

Biblical Variety

Volume One

by Louis Rushmore

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Chapter 1: Vicarious Sacrifice

One of the worst snowstorms to hit Washington, D.C. in decades buffeted the city on January 13, 1982. A considerable accumulation of snow brought automobile traffic to a halt. For instance, there was a giant traffic jam on the 12-lane 14th Street Bridge complex. This bridge spans the Potomac River and connects the District of Columbia to Arlington County, Virginia.

The moderate to heavy snowfall temporarily closed the Washington National Airport, three-quarters of a mile away. Among the affected aircraft was a Boeing 737-222 bound for Fort Lauderdale, Florida. This was Air Florida Flight 90, comprised of 74 passengers including three infants and a crew of 5. About an hour and forty-five minutes after the scheduled departure time, the plane took off from runway 36 at 3:59 p.m. The two-engine blue and green jetliner headed north and made a shallow left turn. The path of Air Florida Flight 90 presumed a 700 foot clearance over the 14th Street Bridge.

However, at 4:01 p.m., a mere two minutes after leaving the runway, and unable to stay aloft, nose raised and tail down, the ill-fated 737 crashed into the 14th Street Bridge. The aircraft struck seven occupied vehicles, shearing the roof from one automobile and crushing four other cars. It also ripped out 180 feet of railing before plunging between the bridge spans, through the ice to the bottom of the river, 30 feet deep. The plane vanished except for the tail section which had separated from the body of the aircraft and floated. In an instant, four motorists were injured, four motorists were killed and all but six people on the plane were dead. Five passengers and one flight attendant climbed from beneath the icy waters on to the wreckage of the tail section.

Rescue was dependent on the gallant efforts of the crew of a National Park Service helicopter. They lowered a line with a ring on it to a balding man in his 50's with a mustache. Instead of seizing the lifeline for himself, he passed it to another survivor. This he did when the helicopter returned four more times. However, when the helicopter made its sixth trip to the wreckage, Arland D. Williams, Jr. was gone. He perished beneath the icy waters with the balance of passengers and crew at the bottom of the Potomac River. **Mr. Williams had elected to become a vicarious victim so that strangers could live!** Another man, 2,000 years ago also became a vicarious victim so that strangers could live. Of course, that man was Jesus Christ.

The word *vicarious* means: “**1 a** : serving instead of someone or something else . . . **2** : performed or suffered by one person as a substitute for another or to the benefit or advantage of another : SUBSTITUTIONARY (a *vicarious* sacrifice).” (*Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*. Springfield, Massachusetts: Merriam-Webster, Inc., 1993.)

The core of our relationship with Jesus Christ, and by him our fellowship with the entire Godhead, pertains to the vicarious sacrifice of our Lord. The Gospel itself is defined in relationship to the vicarious death of Christ. First Corinthians 15:1-4 is often cited as the definition of the Gospel, summarized: the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Verse three reads: “For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that **Christ died for our sins** according to the scriptures.” The phrase “according to the scriptures” includes Isaiah 53.

“But he *was* wounded **for our transgressions**, *he was* bruised **for our iniquities**: the **chastisement of our peace was upon him**; and **with his stripes we are healed** . . . he hath poured out his soul **unto death**: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and **he bare the sin of many**, and **made intercession for the transgressors**” (Isaiah 53:5, 12).

Jesus Christ willingly became a sin-sacrifice for you and me. “For he hath made him *to be* sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2 Corinthians 5:21). “And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and **hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice** to God for a sweet-smelling savour” (Ephesians 5:2). “Who **gave himself for our sins**, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father” (Galatians 1:4).

The preceding Scriptures except for the citation of Isaiah were written by the inspired pen of the apostle Paul. Elsewhere in the New Testament, Jesus, his apostles and other inspired writers likewise denote the vicarious sacrifice of Jesus for us. Jesus declared of himself: “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man **lay down his life for his friends**” (John 15:13) and “Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and **to give his life a ransom for many**” (Matthew 20:28).

Peter wrote: “Who his own self **bare our sins in his own body** on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed” (1 Peter 2:24) and “For Christ also hath once **suffered for sins**, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, **being put to death** in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit” (1 Peter 3:18).

