

THE BIBLE TEACHER

Editor :
J. C. CHOATE

Associate Editor
SUNNY DAVID

Published by Church of Christ, Box 3815,
New Delhi-110049

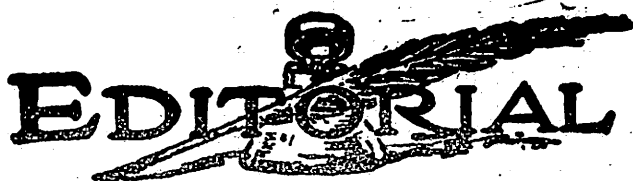
Pleading For The Restoration Of Pure New Testament Christianity

Vol. 17

September 1986

No. 5

EDITORIAL



The Meaning of Faithfulness

One of the all important things that we think of when we are discussing the Christian life is faithfulness. But what is faithfulness? What is involved? Do we understand it? Do we practice it?

Perhaps one of the best ways to describe what it means to be faithful would be to take a look at some of the different aspects of our physical lives. For example, when we talk about one being a faithful worker then we mean by that that he stays on the job, that he is dependable and reliable, that he can be counted on. If he is unfaithful then that means that he is just the opposite and not many people will even bother to use him.

We talk about a faithful husband or wife. We mean by that they are loyal to one another, that they are not cheating on each other. Again, we speak of various ones being faithful to pay their

honest debts or a student being faithful in his school attendance.

What about in sports? It is not enough to enter the race, but one must finish the race if he expects to receive the reward. And so it is with hundreds of other things.

Now we understand all of those kind of things. But what about the spiritual side? Please understand there is much more to being a Christian than just professing Christianity. One must not only become a Christian but he must also remain a Christian to go to heaven. That is where faithfulness comes into the picture.

First, God himself has always been faithful. The Apostle Paul said, "If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful : he cannot deny himself." (2 Timothy 2:13). He is simply saying here that regardless of what we do, or fail to do, that God is always there, that he will go on being the God that he is, that he will never change. It is because of this assurance that we have in him, of the confidence that we can have in him, that makes it easier for us to believe in him and to obey him.

God has never failed. He has never gone back on his word. The Hebrew writer said, "Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; for he is faithful that promised." (Hebrews 10:23). Peter spoke of God as being a faithful creator. (1 Peter 4:19).

Second, Christ is faithful. He came down from heaven to live among men and to die on a cruel cross that we might be saved. He loves us and wants us to be saved. Peter tells us that he is not slack concerning his promises. (2 Peter 3:9). He has said that he would be with us always even unto the end of the world. (Matthew 28:20). Even in time of temptation, he will help us to overcome. The Hebrew writer declared, "Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." (Hebrews

4:14-16). John says that he is faithful and just to forgive. We read concerning him, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9). So in every way he is faithful. There is no other way to describe him.

Third, and likewise, the Lord expects faithfulness on the part of his people. This is a reasonable service. (Romans 12:1,2).

Faithfulness means that one is dependable. He is reliable. He is predictable. You can always count on him. Paul said, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord." (1 Corinthians 15:58).

Faithfulness means that one is obedient. He recognizes the Lord's authority. He puts Christ first in all that he says and does. (Matthew 6:33). He is a doer of the word. (James 1:22).

Faithfulness means that one goes on believing, obeying, and serving. Christ said, "Be thou faithful unto death and I will give you a crown of life." (Revelation 2:10).

Faithfulness leads one to a harvest, to a victorious occasion, to an eternal crown. James says, "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation : for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him." (James 1:12).

But this is just the beginning. Faithfulness means all of this and much more. It is a life of service, giving, growing, and being strong. It brings to mind work, service, loyalty, and dedication. It means being in Christ and Christ being in that one, of having the spirit of Christ, and being Christ-like.

Have you obeyed Christ? If so, are you his faithful follower? Can he count on you? Will you continue with him as long as you live? If so, then you will be among the faithful that will be given a home in heaven where you will be able to live with your Lord and Master forevermore. That will be the reward for your faithfulness. Surely it is a small price to pay. To God be all the glory for all of his grace and mercy.



associate editorial

Can One Be Rebaptised ?

There is no such thing taught in God's book, the Bible, as rebaptism. The Bible records that there is only one baptism, "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all." (Ephesians 4:4-6). Just as there can't be two God, and just as there can't be two Christ or two Lord, so there cannot be two or more baptisms. Sometimes people misunderstand when they are shown the fact that they were not Scripturally baptised when they went through some ceremony of "baptism" based on human teaching. Realising their mistake then they want to know if they needed to be re-baptised. Since there is only one Scriptural baptism, therefore there cannot be another or a re-baptism. A rebaptism would mean a second baptism that would replace the first one.

The shocking fact is this that there are a great number of people on God's earth today who think that they have already been baptized according to the command of Christ, when in fact they have never been really baptized as the Bible teaches. For example, all those people who have been sprinkled with water, they are not yet baptized according to the Bible. I know thousands of people, young, middle-age, and older people, many of them are very religious and some of them are preachers and religious leaders, they are not scripturally baptised, because they have been sprinkled with water when they were little infant babies.

