy of salvation from sin. That is why James had exhorted Christians of his time by saying; "Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom." (James 4 : 9). If we are sorry for our sins and are concerned for our sinful world, then we are going to do something about it. We need to repent, change, and tell the world to do the same. Sin will destroy people, but repentance will save people. Sin offers a momentary happiness, but repentance from sin, through Godly sorrow, will bring eternal joy. Truly, therefore, blessed are those who mourn.

Thirdly, said Jesus, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." Meek are the ones who quietly submit themselves to God, to His will, and follow His directions and comply with His designs. The arrogant seek after power and dominion, but they are soon gone and forgotten. Meekness is opposed to arrogance. The meek, Christ said will inherit the earth in that they shall enjoy it more fully while in it, being content and satisfied and thankful to God for whatever they receive from Him. Also, because they will continue to influence for good the lives of men and women on earth after their departure from earth, (Revelation 14 : 13), like Christ who was meek and lowly (Philippians 2 : 5-9).

Fourthly, Christ taught, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled." Christ also taught at Matthew 4 : 4 that man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. Man is a dual being—he is body and soul. There is the outward man or personality, which is physical, but there is also the inward man, which is spiritual. (2 Corinthians 4 : 16). Just as man needs physical food and drink to live, so does he need the spiritual food and drink, which is the word of God, that instructs and guides man to live the kind of life for which did God create him. Also, hunger and thirst are appetites that return frequently and call for fresh satisfactions. Those who hunger and thirst continually labour for supplies. Christ taught, happy are they, who hunger and thirst for righteousness, and he promised that they shall be filled. To have the hunger and thirst for righteousness means to have the desire to know God's will. The Psalmist at Psalm

119 : 172 said that all commandments of God are righteousness. We should therefore be not only willing to know God's commandments but also be willing to do what God requires of us. When we will have that kind of attitude toward God and His will then that will bring real happiness and satisfaction to us, because we will know that we are living by the will of God.

Fifthly, revealing the secret of everlasting happiness, Christ said, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy." This is to say that those who are merciful toward others shall for themselves receive mercy from God. They are blessed, because they will obtain mercy. Even after we have believed in Christ and have obeyed His commandments to be saved, we shall still be saved eternally in heaven only because of the mercy of God. But we must remember though, that God will be merciful to those who are merciful to others. In His sermon on the mount Christ warned by saying, "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men, their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." (Matthew 6 : 14, 15). Our Lord also taught : "Therefore whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them." (Matthew 7 : 12). We want others to forgive us, so must we be ready to forgive others. Very often we exhibit the attitude of those sinful men who were getting ready to stone to death the woman who they were claiming had been caught in the very act of adultery. Jesus, who was sinless, on the other hand, said to the woman, "Neither do I condonm you, go and sin no more." (John 8 : 11). We should be merciful like Jesus, if we want God to be merciful to us. "For whatever a man sows, that he will also reap" says Galatians 6 : 7.

Sixthly, "Blessed are the pure in heart", said Jesus, "For they shall see God." Christ was referring here to the mind of man, Purity of heart or mind is freedom from evil desires and purposes. Whatever man does he first think or plan in his mind. At Mark 7 : 21-23 Christ taught, "For from within, out of the heart of man, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile a man." Therefore the wise writer of Proverbs

said, "Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life." This is to say that if our hearts are pure, our lives will be pure. And the happy thing about it is that those who are pure in heart shall see God. They will live with Him, in His fellowship, eternally. (Revelation 21 : 27). God is pure and holy, He cannot live with sin and uprightness. That's why Jesus warned His disciples, "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 18 : 3). In heart we should try to be like little children who hold no envy or malice toward others. The pure in heart shall see God by faith, as a source of happiness on earth, and shall one day see Him face to face in heaven.

Seventhly, Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God." The peacemakers are called children of God, because they possess the very characteristic of God, they resemble Him, they are most like God in His efforts to reconcile men unto Himself. If there is anything our world today need the most, it is peace. Just imagine, if every person today on this earth was a Christian—Christian in the real sense as the Bible describes—If that was true, there will certainly be no wars, and no envyings, and no hatreds. Then there will be only love and peace. Because then everyone will think others better than himself. (Philippians 2 : 3). He will treat others as he would want himself to be treated by others. (Matthew 7 : 12). Christ want His followers to be peacemakers and not troublemakers. His followers can bring peace to hearts that are troubled, by praying for them and by helping them. They can bring peace to their fellowmen who are at strife among themselves. And above all, they can help many to be reconciled to God by proclaiming the gospel of the cross, and by urging people to believe in Christ and obey Him to be at peace with God. Because God is the God of peace, therefore who will bring peace to others, they shall be called God's children.