The apostle John penned: “Hereby perceive we the love of *God*, because **he laid down his life for us**: and we ought to lay down *our* lives for the brethren” (1 John 3:16). The Hebrews writer recorded: “. . . once in the end of the world hath he appeared to **put away sin by the sacrifice of himself** . . . So Christ was once **offered to bear the sins of many** . . .” (Hebrews 9:26, 28).

Even Divine-authored worship in the Gospel Age incorporates as a central focus the vicarious death-sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Especially, communion ties the faithful Christian to the vicarious death of Christ on his behalf. “For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do **shew the Lord’s death** till he come” (1 Corinthians 11:26). The vicarious death of Christ is immortalized through the emblems of the communion which represent his shed blood and tortured body on our behalf. Further, the benefits derived from the vicarious death-sacrifice of Christ permit Christians to pray to the Father. As indicated above (1 Corinthians 15:1-4), the central theme of the Gospel which we preach is the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. “**But we preach Christ crucified** . . .” (1 Corinthians 1:23).

The merit of the vicarious death-sacrifice of Jesus Christ manifests itself in his shed blood. The Old Testament is replete with references to animal sacrifices under Patriarchy and Judaism, the blood of which foreshadowed the blood of the perfect sacrifice — Jesus Christ (Hebrews 9). “It was therefore necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these” (Hebrews 9:23). The New Testament is filled with references to the saving blood of our Lord (Acts 20:28; Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:14; Revelation 1:5).

Part of the biblical concept of redemption relates to the vicarious death of Christ. “To redeem” means to “buy back.” Nothing on the earth, including the earth itself, is of sufficient worth to purchase even a single soul. For this reason, only the sacrificial death of the perfect Son of God is capable of securing our redemption. Divine blood, sacrificially shed for us, is the medium by which an infinitely holy and just God can reconcile sinful, wayward mankind back to himself. “For if, when we were enemies, we were **reconciled to God by the death of his Son**, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life” (Romans 5:10).

“Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not **redeemed** with corruptible things, *as* silver and gold, from your vain conversation *received* by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious **blood of Christ**, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you” (1 Peter 1:18-20).

Jesus purposely gave his life that the world, dead in sin, could live (John 6:51; 10:11, 15). Besides the passages quoted herein, numerous additional passages speak directly regarding the vicarious sacrifice of Christ that we might live (Romans 4:25; 5:6; 1 Corinthians 8:11; 2 Corinthians 5:14-15; Galatians 2:20; 1 Thessalonians 5:10; 1 Peter 4:1).

Our Lord’s mission was to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10). Jesus Christ is the author of eternal salvation unto all that obey him (Hebrews 5:8-9). Jesus is the captain of our salvation, which he accomplished through suffering in our stead.

“But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the **suffering of death**, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death **for every man**.

For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings” (Hebrews 2:9-10).

Summarized, Jesus died for us that we might live. “But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

Like Mr. Williams, Jesus could have saved himself. Jesus did not have to die for us; he could have called 12 legions of angels to rescue him from the cross (Matthew 26:53). However, our Lord voluntarily died that we might live. Like Mr. Williams, God wants people to be saved (2 Peter 3:9). The apostle Paul also earnestly desired that people would be saved (Romans 10:1). The apostle pleaded with King Agrippa to become a Christian (Acts 26:28-29).

Think back for a moment about Air Florida Flight 90. The untimely loss of any life is tragic. It is a very sad thought to realize that on January 13, 1982 Arland D. Williams, Jr. died while saving strangers. Just imagine how much more lamentable his death would be had one of those survivors jumped back into the river and drowned. Suppose for a moment that all five of the survivors for whom he forfeited his life jumped back into the water and died. How horrific it would be for him to have sacrificed himself in vain.

Yet, isn't this precisely what happens respecting Christ when people for whom Jesus came to this earth and died refuse to become Christians? Worse still is the fact that many who become Christians, and thereby have been rescued from the death of sin (Romans 6:23), return to unrighteousness (2 Peter 2:20-22). They are said to crucify Jesus again. “If they shall fall away . . . they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame” (Hebrews 6:6). The death of Jesus is in vain for each person who either does not become a Christian or who forsakes Christianity for the pleasures of sin for a season (Hebrews 11:25).

Dear Reader, have you appropriated the blessings of the Gospel of Christ on God's terms? Many fanciful plans of redemption have been authored by mankind. However, God is not obligated to accept any human plan in the Day of Judgment. All mankind will be judged by the Divine laws under which they lived (such as, Patriarchy, Judaism or Christianity). “And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works” (Revelation 20:12).