Most members of denominational churches, both Catholics and Protestants, take their infant children to the "Priest" or

"Pastor" so that they would be baptised. The "Pastor" would then lead the congregation of the assembled people on that occasion into a "Baptismal Service" and would sprinkle a little water on the infant child. This is accepted by people in denominational churches as baptism. But it is not. It could be sprinkling or some religious rite, but not baptism of the Bible. Because Bible baptism means a burial or an immersion in water. The Greek word "BAPTIZO" from which the word baptism has come means a "burial" or "immersion". Therefore when we read about baptism in the Bible, it says, "Buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead." (Colossians 2:12). And, "Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection." (Romans 6:4,5). Again, in the case of the Ethiopian eunuch, "Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, "See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptised?" Then Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptised him. Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more, and he went on his way rejoicing." (Acts 8:36-39).

By being Scripturally baptised one obeys the form of the doctrine. Notice. To Christians at Rome Paul wrote and said in his epistle to them, "But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness." (Romans 6:17-18). Before, he said they were slave of sin, but now they had become servants of righteousness, having been set free from sin. because they had obeyed from the heart that form of the doctrine. Notice, to be free from sin or to be saved from sin, they had obeyed the doctrine. They had done something from heart, with understanding and realization. They weren't little children or infant, but they

were grown up people, who realized that they were in sin and then they obeyed the doctrine to be free from sin. Again, note, they had obeyed that form of the doctrine. What was that? The same apostle explains, "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures." (1 Corinthians 15 : 1-4). In obeying the form of the doctrine of Christ's death, burial and resurrection then they had done the same thing. Christ died, so they died to sin through their repentance from sin which preceded baptism. (Acts 2 : 38). Christ was buried, so they were buried with Him through baptism into death. Then Christ rose again, and so they were raised from the grave of water of baptism. Therefore they had obeyed, by being baptised, that form of the doctrine.

So we can see that water sprinkling is not true baptism of the Bible. And those who have been thus sprinkled have never obeyed that form of the doctrine which sets one free from sin. They need to be baptized. Likewise, if someone, after understanding that baptism is a burial, was merely immersed in water, not realizing the great importance of baptism or without a proper understanding of the purpose of baptism as taught in God's word, then that person need to obey from the heart that form of the doctrine. True, baptism is a burial in water, but it is not merely a burial. One must be baptized with a proper understanding. One must be taught before baptism. That is why Christ had said that before baptizing them make them disciples. (Matthew 28 : 19). One must know that according to the Bible, one is baptized : to be saved (Mark 16 : 16); for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2 : 38); to wash away sins (Acts 22 : 16); to put on Christ or to get into Christ (Galatians 3 : 27); and to be able to walk in the newness of life. (Romans 6 : 3,4).

Those who reject this simple and clear teaching of the Bible they have gone in the way of Naaman who rejected God's command of dipping seven times in the river Jordan to get cleansed of leprosy. (2 Kings 5 : 1-14). One must understand the fact, that it is not the act of baptism or the water that saves one, but it is the obedience to that form of the doctrine which brings salvation. Just as Naaman was cleansed of his leprosy, not because he simply dipped himself in the Jordan, but because he had obeyed

the command of God (2 Kings 5:14), and just as the blind man was healed when he did that what Christ had commanded him to do. (John 9:7). So we are saved from our sins by the grace of God and through the blood of Jesus Christ when we obey His command.

“And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.” (Acts 22:16). Can we help you ?

The Story Of A Man And A Weed!

Basil Overton

Behold, a man went forth and found a weed. We dried it and began to burn it and inhale the smoke from it. After many years of burning this weed and sucking its smoke into his precious, God-made lungs, he learned it was very harmful to his lungs, his heart, and his health in general. He also learned that blowing smoke from the weed into the garments and hair and faces and noses of those who did not burn the weed and suck its smoke into their bodies was exceedingly offensive to them.

Finally, the man held up a small roll of the dried weed that was wrapped in paper and burning at one end of the roll, and he said to it, “You have controlled and hurt me and others long enough! You are a weed, and I am a man! I am not going to suck your smoke into my precious body anymore. (Psalm 139:14).

How about you! Are you man (or woman) enough to stop letting a weed control you?

Loving Your Enemies

Jonn Stacy

“But I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the

children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans do the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans do so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:44-48).

First of all how should we love our enemies? We can love our enemies by forgiving them. Jesus forgave those who crucified him (Luke 23:34). Stephen forgave those who stoned him (Acts 7:59-64). Jesus and Stephen did not forgive their enemies for what they were. They forgave them because of what Jesus and Stephen were! Too many times we hold grudges. We want those who have offended us to crawl in the dirt. We are slow to forgive because we do not truly forgive our enemies. If we will not forgive those who have sinned against us, we will not be forgiven. (Matthew 6:14-15).

Secondly, we can love our enemies by doing them good. In Romans 12:20 Paul said, "Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head." Doing them good might change them into friends. This is what God does (Matthew 5:44-45). Well what if that won't work? We must still keep on loving them. If we will do this, our reward will be great (Luke 6:35).

In the third place we must love our enemies that we may be the children of our Father. We often say, like father like son. He is a chip off the old block is another common expression. We make these observations because in the actions of the children, we see the character of the father, who gave them life. Christians love their enemies so that they can be children of the heavenly Father (Matthew 5:46). We love our enemies then that may be like Him, who gave us life. God loved those who were his enemies when he sent Jesus to die on the cross. (Romans 5:6-10).