Lastly, and eighthly, Christ said, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." In other words such will inherit the kingdom of God. Those who try to live righteously, and face Satan's wrath because

of their righteous living are indeed blessed. To Christians Peter wrote: "But Let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters. Yet," he said, "if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter." (1 Peter 4: 15, 16). He also said, "For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that we should follow His steps: Who committed no sin, nor was guile found in His mouth, who when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness..." (1 Peter 2: 21-24). Evil forces are at war against the forces of righteousness. Therefore, those who maintain a firm stand for righteousness may expect to be persecuted. Paul said, "Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution." (2 Timothy 3: 12). Talking to His followers, Jesus declared, "that in Me you have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (John 16: 33). Hence, those who desire to please God by living godly and righteous lives, cannot escape persecution in one form or another. But, remember, those who suffer persecution for righteousness' sake have the wonderful promise of the blessing of the kingdom of heaven. As a matter of fact persecution for righteousness drives the persecuted more closer to God for refuge, and the closer we get to God, the richer and fuller the blessing. May you indeed have A Happy New Year by following what Christ taught. God bless.

The Blessing Of Having A Brotherhood

J.C. Choate

The Bible teaches that when we obey the Lord that he saves us and adds us to his church and as such we become brothers and sisters in Christ. Paul wrote, "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been

baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female : for ye are all one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3 : 26-28).

We are told that Christ is the head of the body (Colossians 1 : 18) and that the body has many members. Paul explains, "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body : so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many." (1 Corinthians 12 : 12-14). He illustrates how the members of that one body all work together by showing how the physical body works. Then he says, "But now are they many members, yet but one body." (1 Corinthians 12 : 30). Again, "Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular." (1 Corinthians 12 : 27). As there is but one God, one Lord, one Spirit, and so on, there is also just one body. (Ephesians 4 : 4-6).

But what is the body ? Paul said that Christ "is the head of the body, the church : who is the beginning, the first born from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence. (Colossians 1 : 18). Speaking of Christ again, he 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 fulness of him that filleth all in all." (Ephesians 1 : 22, 23). So what do we have ? We have the scriptures telling us that Christ is the head of the body, that there is but one body with many members, who are Christians or children of God, and that the body is the church. Therefore, there is but one church, and that church belongs to Christ. Again, we know that the body is the church and the church is the body because Paul said so in Colossians 1 : 18 and Ephesians 1 : 22, 23.

The church is also spoken of as the house of God (1 Peter 4 : 17; 1 Timothy 3 : 15). The Hebrew writer speaks of Christ as being over his own house. (Hebrews 3 : 6). That house is said to be the church of God or the church of Christ. (1 Timothy

3 : 15). A house^s is used here to suggest a family, the Lord's family, that is, a spiritual family. Once more, Christ is the head and the members are brothers and sisters who make up that family.

The church is universal (Matthew 16 : 18), but there are congregations of it all over the world, and each congregation is made up of local members. In a country there is but one church, the Lord's church, and again it is made up of local congregations scattered over that country. Then again, each congregation is made up of local people who have obeyed the Lord and as a result he has added them to his church, of which the local congregation is a part. The congregations over the country, and the members that make up those congregations, are one in Christ. There is to be unity among them, since they are all a part of the Lord's one church. They all recognize Christ as their head, all wear the same name, all worship the same way, and all teach the same truths. There is a closeness between them, a oneness, a brotherhood, since they are all in the same family, and all are brothers and sisters in Christ. As such, when they visit with each other, they worship together. When they have meetings, they work together and encourage each other. When they have needs, they help one another. Locally they may be few, but countrywide they may be many. Individually they may be weak, but together they are strong. They are blessed to be a brotherhood. Peter said, "Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king." (1 Peter 2 : 17).

The scriptures talk about the Lord's people having brotherly love. The Hebrew writer said, "Let brotherly love continue." (Hebrews 13 : 1). Paul said to the Thessalonian Christians, "But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you : for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another." (1 Thessalonians 4 : 9). Peter listed brotherly love as being one of the Christian graces. He said that Christians should grow and to help them to do this then they should add brotherly love to their lives. (2 Peter 1 : 7). What is brotherly love ? It is love that one has for another, that is, as a brother loves a brother or a sister loves a sister. It means that where there is brotherly love that the members appreciate one another, that they are kind to each other, and work together and dwell together as one.

Again, the church or body of Christ is compared to members of a physical body as recorded in 1 Corinthians 12. Those members are not divided, working against each other, envious and jealous of one another and trying to hurt each other. Rather they are together, work as one, help each other, and feel for each other. And that is the way the Lord's family is to be. The members are to be united, working together, helping one another, being kind to each other. They would surely never oppose each other, try to hurt one another, be envious and jealous of the other, and so on. Why? Because they are joined together, they are united, and they are one. This is their strength. But to oppose one another and work against each other, then they would only hurt themselves, and who wants to do that?