Let's go to heaven together! Harken to God's Word only, whereby true faith develops (Romans 10:17). Allow that Bible faith to lead you to turn from your sins (Acts 17:30), acknowledge Jesus as Lord of your life (Romans 10:9-10; Acts 8:37) and submit to immersion in water for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38).

A wonderful thing happens at the point of baptism. Sins are washed away. “And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16). One is added to the body (church) of our Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13; Colossians 1:18). Souls are saved at the point of baptism (following hearing God's Word, believing, repenting and professing Christ) according to 1 Peter 3:21. “. . . baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”

Once one appropriates God's grace and mercy on the Divine terms, he needs to live faithfully for the rest of his life (Revelation 2:10). If the child of God sins, our benevolent God provides forgiveness upon penitence and prayer (Acts 8:22). **Friends, let's go to heaven together!**

Discussion Questions:

1. Discuss some ways in which one person might suffer vicariously for another.
2. How is the vicarious suffering of Jesus for us far superior to the vicarious suffering one human might experience for another?
3. How can we know that Jesus Christ endured vicarious suffering for us willingly?

Chapter 1: Vicarious Sacrifice

4. How does the vicarious suffering of Christ indicate his love for mankind?
5. In what ways is the vicarious suffering of Christ ever kept before the child of God?
6. What relationship does the vicarious suffering of Christ sustain to Patriarchy and Judaism?
7. What is the relationship of redemption to the vicarious suffering of Christ?
8. Describe the affect on the vicarious suffering of Christ when one fails to obey the Gospel of Christ or if obeying the Gospel, later becomes an erring Christian.

Chapter 2: Potential Danger In All Our Blessings

The proper use of physical blessings is essential to salvation. Like airplanes, automobiles or even fire, physical blessings of themselves possess neither good nor bad propensities for their employment. However, they have the potential of being used for good or evil. For instance, the airplane, neither good nor bad of itself, can be used for rescue and medical missions or for war. Automobiles may serve as ambulances or “get-away” cars. Fire can be used for warmth and cooking or to destroy. Blessings enjoyed by Christians, neither good nor bad themselves, can be abused to the harm of one’s spiritual welfare.

Great intellect, higher education and abundant knowledge may be a curse to a Christian. While no depreciation of brain power, scholarship or proficiency is intended, Christians must use lawfully and wisely whatever it is with which God has blessed them. Christians must demonstrate a humble and teachable disposition, like children (Matthew 11:25). “. . . Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18:3-4).

However, Christians must also exercise intellect in religion (Matthew 22:37). “. . . we . . . desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding” (Colossians 1:9). Yet, particularly secular knowledge can make one “puffed up” and arrogant. God found the world in general and the Corinthian church specifically spiritually deficient, in spite of their possession of knowledge and wisdom (1 Corinthians 1:21; 3:18-21; 8:1). The church can greatly benefit and the Gospel can be widely heralded and defended through the proper application of knowledge (even secular knowledge), or the same knowledge mishandled can harm many Christians and hinder the church in its mission.

Time can be a blessing or a curse depending upon how it is used. One’s time can be used to serve Satan or God, but not both (Matthew 6:24). “See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is” (Ephesians 5:15-17). Christians should use time with such proficiency as though they were by present acceleration enabled to recover squandered moments of the past. We need to develop ourselves to the extent we can anywhere, anytime say with the apostle Paul: “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing” (2 Timothy 4:7-8).

Earthly wealth can be a blessing or a curse, depending upon how it is used. Those who purpose to be rich and make the acquisition of earthly treasures their life’s goal, in the same thought, purpose to ruin themselves spiritually (1 Timothy 6:9-10). Riches, even when not freely made the object of our pursuits, can acquire ownership of Christians when the possession of things becomes the primary occupation of life. The “good life,” like thorns, can choke the Word of God in us (Luke 8:14).

Earthly treasures cannot compare with treasures in heaven (Matthew 19:21; 1 Timothy 6:19). Christians are repeatedly urged to learn “contentment.” If we have food and clothes, that is enough (1 Timothy 6:6-8). “Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee” (Hebrews 13:5). Yet, it is not wrong to be rich, only one’s responsibility of stewardship increases proportionately with wealth (1 Timothy 6:17-18). The heavenly charge is that we seek spiritual things first and concern ourselves with physical needs at some point after that; it’s about priorities (Matthew 6:25-34).