Fourthly, we must love our enemies because we must do more than sinners. Jesus said, "For if ye love those that love you, what reward have ye, do not even the publicans do the same? And

if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?" (Matthew 5:46-47). The world needs to see something different, something extra in Christians. Too many have a form of godliness but deny the power thereof. They profess that they know God but by their works they deny him. Christians must go the extra mile. Second mile region ought to be our trademark (II Tim. 3:5; Titus 1:16; Matthew 5:41). When we love our enemies, we do more than others.

The fifth point of this lesson shows that we must love our enemies in order to know God. John wrote, "He that loveth not, knoweth not God, for God is love" (I John 4:8). If we do not know God, eternal life is not ours. (John 17:3).

In the sixth place we see that loving our enemies perfects our love. Matthew 5:48 says, "Ye therefore shall be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." See the context (Matthew 5:43-47), John tells us that perfect love casts out fear, he that feareth is not made perfect in love" (I John 4:18).

Finally, we must love our enemies for our own good. Romans 12:20-21 says, "But if thine enemy hunger feed him, if he thirst, give him to drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head. Be not overcome of evil but overcome evil with good." If we do not love our enemies, we will not be overcoming evil. We will be allowing evil to overcome us.

Thanksgiving

Thomas Premanandam

Thanksgiving is the human response for divine grace. This expression of thanksgiving springs from a truly grateful heart and may take the form of an eulogy or a spontaneous paean or penegyric glorifying God's name. Thus thanksgiving prompted by genuine feelings of gratitude regardless of varying circumstances is like a fountain of perennial flow.

One of the Bible characters whose life had been hardly a bed

of roses was King David. His memory flashed before him an endless flow of God's blessings and benefits, right from his humble origin as a shepherd boy to his eventual position as king of the Hebrews.

Overwhelming gratitude surged through his heart as he sang him glories and praise to the accompaniment of different instruments of music. When in ecstasies of joy he even expressed himself in dance in the presence of God.

David calls on his soul to bless the Lord but the praise to be offered thus, he feels, is far too inadequate and incommensurate with the immeasurable mercies of God: hence he urges all that is within him—the lungs, heart, bowels, spleen, liver, nerves, blood vessels, muscles and so on to join the soul in praise of the Lord. (Psalm 103:1).

Again with a sense of urgency, he invites the heavenly bodies the living creatures on earth and in sea, the kings and princes, men young and old to bow in adoration of His holy name. In thanksgiving King David is the supreme example for us to emulate but rare are the children of God who emulate the Davidic virtue & say a word of thanks to the Almighty despite the many occasions of joy and cheer that smile on them.

The writer knows of a man who started thanking his friend over and over again for having arranged a good match for his daughter but not a word of thanks to the Giver of all good gifts who, unseen, steered the wheel of good fortune for him. Such a man belongs to the category of thankless souls who presume it is the duty of God to bless them with the necessities of life over and above their need even in spite of their perfidious attitude. How strange!

And some there are who feel much beholden to God and make even touching sermons on the unfathomable love of God and His gracious concern to meet the needs of His children. But in the event of adverse situations and when peace of the family is threatened by some unexpected storm or when moments of tension and anxieties stare in the face, they cool down and conveniently

draw a veil on the homilies they made when things were bright. Can we take these unfair winds as negative blessings that visit us in the guise of difficulties and thank the Lord for the lessons we are forced to learn. Some do not at all thank the Lord for the THORN but a thousand times for the ROSE.

Negative blessing is an euphemistic word for anything that is not a blessing in the ordinary sense of the term. They must be counted as blessings for a Christian because they are the instruments of divine discipline and messages proclaiming God's way to men. Can we in times of unsavoury experience magnify the excellencies of the Father in heaven ?

Once a man of God, a widower who having lost two of his three children within the interval of a week's time invited his friends and relatives for a thanksgiving service at his house. Although the clouds of bereavement still hovered over his family, he took them for dark chariots of bright grace and gratefully poured out his heart on the altar of praise to God expressing his deep indebtedness to Him for sparing one soul, his daughter, on whom he could depend for the rest of his life in this world. What an incense of sweet odour of praise offered to the holy name of the all-gracious God ! This man of God stayed himself on the all-trustworthy God.

At one stroke, Job lost all his children, all his health and all his wealth except his nagging wife but he declared, "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away : may the name of the Lord be praised." What a touching expression of thanksgiving in the hour of bitter affliction !

Again there may be some who quite naturally thank the Lord for all His blessings but how inspiring it would be if we can thank Him for the gifts WITHHELD also. Lest we should turn prodigals, the good God withholds certain gifts foolishly prayed for, good things that bar us from the BEST : how often we prefer the tinsel joys to a lesson on contentment; the light of a glow-worm to the Light of the World. The omniscient God who sees into the future of His children withholds what is not the best for them. Praise is comely says David the King. Comely in Hebrew means'

to be at home'. Then can you be at home in thanksgiving unto the Lord of lords when blessings you ask for or expect are withheld?