We have a brotherhood then around the world, and here in our own country. Wherever we may go, we may visit with our brothers and sisters in Christ. We know that in doing so that we will always be welcome. We can worship together and encourage each other. Even though we may be of different nationalities or from different parts of the country, speak different languages, have different professions, as well as many other differences, still, in Christ we are one, we are on the same level, and we accept one and another as equal. Certainly the Lord does not see us as men and women, as being from different countries, speaking different languages, and so on, but he sees us only as his people, those he loves, and those who serve him. He also sees us as being those that he has saved, those who belong to him, and those whom he blesses, and those that he has promised to return for one day. Paul explained it like this: "And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." (Ephesians 4 : 32).

How wonderful it is to be a part of such a brotherhood, such an organization, the greatest institution in all the world.

Hindrances To Prayer

Steve Williams

Someone remarked, "Prayer should be the key of the day and the lock of the night." The early church was a praying church, and we should be also (Acts 2 : 42). The less we pray, the more we will not have the blessed life. (James 4 : 2). Every Christian should want to learn how to grow in prayer, and one effective way to grow in prayer is to remove anything that hinders prayer (1 Peter 3 : 7). Hindrances to prayer are the subject for this lesson. Especially recommended for further reading is **The Christian Doctrine of Prayer**—edited by James Hastings. Things which will hinder prayer include :

1. **Trouble in the Home.** If a husband and wife or parents and children are not living in harmony, the tension in relationships will hinder everyone's prayer life (1 Peter 3 : 7). Discord in the home will mean less spiritual growth.

2. **An unforgiving spirit.** If we are unforgiving toward other people, this will be a barrier in having acceptable prayer before God (Matthew 6 : 14-15; Ephesians 4 : 32). One time a man told another man, "I never forgive anyone." In response he was told, "Then I hope you never sin!" Forgiveness of others is commanded, and God and Christ provide the standard of how we ought to forgive in their exemplary behavior.

3. **A rebellious attitude.** If we are in the "kickative" mood towards God, our prayer life will die. Furthermore, God turns his ear away from hearing the cry of a rebellious person. King Saul is an example here (1 Samuel 15 : 23).

4. **Lack of concern for God's word.** When we turn our ear away from hearing God's word, our prayers are not pleasing to God (Proverbs 28 : 9). As one woman wrote on the flyleaf of her son's Bible when he went away to school, "This book will keep you from sin, or sin will keep you from this book." Likewise, if we have no concern for God's word, our prayer life will die.

5. Pretentiousness or insincerity. If our prayers are only being done for show to impress others, our prayer life is already dead. Jesus warned against doing any acts of piety merely to be seen of men. In his well-known parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector praying in the temple, the Pharisee did not go down to his house justified, because he prayed to impress other people.

6. Unconfessed, unrepented of sin. If we have sin in our lives for which we are unwilling to make confession and are impenitent, our prayer life will suffer. God does not listen with approval to the prayer of one who persists in evil (1 Peter 3 : 12). Sin builds a barrier between God and man, so that he does not answer prayer (Isaiah 59 : 1-2). As the Psalmist said, "If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened" (Psalm 66 : 18).

The son of a rich farmer wanted a bicycle, but the boy did not dare ask his father for one. The father had money to buy him almost anything the boy desired, but the boy knew he had no right to ask his father for anything. His report card had several bad grades on it. There was a big pile of wood still unstacked which he had neglected. There were other questionable acts he should not have done, and some other things he had left undone which he should have done. These were all a barrier which kept him from feeling right about approaching his father with a request for a bicycle. It is the same with us. Although we know we are not sinless, unrepented of sin is a barrier which will harm our prayer life.

7. Lack of faith in God. If we are going to be consistent and devoted in our prayer life, we must have faith in God. God wants us to believe, not doubt, and trust in him to answer prayer (James 1 : 7-8). If we believe prayer is nothing more than self-psychology and introspection, we will show little commitment to it. We will be serious about prayer only if we believe that we can communicate with the Almighty God in prayer.

8. Too busy. May be the most common hindrance to a meaningful prayer life for modern man is that we are too busy with the cares of this world. We do not think prayer is important enough to set aside time for it. We need to grow in devotion to

God to the point where we need prayer in order to get through the struggles of each day. Martin Luther once said, "I am so busy now that I find if I did not spend two or three hours each day in prayer, I could not get through the day." We ought to be that way.

Examine your life. Is there a hindrance which has kept you from being regular in approaching God's throne of grace in prayer? If so, work immediately to remove those barriers. Study how holy men and women of old were people of prayer. Study, for example, how prayer was important in the lives of the Psalmists (see Psalms 3:4; 4:1; 5:2-3; 5:8; 29:12; 42:8; 54:2; 55:1, 17; 61:1-2; 62:1-2; 65:19-20; 69:13; 71:12; 84:8; 86:6; 88:1-2, 13; 102:1-2; 116:1-2; 119:62, 62, 148; 130:1-2, 5-6; 141:2; 142:1-2; 143:1, 8; 145:1-2). Retire into the privacy of your own special quiet place and into the secrecy of your heart and commune with God.

The Church Of Christ Is Different

W.A. Hölley

The church of Christ is not just another denomination. Actually, denominationalism did not exist in the days of the Apostles. If such did exist, how can one account for the New Testament's silence regarding them?? Most denominational preachers are very proud of denominationalism and they spend much time in praising it; but the apostles never engaged in any such practice. We ask, "Why??"

The Bible teaches that differences between right and wrong must be shown. Preachers who pretend that there are no differences are false teachers. "And they shall teach my people; the difference between the holy and profane, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean" (Ezekiel 44:23; Cf. Ezekiel 22:26). "A great woe is pronounced upon them; that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter"

(Isaiah 5 : 20). Hence those preachers who contend that every thing is right, depending upon how one looks at it, are in grievous error.

For centuries, there have been those who contend that people should do as they please, regardless of what God Almighty says. In the days of the Judges when "there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Judges 17:6; 21 : 25), we can see this attitude at work. Anti-nomianism (situation ethics) contends that Christians are not under any moral law except their feelings produced by the Holy Spirit; but the Holy Spirit operates through his word, not through feelings. It is always a sin to violate the commands of God, moral or spiritual.

Not all churches are alike good. Is it possible for men to build churches which are just as good and right as that church established by Jesus Christ? Take a look at man-made churches they have different names, different creeds, different terms of membership, different systems of government; some claim to perform miracles, some do not; plus other differences too numerous to mention. Jesus prayed for the unity of all true believers (John 17 : 20-23), but denominational churches can never be truly one, because it (denominationalism) is a Babel of total confusion (Genesis 11 : 1-9; I Corinthians 14 : 39).

Churches of Christ are bound to "speak as the oracles of God" (I Peter 4 : 11). Churches of Christ have no creed but the Holy Bible (II Timothy 3 : 15-17; I Peter 1 : 20-21). The Holy Spirit revealed and confirmed the full revelation of God (Jude 3; Hebrews 2 : 1-4; Mark 16 : 17-20). But the Holy Spirit did not reveal and confirm any denominational creeds. Is it reasonable to think for one sober minute that the Holy Spirit revealed and confirmed all the contradictory doctrines of denominational churches? Denominational churches do not speak the same language, when it comes to their teaching.

Denominational churches oppose each other—until they find it advantageous to cooperate together in their opposition of the churches of Christ. The foregoing statement has been proven true a thousand times over! They will parrot: "one church is

as good as another" till they come to the church of Christ, and then they change their tune!

According to the Bible, the church of Christ was established by Jesus Christ on the first Pentecost after his glorious resurrection. (Matthew 16 : 16-19; Mark 9 : 1; Acts 1 : 8; 2 : 1-4, 41, 47; 11 : 13-15). The church of Christ and the kingdom of God are one (Ephesians 5 : 5). The kingdom of God is in existence now (Colossians 1 : 13-14; Hebrews 12 : 28; Revelation 1 : 9).

Those who are Christians are in the kingdom now! The kingdom of God is neither premillennial, nor postmillennial. In fact, the Bible says nothing about a literal reign of Christ on the literal earth for a literal thousand years. Jesus' kingdom is not of this world (John 18 : 36). At Jesus' second coming, the earth and all that pertains to it shall be destroyed or burned up (II Peter 3 : 10-13). If one is not in the Lord's kingdom when he dies he never will be!!

What are some of the peculiar characteristics, not true of Romanism nor denominationalism, but which mark the church of Christ, thus showing their differences?

(1) Jesus is the builder of his church (Matthew 16 : 18-19). Jesus did not leave the building of his church to men (such as Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Wesley, et al). "Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it. . ." (Psalms 127 : 1).

(2) Jesus is the foundation of his church (I Corinthians 3 : 10-11). Hence, the Lord's church was not built upon Peter nor any other human being! In Matthew 16 : 18-19, let it be noted that the Greek word translated "rock" is feminine and refers to the foundation upon which Jesus built his church. "Petros" (the Greek for "Peter"), which means "a stone," is one thing; and "Petra," which means a ledge of rock, is another. Jesus did not say that his church would be upon "a stone," a pebble; but upon a solid "ledge of rock." A pebble is too small for a foundation, but a ledge of rock—Jesus Christ—furnished sufficient foundation for the greatest superstructure, possible.

(3) Jesus is the head of his church (Ephesians 1 : 22-23; Colossians 1 : 18, 24). Jesus has not abdicated or renounced

this exalted position in favor of the Pope, nor of any other man. No passage of Scripture teaches that the Pope is the head of the Lord's church. Book, chapter, verse please!

(4) Jesus purchased his church with his own blood (Acts 20 : 28; I Peter 1 : 18-19; I Corinthians 6 : 15-20). Romanism and denominationalism were not purchased by the precious-blood of Christ. Human institutions are not covered by Christ's blood.

(5) Jesus is the Saviour of his body which is the church (Ephesians 5 : 23; Colossians 1 : 24). Jesus does not add unsaved people (those who have obeyed commandments of men) to his church; nor does he add any men to human churches (Acts 2 : 41-47).