Our public prayers are long but the praise of the Lord reserved therein is short. Usually the praise embodied in our invocation is limited to a word or two as in 'Almighty God' 'Our heavenly Father' and so on. Then follows a long narration of our wants and needs. Prayers either in public or in private or those that take the form of petitions, supplications or intercessions should always be offered with due praise touching upon the attributes of the Absolute Deity. The Lord delights in our hearty praise of Him.

We, as His children may be in service to the Lord in Different capacities. Should we not realize that an opportunity of service for our living either secular or religious is the provision of God and that no service which is not covered by thanksgiving will the Lord appreciate or accept ?

Sincere and hearty thanksgiving to the Most High cannot end in empty words of praise but must necessarily be translated into an act of offering like Mary of Bethany who made a tangible expression of her deep gratitude by anointing the Lord with an expensive perfume.

The sacrificial love of God, the propitiatory and redemptive act of Jesus Christ which have restored us to the sonship of God, the Father, certainly demand a heart overflowing with gratitude and thanksgiving.

As we continually draw from the eternal fountain of His sublime and unspeakable love and enjoy blessing after blessing from His grace, the giving of thanks to the most merciful God must also be a never-ending song.

To remain a passive recipient of God's inexhaustible bounties and gracious benevolence is to lead a life of stark ingratitude which is SIN.

Let us therefore continually offer to God our sacrifice of PRAISE. Heb. 13:15.

Note : This brief article and another on FAITH are born of my deep meditation when a fractured foot laid me down in bed for about four months—an accident coming close on the heels of domestic bereavement of my two-years old grand-daughter and my only son at the threshold of his youth and career : both died in accidents within the span of a year.

In a forlorn state, almost at the point of shattered faith I felt drawn to the soothing presence of the Lord who through his Word made me see as if in a mirror the abundance of His sustaining love and the all-sufficiency of his solacing grace before which have been dwarfed the losses I have sustained in the deaths of my dear ones whom I hope to meet at the feet of my Lord. In humble submission to the divine Will I have accepted the bitter happenings in a spirit of thanksgiving. God's ways are mysterious and our task is to obey and wait.

Can We All Have It Our Way Large

Author Unknown

Will you take a moment to think about a familiar street you travel often ? Perhaps it's the street you take on your way to work or as you drive your children to school or as you shop for the family's groceries. Do you remember how many churches you pass as you travel this familiar route?

The street you are picturing probably has a concentration of businesses—supermarkets, service stations featuring different kinds of gasoline, local merchants offering their goods and services. You have probably developed some preferences that are pretty firmly established.

When you really think about it, though, you remember times when you have shopped at other places without serious consequences. When you bought groceries at a different store, your family still ate well. And when your tank was on "empty," you filled it with an unfamiliar brand of gasoline without your car seeming to notice the difference. Some of your friends and neighbors choose different stores and different brands and they get along about as well as you.

But as you think about all the churches you pass in your daily

travels, there is the nagging suspicion that they are not in quite the same category as the places of business. Deep inside you have the feeling that one's religion ought not to be selected on a whim or a friend's recommendation or on geographic nearness or even a personal preference.

If you are confused by all the claims and counterclaims made by the advertisers of today's products, you are likely to be even more confused when you are bombarded with the claims and the teachings of the different churches. How can you be sure of making the right choice? Does it really make any difference which choice you make? Is there any one way that is best? Is one church, one set of doctrines and parctices, as good as another?

The Shame Of Division

Stephen Neill, a missionary from England who spent much of his life in India, recently wrote: "Christian divisions never looked so shameful in the West as they do when the Christian community is a little fragment surrounded by vast non-Christian populations . . . In a missionary environment one feels the shame of Christian divisions much more than in the Western country. To go to a small Indian village off the map altogether and find four Christian churches competing for the souls of these people—or to go, as I did, to a little village of 1,300 Eskimos up in Alaska and five churches . . . competing for the souls of these 1300 people—leaves one shaken and bitterly ashamed," This is a sobering statement.

There was a time when denominationalism was highly appraised by people all across America as a testimony to our tolerance. It was thought that it was good for the people to choose their own religious faith in much the same way as one chooses his food in a cafeteria. Each person could observe the many religious offerings until he found one that was suitable to his own taste. Then, upon finding the group which appealed to him most, he could devote his loyalties to its creed. But now the mood has changed. There has been, within the past few decades, a realization that religious unity is a thing to be desired.

Robert McAfee Brown, in his book *The Ecumenical Revolution*, calls the religious division of our day "a scandal and a sin as well"

He goes on to say, "By no stretch of the imagination can we find in the New Testament a justification for our present denominations and competing Christian groups . . . The notion of denominations, let alone huge *blocs* of Christians severed from full unity with each other, is foreign to its pages."

The New Testament Emphasis

Statements from thoughtful religious leaders of our own day echo the strong emphasis of the New Testament for religious unity. The strongest possible encouragement toward unity is found in the prayer of Jesus, offered to His Father in heaven on the night of His own betrayal. He prayed earnestly for the apostles and then added. "I do not pray for these only, but also for those who believe in me through their word, that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me" (John 17:20-21).

The apostle Paul sounded strong words of warning in his first letter to the Corinthian church :

I appeal to you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree and that there be no dissensions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. For it has been reported to me by Chole's people that there is quarreling among you, my brethren. What I mean is that each one of you says, 'I belong to Paul' or 'I belong to Apollos' or 'I belong to Cephas' or 'I belong to Christ.' Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? (1 Corinthians 1:10-13).