(6) Verily, Jesus adds the saved to his church (Acts 2 : 36-38, 41, 47). Among denominationalism, "joining the church of one's choice," is a very prominent doctrine, but no one can "join" the Lord's church. Why? Because, when one obeys the gospel of Christ, the Lord adds that one to his church.

(7) How can an honest soul determine, in the wilderness of denominationalism, which church is the Scriptural church? Four cardinal points must be considered : (1) Is the church scriptural in origin? (2) Is it scriptural in doctrine? (3) Is it scriptural in name? (4) Is it scriptural in practice? If the church of which you are a member does not meet this criterion, then you belong to the wrong church. You are respectfully requested to read your own Bible, believe what it teaches, obey its commands, and live faithfully according to the demands of God Almighty, if you would inherit heaven. Will you do it today?

Why Did I Change Churches?

Tom Lynch

There are many wonderful articles written by brethren who have come from various denominational backgrounds to obedience of the gospel of Jesus Christ. I dearly love to read these articles because I came out of such error myself. It is inspiring to read

of the changes others have made, and I am often able to gain information which helps in working with those who are presently caught up in this evil.

I am troubled by some trends among some Christians. Those of us who have broken from denominationalism are being forced to consider whether or not such a move was really necessary? Too many members of the Lord's church are now adopting the idea which those in denominations have long affirmed—specifically, that there are sincere, knowledgeable and devout Christians in all of the various denominations, and that while critical doctrinal differences exist, we can still have fellowship with one another in those areas where there is agreement. If this were true wish it had been taught in 1977. Then I simply could have stayed in the Southern Baptist Church. By doing so I could have avoided a great deal of personal anguish which included severed friendships and family conflict.

As I studied the scriptures with members of the church of Christ in Indian Mound, Tennessee, one point they would constantly stress, regardless of any arguments I presented for or against any position—whether it was the preacher, elders, teenagers or any others: emphasis was placed on Biblical authority. I presented what could probably be regarded as "standard" Baptist arguments, and all were answered unashamedly with: "what does the Bible say?" That stance impressed me. It was that point above all others that convinced me of my error.

Looking back on my time as a Baptist, I believe I could classify myself as having been as sincere, knowledgeable and devout as any in a denomination could be. To attest my sincerity; I attended all activities of the church, taught a Bible class, sang in the choir, sang in a youth group that performed at functions of various churches, organized youth revivals, went door-knocking, and would "testify" of my conversion experience whenever asked to do so. Could any question my sincerity?

As for being knowledgeable, consider that before ever talking to a member of the church I had come to realize Sunday is not the Sabbath, and "sabbath-keeping" was at the very least questionable. I had also questioned points such as salvation outside the

church, and if it is consistent with the Bible for so many churches to exist.

I present none of these facts in an effort to brag on myself. It would certainly be inappropriate for a Christian to be boastful of his former error. I mention these things only to show that I was sincere, knowledgeable, and devout, and therefore was worthy of the fellowship some Christians are willing to extend today.

The problem with my former condition is that I was not walking "in the light, as he is in the light" (I John 1 : 7).

Rather I could more accurately be described as walking in the light, as "I" was in the light.

The matter rests heavily upon that which I have already identified as having convinced me of the error of denominationalism. Respect for the authority of the sacred scriptures.

Jesus said "ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8 : 32). Clearly, scriptural authority provides the basis of that truth Christ spoke of so highly. "Truth is not one's own "version" of truth, nor one's "understanding" of truth. Did Uzzah's own concept of right and wrong justify his actions? (II Samuel 6) in defiance of the word of God? Did the light Saul of Tarsus believe himself to be walking in (Acts 26), justify his stand against the truth of God? We must never permit ourselves to regard scriptural authority as a small matter.

As I write these words I can say without reservation that I am "proud" to be (in a righteous sense) just a Christian. Included in this thought is the fact that I am "proud" to be out of denominationalism. Through teaching the word of God I have been able to persuade a few others of the error involved in joining themselves to man-made ideas. I plan to continue to do this as long as I am able. I pray to God that brethren will cease to hinder such efforts by telling those in error that they are all right, and they can be fellowshipped as they are.

Honesty

Robert Ball

Honesty is one of the greatest virtues a person can possess. It is a virtue that is absolutely necessary for one to have to be saved. In his explanation of the parable of the sower, Jesus said, "And that in the good ground, these are such as in an honest and good heart, having heard the word; hold it fast, and bring forth fruit with patience" (Luke 8 : 15). The only place where the word of God can take root and grow to produce fruit is in an honest and good heart.

Under the law of Moses the children of Israel were told, "Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment, in measures of length, of weight, or of quantity. Just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin, shall ye have : I am Jehovah your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt" (Leviticus 19 : 35-36). The Psalmist said, "Who shall ascend into the hill of Jehovah ? And who shall stand in his holy place ? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto falsehood, and hath not sworn deceitfully" (Psalm 24 : 3-4). Solomon said, "A false balance is an abomination to Jehovah; but a just weight is his delight" (Proverbs 11 : 1). "Lying lips are an abomination to Jehovah; but they that deal truly are his delight." (Proverbs 12 : 22).

During the days of his personal ministry, Jesus said, "Thou knowest the commandments, Do not kill, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud..." (Mark 10 : 19). Paul said, "Providing for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men" (2 Corinthians 8 : 21 KJV). "Brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just...think on these things" (Philippians 4 : 8 KJV).

The Bible has much to say about the virtue of honesty. But despite all the Bible teaches about being honest, there are many who speak with lying lips, cheat, steal, and bear false witness. These sins are prevalent in every area of life. Therefore, it should

come as no surprise that people will be dishonest with the word of God, the Bible.

Peter tells of those who wrest the Scriptures to their own destruction (2 Peter 3 : 16). Paul said, "Therefore seeing we have this ministry, even as we obtained mercy, we faint not : but we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God" (2 Corinthians 4 : 1-2). It is possible to handle the word of God deceitfully. All such handling is wrong.

Let each of us be determined to be honest. Let us not handle the word of God deceitfully. But, as Paul said, "Give diligence to present thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, handling aright the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2 : 15). The writer of the Book of Hebrews said, "Pray for us : for we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly" (Hebrews 13 : 18 KJV).

What's Your Price ?

We live in a time of great wealth. This wealth presents a constant temptation to all of us to forget our values and do things that we know are wrong.

We must remember, however, that those that give into this temptation "have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows" (1 Timothy 6 : 10). We all need to be like the tugboat captain in the following story.

A man boarded a tugboat on the Mississippi River and approached the Captain with an offer. "If you will carry a package up-river for me I will give you \$500." The wise old Captain knew the package probably contained illegal drugs and told the man. "No."

The man then said he would pay the captain \$5000 to carry the package up-river. The Captain answered with another "No."

Again the man raised his price, offering the Captain \$20,000 to carry the package up the Mississippi. At this point the Captain reached down and came up with a .44 magnum handgun, pointed it straight at the man and ordered him off his boat.

"Why are you getting so upset?" the man exclaimed as he hurried back to the shore. "Because," the Captain replied, "You were getting too close to my price!"

Be sure you stop the temptation of materialism before it gets to your price!

Examine Everything Carefully

Peter Taylor

The People of Berea were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind and searched the scriptures daily to ascertain whether those things were so. (Acts 17 : 11). That is why the apostle Paul admonished the brethren at Thessalonica, "Do not quench the Spirit, do not despise prophetic utterances, but examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; abstain from every form of evil." (1 Thessalonians 5 : 19-22). These instructions were not only to the Christians of the first century, but for all ages, for you and for me.

We should not believe everything being taught in the name of the Bible today, because there are many false teachings being taught in the world. We should try and test all teachings in the light of the Bible. Hold fast and cling to that which is really the word of God. More often in the religious world of today people are contended merely in anything that comes their way as the Bible teaching, taught by various denominational teachers, and such are the causes of division in Christianity. (1 Corinthians 1 : 10-13).

We should not overlook the fact that God has spoken to man

already through His Son as we read in Hebrews 1:1,2. He is not talking through people, but through His book. He is speaking to you as much as he does to me through His book. He is not telling different things to different people. The problem is that we are most times too busy learning the truth by ourselves. People are going to people for learning God's will instead of going to the Book of God that contains the whole will of God. The truth is not some thing that man believes or assumes, rather what God says in His Bible is the truth that we need to study and learn and obey if we want to be saved in heaven. Truth is not found in books written by men whosoever they might be, the truth, rather is found in God's book. Therefore if we want to know whether a particular teaching or practice is in harmony with the will of God, then we need to go to the Bible. We need to examine everything in the light of what God has revealed in His book. The cause of division is man-made teaching and doctrine. However, the teaching of God's book will unite us all in one body, one faith, and one spirit.

'Daddy, Have I Ever Seen A Christian?'

Edsel Burleson

A little boy once asked his dad what a "Christian" was. The dad replied that a Christian is a person who loves and obeys God. He loves friends and neighbors and expresses his appreciation for other Christians. He even loves his enemies and prays for them that they might be blessed. He prays often and blesses God's holy name in reverent worship. He is kind, considerate, gentle, courteous in speech, and in his selfless attitude. He lives a life that is pure and holy and Christ-like through and through. The little boy thought for a moment and then asked another question: "Daddy, have I ever seen one?"

Most of the New Testament is instruction designed to help us know how to live so as to bring honor to God. How sad that so

many are "hearers" but not "doers" of the word. For this reason many little boys could very well ask, "Have I ever seen a Christian?" Jesus said, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 5 : 16).

Someone told of a good brother who was in a field when a neighbor came over to talk about insect trouble. The neighbour was very anxious to get his plowing done, but he took time to visit.