Later the apostle Paul spoke of the church as being like a human body, having many members which function in perfect coordination because all are under the direction of the head (1 Corinthians 12). In Galatians 3:26-28, Paul further said, "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

Perhaps the most complete summary of what unity among God's people really should mean is seen in Paul's statement in his Ephesian letter :

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all. (Ephesians 4:1-6).

God Desires Unity

The most decisive reason why all believer in Christ must be united is the fact that God desires that His church should be united. The church is built on Jesus Christ as the Savior and Redeemer of all mankind. It has one central message—Jesus Christ and Him crucified for the salvation of all mankind. In God's plan the church was one community of disciples, living and proclaiming the Christian way of life. Christ reconciled God and man; He also removed all barriers between man and man. It is He who is the basis of all Christian unity.

In the New Testament every emphasis is toward unity in the church. Luke describes the beginning of the church and then comments, "And all who believed were together and had all things common And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people" (Acts 2:44, 46, 47).

In all of the modern discussions of unity, there is one issue which we must not overlook. While we are happy that more and more people have recognized the importance of Christian unity, we cannot avoid asking the question : "How will this unity be achieved?"

The Formula For Unity

How can Christian unity be achieved? We cannot settle for

a unity that represents a compromise on matters of faith and principle, nor could we ever accept a unity that asks us to give up the essence of our faith. Indeed, the only unity that can be taken seriously is the unity of faith which is achieved by a recognition of the authority of God as it is revealed in the Bible. We welcome the contemporary spirit which call us to return to biblical teachings in order to find the foundation for unity.

The problem of disunity is essentially a problem of not agreeing on who is in authority. Unless there is some solid body of absolute truth which is accepted as definitive, there is no real possibility of unity. Fortunately, however, we have just such a body of truth in the inspired Word of God.

Our task then, is made so much easier and simpler because there is an absolute basis upon which we may settle divergent opinions and bring about a unity of faith and practice. Let us begin with the whole acceptance of the Scriptures as the final authority in every phase of our religious faith.

With the Bible as our sole authority, we are in a position to achieve unity in such matters as how one becomes a Christian. We go back to the Scriptures and by analyzing the beginning of the church on Pentecost and the subsequent conversion stories throughout the rest of the book of Acts, we can know how God directs people in their response to him. Salvation, we learn, is a gift of God, unearned by man (Ephesians 2:8-10). However, man must respond according to directions given him by the Lord in order to get the free gift of salvation.

In each of the eight major cases of conversion in the book of Acts, the pattern is identical. The 3,000 on Pentecost, the Samaritans and the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8, Saul of Tarsus in Acts 9, the Roman centurion Cornelius in Acts 10, Lydia, the seller of purple cloth in Philippi, and the Roman jailor in Acts 16 and finally, the Corinthians in Acts 18—all followed exactly the same pattern. They heard the gospel preached, believed in Jesus as the Divine Son of God, made known their faith, repented of their sins and were immersed or baptized. If we are willing to accept the pattern which God has given us, we can achieve unity in such matters as how one becomes a Christian.

We can do the same thing on the matter of how Christians are to worship if we will only let the Scriptures be our guide. Singing, praying, eating the Lord's Supper, listening to The Word of God and giving of their means were the avenues of worship practiced by the early Christians. If we are willing to follow in their steps as they followed the apostles, then these will be our avenues of worship. We do not add to them nor take from them, lest we again divide the body of Christ.

The appeal that I make is that all of us endeavor to speak where the Scriptures speak and to remain silent where the Scriptures are silent in all matters of religious faith and practice. Let us have a "thus saith the Lord" for everything we do in our religious faith.

Our *objective* is the unity of all sincere believers in Christ. The *basis* of this unity is the inspired New Testament, given to us by God as He inspired the writers of the various books. The *method* of becoming united is the restoring of the original church, leaving behind the religious divisions and the changed teachings that have come through the centuries of Christian history.

The idea which I want to suggest is that we all join hearts and hands and go back to the church as God originally gave it. This is the idea of restoration—the restoring of church in its original purity and power, bypassing the divisions which have fractured the Lord's church into more than 250 distinct religious groups today. This is the method by which we could erase division and bring to pass the goal for which Christ prayed so long ago: the unity of all sincere believers in Christ.

My Personal Plea

I want to call upon you in a very personal way to do all that you can to help bring about the unity for which Christ prayed. Will you give yourself, your prayers and your influence to help achieve this unity so important to the ongoing of Christianity? With the Bible as our guide, our only guide, and with our commitment to follow the teachings of Christ in their entirety, we will discover in time that we are in step with each other as we come to be in perfect step with the Lord. Obviously, it means that we

cannot all have it our own way so far as religious attitudes, doctrines and practices are concerned. Each of us must make God's way. But isn't that a small price to pay for the religious unity so necessary for the ongoing of Christianity?