After a while the neighbor said, "I hear you are having a good interest at church." "Fair," the brother replied. "You say that the church is the only one mentioned in the Bible," the neighbor asked. "Yes, Sir, it is," replied the brother proudly. "You must be very happy to belong to such an important church," suggested the neighbor. "Well, yes, I am," the brother replied.

"Sometime I would like to go with you and learn more about the church," offered the neighbor. "Fine," said the brother, "I'll be glad to take you any time," "Isn't tonight midweek meeting night for you folks?" asked the interested friend. "Yes, it is," was the brother's answer, "but I CAN'T go tonight; I've got too much work to do."

The friend said, "Well, I don't reckon your church is any more important than any other. WE don't think one has to belong to the church or attend its services to be saved; and if YOUR work is more important than that of the church, I reckon your church isn't very important either."

As the neighbor walked away the brother started his tractor, jerking it into gear, and muttered something about narrowmindedness. No, he didn't attend the service that night nor has he been able to bring his neighbor with him since. Nor does his neighbor seem interested in talking religion with him any more.

Who Is Jesus ?

Brad T. Bromling

Who is Jesus ? Virtually everything imaginable has been said of his identity. The cumulative force of this has been utter confusion in the world regarding the true nature of Jesus ! Whereas his enemies have maliciously accused him of being many unholy things, his "friends" have assumed him to possess other—equally erroneous—identities. When he asked his closest followers to report what the populace was saying of him, they responded : "Some say John the Immerser, some, Elijah; and others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets" (Matthew 16 : 14). While some thought He was simply a carpenter, others with anger proposed that he was possessed of a devil. (Mark 6 : 3; John 7 : 20).

Nor did this confusion dissipate after his triumph over the powers of death. The Docetics of the second century taught that he was all God and no man; the Ebionites taught that he was all man and no God; the Jehovah's Witnesses say Jesus was simply a perfect man; some Mormons accuse him of polygamy; the re-incarnationists believe he was one of them; the Muslims believe that he was just one among many good teachers; and the atheists of today allege that Jesus was insane !

But, according to the Bible, who is this Jesus of Nazareth ? One text which answers this question authoritatively is Colossians 1 : 16-23. In this passage Paul stresses three facets of the scriptural identity of Jesus.

Creator

First, he reminds us that Jesus is the CREATOR : "...for in him were all things created, in the heavens and upon the earth, things visible and things invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers; all things have been created through him, and unto him; and he is before all things, and in him all things consist" (Colossians 1 : 16, 17). That means that not only was he the active agent in creation, but that he is himself God.

The deity of Jesus is loudly proclaimed in the Scriptures. In Genesis 1 : 26 we are given the first clue of this, for there we are told : "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our image, after our likeness..." Although God is a BEING who certainly defies a complete comprehension by finite minds, he has given us a few glimpses into his character, one of these is that there are three personages involved in the Godhead (Matthew 28 : 19). It is with this understanding that readers of Scripture must come to John 1 : 1-3 : "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that hath been made." As the Jews correctly perceived, when Jesus called himself the "Son of God," he meant a great deal more than did Luke when he called Adam the "son of God" (Luke 3 : 38). Jesus meant that he was equal with God (John 5 : 18), and for this reason they "sought the more to kill him !"

Further, Jesus is not only the originator of the creation, but he is also its maintainer ! In the word "consist" (Colossians 1 : 17) inheres the idea of "hold together." This is the same thought expressed in Hebrews 1 : 3, where it says that Jesus is "upholding all things by the word of his power..." Here is an impressive statement of Jesus' divine power : he simply "spoke" the universe into existence (Psalm 33 : 9); and by his very "word" the universe continues to operate ! Any description that fails to recognize Jesus' deity fails to describe the Jesus of the Bible.

Redeemer

Second, Paul informs us that Jesus is the REDEEMER : "in whom we have our redemption, the forgiveness of our sins," (verse 14; cf., verses 20-23). The term "redemption" conveys the idea that a ransom price was paid to buy another's freedom from bondage. The very theme of the Bible is the "redemption" of mankind from the slavery of sin (Romans 3 : 23; 6 : 16-23). Without Jesus, there is no redemption ! In redeeming man, Jesus fills two offices : (1) He is the sacrificial lamb that was slain as a sin offering. And (2) he is the high priest assigned by God to

offer the blood of that sacrifice (John 1 : 29; Hebrews 4 : 15). Jesus paid the only acceptable price to secure man's freedom from sin—his pure blood (I Peter 1 : 18-19). Any description of Jesus that misses his redemptive mission is inadequate.

Ruler

Third, Jesus is the RULER: "And he is the head of the body, the church : who is the beginning, the first born from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence" (verse 18; cf. verses 10, 13). This facet of Jesus' character is shown by Paul's use of two figures of speech. First, Paul refers to the church as Christ's Kingdom : "[God] delivered us out of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of his love" (verse 13). This figure implies that Jesus is a king, and as such he has complete authority over his subjects (Matthew 28 : 18; John 12 : 48). As our monarch, Jesus does not merely preside over a democracy. (as an American president might). Instead, what he says is law ! This is the meaning of Peter's statement, "Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly, that God hath made him both LORD and Christ, this Jesus whom ye crucified" (Acts 2 : 36).

Second, Paul refers to the church as the body of which Christ is the head (verse 18). A human body which is functioning correctly is in complete submission to the will of its brain. What the head thinks determines the attitude, posture, direction, and well-being of the whole body. Just so, Christ demands the same influence over his church : "and [God] put all things in subjection under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all" (Ephesians 1 : 22-23).

Any answer to the question "Who is Jesus ?" that contradicts or fails to consider the Lordship of Jesus is unbiblical and useless.

Who is Jesus ? Jesus is the CREATOR. Like clay in a potter's hands, who are we to do less than yield to his will (Romans 9 : 21) ? Jesus is our REDEEMER, and like the two men from Jericho who were freed from the bondage of blindness, we ought to arise and gratefully follow him (Matthew 20 : 34).

Jesus is our KING, and as his subjects we must serve him with all reverence and humility.

Yes, the world is confused over the identity of the Nazarene; and this confusion will result in the condemnation of many. If those of us who call ourselves his friends fail to recognize—and teach others—these facets of Jesus' character, we will fare no better in the presence of Jesus who then will be our Judge! (II Timothy 4 : 1).

Where Are You Going ?

Dana Watford

Recently, I had the opportunity to speak to a group of prisoners at the State Penitentiary. I am happy that I was able to share the gospel of Christ with those men. But a somewhat amusing incident took place as we were leaving the building to go back across the prison yard. We were late getting through with the service (through no fault of my own) and instead of being able to walk across the yard when it was empty, we had to walk when it was full of prisoners going back to their cell blocks. I was out in the front of our group talking to one of the prisoners who had been at the service, when I realized that I went through a gate that I had not remembered coming through when we came in. I was going into the cellblock with the prisoners! I heard someone ask from behind, "Where are you going?" Several of the prisoners invited me to come in with them! Of course, I refused. When someone asked me why I was going that way, the only reply I could come up with was, "That's what happens when you follow the wrong crowd." It was somewhat comical when I said it, but the truth of it was plain to see.

There is perhaps no explanation given more often for our actions than: "Everybody else is doing it." This is given to explain everything—from our choice of clothes, to our willingness to engage in the same sins as those around us. It is our refuge

against the pleas of our friends for a life that is more noble and pure. "Everybody's doing it" seems to be the standard of too many today. It would be wise for us to consider this standard of following the crowd in light of some things which we know from the past. What if we had lived with Adam and Eve in Eden. Everybody present disobeyed God! Would you have followed the crowd on that day? What if you had lived in Noah's time? If someone had asked you, "Where are you going?" Would you have been walking toward the ark with that magnificent minority? or, following the multitude away from it to do evil, and to death?

This attitude of following the crowd is dangerous! It assumes that the standard of right is determined by men. Nothing could be farther from the truth! Men have never been able to agree on an acceptable way of life, much less follow such a standard (Jeremiah 10 : 23).

The only way to know what is right is to learn what God has said! His word alone is the standard. (Isaiah 49 : 22).

You Must Begin !!

A teakettle singing on the stove was the beginning of the steam engine. A shirt waving on a clothesline was the beginning of a balloon, the fore-runner of the Graf Zeppelin. A spider web strung across a garden path suggested the suspension bridge. A lantern swinging in a tower was the beginning of the pendulum. An apple falling from a tree caused the discovery of the law of gravity.

So it is with the life of a man. Once he has made a beginning at something, no one can predict the end result. Simple, seemingly meaningless beginnings often have wonderful endings. But, the beginning must be made. The first step must be taken.

Christian service is the same way. Only those who begin can become the giants of Christian service. Some, because they feel incapable of doing great deeds in the vineyard of the Lord, never

enter the field: No one has ever stepped directly into great pathways of service. Everyone must begin with the teakettles and spiderwebs of service. Then, having made a beginning, he can progress to the greatest aspects of service.

Don't wait to serve the Lord until you think you are ready to do the big things. Begin where you are. Do the things that you can do. Once you make a beginning, no one can predict the final greatness of your service.

—Author not known to the editor

Short Sermons

There is no limit to what a good man can do if he does not care who gets the credit.

× × ×

If religion has not changed you, you need to change your religion.

× × ×

There is no good way to be bad and no bad way to be good.

× × ×

Soft words may appease an angry man; bitter words never will.

× × ×

Snobbery is the pride of those who are not sure of their position.

× × ×

Anger is a wind which blows out the lamp of the mind.

× × ×

The excellence of many discourses consists in their brevity.

× × ×

He lives in true repose who bridles his passions.