Gifts of the Holy Spirit

Steve Williams

How do you teach a friend about the gifts of the Holy Spirit? Suppose your friend believes in speaking in tongues and other miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit. How do you teach that friend? Let us look at the scriptures on this subject. As we study these scriptures, realize that some people are attracted to the idea of miraculous manifestations of the Holy Spirit today out of emotional needs rather than rational convictions based upon Bible study. Some have a need for God making himself known in a personal manifestation in the here and now. Walking by faith rather than by sight is not enough for some people. Being able to believe in a God and a Christ whom they have not seen is not sufficient for some (Jn. 20:28-29). Thus when you are teaching such a person, it is not only necessary to deal with the facts of the scriptures on the cessation of miraculous gift, it is necessary to deal with their emotional needs which might tend to make them lean toward or desire miracles as an evidence of their faith.

What was the purpose of miracles? If miracles were done primarily out of compassion for the physical needs of people, several troubling questions arise. First why was not everybody healed? Why was not everyone fed? Why was not all poverty removed from society? Second, if miracles were done primarily out of compassion for physical needs, would that not imply that miracles should still be performed today? If not, then God was more compassionate upon ancient people than upon people today.

The solution to these difficulties is the realization that the purpose of miracles was not primarily to alleviate physical suffering. Also, we must realize that physical suffering is not an evil in

and of itself. If it were, then God could be accused of wrongdoing, because he allows pain to come our way. Pain is a test which can make us stronger, but it is not evil in and of itself (Jas. 1:2-4; Heb. 12:5-7). Also the purpose of miracles was primarily to be a sign and an evidence to confirm the word of God. The gospel was "declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard him, while God also bore witness by signs and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his own will" (Heb. 2:3-4).

Once a thing is tested and proven, if adequate proof has been offered, the evidence does not have to be produced over and over again. The former evidence can simply be examined again to reconfirm the former decision. Likewise, once the person of Jesus Christ was validated by his miracles and by his resurrection from the dead, miracles were not needed again and again to prove that point. It has been proven. It stands as a historical fact. The evidence (including miracles) is now recorded in a document (the Bible) for us to examine and that is all that is necessary for us to believe (Jn. 20:30-31). Miracles do not need to be performed over and over again any more than the resurrection of Jesus needs to be performed over and over again. The resurrection occurred once and it proved that Jesus was the Son of God (Rom. 1:4). It does not need to be repeated. The same is true for other miracles of the apostolic era. Their purpose was primarily to confirm the word of God. They have done that. They have served their purpose, thus the key need for them has disappeared.

When these facts are coupled with a brief history of miracles in the book of Acts and in 1 Corinthians, the fact that **miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit ceased** should be clear. There had been about a 400 year period where there had been no miraculous activity of the Holy Spirit during the period between the Testaments. This is not a matter of anyone today trying to limit the power of God; it is a matter to historical record. We have no inspired books from that period of time. The apocryphal books themselves tell that there were no prophets during this period of time. The sudden return of miraculous activity of the Holy Spirit was a signal that the Christ was coming into the world (Lk. 1:15, 22, 35; 2:25,36). Of course the Holy Spirit acted in a special way

in the birth of Jesus. Then the Holy Spirit came down upon Jesus at his baptism. Jesus performed many amazing miracles during his ministry. Others could do this also in his name. Clearly the purpose of the Holy Spirit's activity was to point people toward Christ. There was no selfish need fulfillment here.

Jesus told the apostles to wait in Jerusalem after his ascension, though, so that the Holy Spirit might come in power upon them in the baptism of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:1-5). This occurred in Acts 2. It was limited to the twelve apostles (Acts 2:1-4,14; and one special exception in Acts 10-11). They were able to speak in tongues. What were tongues? They are not just speaking jibberish. A baby can do that. They are not getting excited and losing control of your tongue. People do that at football games. In fact that is an ancient phenomenon present in many ancient religions. Tongues were languages as evidenced clearly by Acts 2:6-8. The miracle was that these uneducated men could suddenly, instantaneously speak a foreign language fluently without study. I wish that were possible today. Then I would not have had to study Hebrew, Greek, Latin and German. Some denominational folks who believe in tongue speaking today have tried sending out missionaries to foreign countries and praying for the gift of tongues in order to teach foreign people. They end up going to language school. They do not have the gift of tongues. No one today has the gift of tongues.

The apostles, then, were baptized in the Holy Spirit and given gifts such as tongues. Later, though, we read that a man like Philip was "full of the Spirit" (Acts 6:3,5). He was able to perform miracles and signs (Acts 8:6, 13). Though he had this ability, he was not able to give the ability to perform miracles to other Christians. It was necessary to call in apostles to do this (Acts 8:14-16). This was done through the laying on of hands (Acts 8:17). This ability to give miraculous power to others could not be passed on, however (Acts 8:21). This seems to imply that once the apostles died and those upon whom they laid their hands died (e.g., Philip); the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit ceased. This conclusion is corroborated by other evidence.

Such a cessation of miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit would

coincide with the transference of the inspired will of God from a human vessel such as the apostles to a written vessel (the Bible). As the need for miracles to confirm the word was becoming less and less, the age of miracles was drawing to a close. Now that we have the Bible to instruct us, we do not need living inspired apostles and prophets. We have all the inspired apostles and prophets we need in God's all-sufficient word, the Bible (2 Tim. 3:16-17). To some what has been written so far may seem like a jig-saw puzzle. One might wonder if there are not too many "ifs" or tenuous conclusions involved in the reasoning. Is there any plain statement about a cessation of miraculous gifts in the New Testament? There is.

Paul said, "Love never ends; as for prophecy, it will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. For our knowledge is imperfect and our prophecy is imperfect; but when the perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away" (1 Cor. 13:8-10). "Knowledge", here, by its proximity to miraculous gifts such as tongues and prophecy, should be taken to mean the miraculous ability to receive divine knowledge, whether by visions or whatever means Paul had in mind. Thus Paul plainly states that miracles were not forever. They were not to be eternal. They were to cease: They would come to an end. That end would be when the perfect was come. When is this?

At first it seems that the perfect is the second coming of Jesus Christ, but this seems unlikely. Paul envisioned three periods of time :

1. the period when love, hope & faith abided along with miraculous gifts.
2. the period when love, hope & faith abided, but miracles had ended.
3. the period of heaven when faith was swallowed up in sight and hope came to fruition leaving the greatest—love.

Period 1 and 2 are divided by the coming of the "perfect." Period 2 and 3 are divided by the second coming of Christ, so it logically follows that the second coming of Christ can not be the "perfect."

There is other evidence that points toward a definition of the "perfect" of 1 Corinthians 13:10. The word "perfect" implies maturity or completeness. The church at the time was in a stage of immaturity or childhood. It was quickly growing toward maturity in a sense. It was growing toward a time when it would be able to carry on by itself without the assistance of miraculous manifestations of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 2:11-16). Once the New Testament was written and in the possession of the church, a significant step in the growth of the church had occurred. Instead of saying, "I say unto you . . ." or speaking with the authority of inspiration, we find the second century writers suddenly referring back primarily to what the New Testament apostles and prophets had written. Inspiration was not active in men anymore. It was found in a book—the Bible. The message of that book, the gospel, the good news, the covenant of Jesus Christ, the New Testament is perfect for man's spiritual needs. It is the "perfect law". It is the "law of liberty" (Jas. 1:25).

Thus three different lines of evidence point to the cessation of miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit at a period late in the first century or in the very, very early second century. (1) The purpose of miracles had been fulfilled. (2) The apostles and those upon whom they laid hands had died. (3) It had been predicted that miracles would cease when the perfect came. Now while someone might dispute one particular line of evidence (some dispute them all), all three of them together have a cumulative effect toward the conclusion.

A few other matters need to be noted also. While the gift of tongues is very highly praised by some today, Paul said it was the least of the miraculous gifts and should be limited in its use in worship services. Not only should its use be limited, if no one was there to interpret the tongues, it provided no edification to others, so it should be completely curtailed in worship services. Just using a tongue for one's personal ego-gratification was not helpful to the entire body (1 Cor. 12:27-31; 14:1-33). Some, in a false humility, respond, "Well I am only wanting the least of the miraculous gifts." Yet a superior attitude of a "first-class" Christian is usually the spirit of those who claim the gift of tongues in their treatment of others whom they see as inferior since they

do not have that gift.

Another side issue is that while many like to claim gifts of tongues or prophecy, few want to claim gifts such as the ability to heal the lame or raise the dead. Yet, at least within the body, if some have the ability to speak in tongues, some one must have these other gifts (1 Cor. 12:30-31). While claims to such are occasionally made, they are never verified. In Delhi a man visited Sunny David claiming the gift to heal people. Sunny listened to him patiently. He then told the man of a leper who sat near his house begging. He asked the man to come with him to heal the leper. If that man could not do it, surely someone in his religious group could. They could pray and have a special service. The man began to retreat very quickly. J.C. Choate told one such man that if he really had such abilities, why not go with him to the graveyard. If that man would raise the first one, brother Choate would raise the second. That man declined. Why? These men had no miraculous ability. No such ability is needed today. The Bible is sufficient for our every spiritual need. If miracles are still being performed, then we must still have living, inspired prophets. The New Testament must not be complete. Such writers must still be adding to the New Testament to fill in what lacking. But there are no such living inspired prophets today, because the age of miracles is over. We have all the inspired prophets we need in the New Testament.

The claim of some to miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit are productive of more evil than good. Such claims commonly result in a superior attitude towards others who do not claim such gifts. Such claims imply that God is the author of confusion, because in the name of the Holy Spirit different doctrines are proclaimed. God, though, is not the author of confusion (1 Cor. 14:33). The desire for miraculous gifts today is very understandable. It is the same sort of need for which ancient (and modern) people build idols. An invisible God whom one must follow in faith is not enough for many people. Many want to "feel" God in their soul, to "see" God in a sign, or "experience" God in a physical way. Let us all, instead, walk by faith in God's inspired word that has already been confirmed by miracles.

God's Glorious Plan

Tom Dockery

INTRODUCTION

Our world is fascinated by well developed solutions to difficult problems. We thrill when medical science uncovers the solution to a disease that has plagued men for centuries. Mankind is constantly challenged and inspired as he reaches out for the solutions to our world's problems.

The most thrilling story ever told has to do with God's scheme for redeeming lost men. It encompasses centuries of preparation and its end is one of unimaginable joy and satisfaction. "God's Glorious Plan" needs to be proclaimed around the world today. Let us notice the way in which God met the problem of the ages and gave a solution.

I. The Plan Purposed

A. It is needed. . .

When sin came in to the world, the need for a plan of salvation became obvious. The wages of sin are death (Romans 6:23). The cry of Jeremiah voices the need of all men when he says, "Is there no balm in Gilead?" (Jeremiah 8:22). Paul, in the New Testament, cried out for all men of sin, "Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?" (Romans 7:24).

B. It is promised. . .

No sooner had sin entered into the world than God gave the seed of a promise of salvation (Genesis 3:15). The serpent would be crushed at the expense of the Seed to the woman. Thus was set into motion a mystery that men in every age desired to see fulfilled (Romans 16:25-26; Ephesians 1:9-10; 3:3ff). The promise was renewed to the patriarchs and the prophets. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob all were promised a blessing (Genesis 12:2-3; 26:4; 28:14). The prophets gave tantalizing glimpses into the promise (cf. Isaiah 2:2-4).

C. The promise is set in motion. . .

God chose a family because of the faith of Abraham. This family was nurtured and taught by God Himself. The story of the providential working of God with the family of Abraham is phenomenal. Finally, the Lord chose an entire nation through whom He could reveal his plan. God blessed this nation and gave them a land and a law. In spite of this, most of them forgot the Lord and His promise to them.

II. The Plan Foreshadowed

A. God's Plan was foreshadowed by the nation. . .

It was a nation of people set apart. God expected His people to be different from the pagan nations around them: They were not to ally themselves in any way with others that would compromise their relationship with God (cf. II Cor. 6:14-18). It was a nation that was to reflect to the world something about God and be an example to others.

B. God's Plan was foreshadowed by the temple. . .

The temple made men aware of the need of sacrifice and a high priest. It also made them aware that one does not approach God irreverently or disregard His commands. The temple made men aware that man was separated from God by a veil.

C. God's Plan was foreshadowed in many ways by the prophets. . .

God's Plan is pictured as a kingdom by Daniel (Daniel 2). It is pictured as a flock of sheep and a wonderful temple by Ezekiel (Ezekiel 34:40-48).

III. The Plan Is Completed

A. The timing was perfect (Romans 5:6; Galatians 4:4). . .

It was a time of stability and order maintained by the Roman Government. All parts of the world were open to travel and trade. A universal system of coinage was in effect (Matthew 22:19-21). Roman citizens were accorded special

privileges (Acts 16:38; 22:25-29). It was a time of peace. There was a nucleus for the church in the Jewish people, who had been scattered into all parts of the world (Acts 2:3-11). Wherever they went, they publicized the concept of One True God. There was one universal language. Men were ready for Christianity because they were in a state of helplessness (Romans 5:6). The religions of the world were bankrupt.

B. The teaching was perfect. . .

The teaching was with authority (Matthew 7:29). It was simple and to the point. It furnished the guidance that was needed (II Timothy 3:16-17).

C. The result was perfect. . .

Jesus fulfilled all of God's plans (Matthew 5:17-18). He came to do the will of God (John 6:28) and on the cross He proclaimed, "It is finished." (John 19:30). The mystery was revealed (Romans 16:26; Ephesians 3:9-10) and the throne of God was made accessible to all men through Christ.

IV. The Plan Is Revealed

A. The church was the culmination of God's plans. It revealed the wisdom of God (Ephesians 3:10), and it is the pillar and ground of truth (I Timothy 3:15).

B. The establishment of the church was the fulfillment of prophesy.

- 1. It was established at the TIME predicted by the prophets (Daniel 2:44).**
- 2. It was established in the PLACE predicted by the prophets (Acts 2:5; Isaiah 2:3).**
- 3. It was established in the MANNER predicted by the prophets: With the outpouring of the Spirit; (Acts 2:41); With the preaching of Peter and the apostles; (Matthew 16:18; Acts 2:14); With the obedience of penitent believers; (Acts 2:41).**

4. It was composed of the PEOPLE predicted by the prophets (Isaiah 2:2). It was called the "ekklesia" of the "called out, assembly, or assembled multitude" (Colossians 1:13). It was composed of those who "were being saved" (Acts 2:47).

C. Characteristics of the primitive church.

1. Its terms of membership: Faith, Repentance, Baptism (Acts 2:38; 3:19; 8:12; 8:37).
2. Its organization and government: Apostles, elders, deacons, evangelists, teachers (Ephesians 5:19; James 5:13; I Corinthians 16:2; Acts 20:7).
3. Its cardinal doctrine: Jesus Christ and His death, burial, and resurrection (Acts 2:22-36).
4. Its work: Develop its members spiritually, provide for the needy, and evangelize the lost world.

Conclusion

"God's glorious plan" is the only hope of salvation for lost men. A prominent doctrine of modern times is that the church is unimportant, but the Lord intended that it be the greatest body of people on earth. It was prophesied many centuries in advance. It was in preparation for thousands of years and John was finally sent to prepare the way. Christ promised to build it (Matt. 16:18), and He spent three of the hardest years that man could on earth preparing for it. He even purchased it with His blood (Acts 20:28).

Don't you want to be a part of such a wonderful and glorious body? Some may make a pretense of following God's plan, but only when we follow in "Spirit and truth" can we truly be His disciples. The design of God through the ages has been the salvation of your soul. Don't you want to take advantage of God's Plan and tell the world about it?