Authority can be a blessing or a curse. The abuse of authority spelled the ruin of a Christian named Diotrephes and troubled the church (3 John 10-11). Overbearing elders, deacons, teachers, preachers, employers, police, husbands, fathers, etc. participate in their ruin and hinder those with whom they come in contact. “When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: but when the wicked beareth rule,

the people mourn” (Proverbs 29:2). With every blessing one must accept the accompanying responsibility to use that blessing correctly.

Great beauty or personality when diverted to sinful use becomes a curse. Beauty may lead one to immodesty or immorality. One’s charisma may lead a salesman or preacher to mislead people. With every blessing there is commensurate accountability.

Great popularity, reputation and worldly honor may lead to compromises of truth and character. Having a “good name” may equate to a measure of popularity, and it is not wrong to be so regarded (Proverbs 22:1). However, one must be careful not to sanction unrighteousness in his life or the lives of others to maintain that esteem. Being “one of the guys” is sometimes sinful, even if it is the popular thing to do (Exodus 23:2). The family pet on a jaunt with a pack of sheep-killing dogs is as likely to be shot as the rest.

For the love of the praise of men some “chief rulers” among the Jews refused to acknowledge Jesus (John 12:42-43), but the apostle Paul and “a great company of the priests” willingly forfeited elusive popularity, reputation and worldly honor in favor of the enduring reward of heaven (Philippians 3:4-8; Acts 6:7). How sad it is that though called by the Gospel, so few souls of earthly distinction respond (1 Corinthians 1:26). While popularity, reputation and worldly honor are not wrong, they bear a weighty obligation to influence others for good with the Gospel.

Even a good moral life and devotion to duty may cause one to despise “publicans” and “sinners” (Luke 18:9-14). It’s hard for man to recognize that he is not made better actually or in the eyes of God by the deficiencies that may exist in others. The “good guy” in the account of “the prodigal son” (Luke 15:11-32) became a “bad guy” upon the return of his penitent younger brother. Loyalty to home and duty led the elder son to despise his wayward sibling. Though difficult, even the children of God must learn to love sinners while hating sin. Fortunately, God loves sinners, yet he can have no association with sin (Isaiah 59:1-3).

Fine clothes, cars, homes, meeting houses and many other things can be dangerous, if we depend on these rather than on personal faith, devotion to God, godly lives, evangelism, as well as every spiritual pursuit. “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever” (1 John 2:15-17). Again, it is a matter of priorities.

Even good health or youthfulness now may keep some from obeying the Gospel. Do we all imagine we will live long and painlessly pass from the scenes of life in our sleep? Do we all further expect to make the necessary (eternal) course corrections well in advance (but not now) of that departure from this world? Are we confident the Lord’s final return will not happen in our lifetime? Let us be careful not to despise the long-suffering of the Lord.

“The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness” (2 Peter 3:9-11).

Man simply does not know if there will be a tomorrow (Proverbs 27:1). Man does not know the will of God concerning himself and the next day (James 4:13-15). Any one of us could easily become a statistic enumerated with thousands of others who die annually from auto accident, violent crime or disease. It is possible the Lord could return and time be no more before we age another year (or even a

day!). It is also possible to become mentally incapacitated through injury or disease, thereby, precluding the amendment of one's life. Good health and youthfulness are blessings that must be properly invested now to ensure reservations later in mansions above.

Lists of physical blessings, possessing potential for either good or evil application, could be vastly expanded. However, this partial examination sufficiently emphasizes the caution and responsibility that must be exercised toward every blessing. All blessings are intended to be enjoyed by Christians. Blessings, though, greatly increase responsibility. For instance, a good job increases both one's ability and responsibility to give. Worldly honor increases one's responsibility to influence the world with the Gospel. Blessings are like an automobile, neither good nor bad, but someone behind the wheel determines the use and path. How are you using your blessings?

Discussion Questions:

1. How do humility and knowledge affect one's use of material possessions?
2. Describe how time can be considered a resource or a possession.
3. Besides not recognizing wealth as properly belonging to God, what special danger is attributable to wealth?
4. Weigh the respective value of earthly possessions versus spiritual pursuits.
5. In what ways can possession of authority manifest itself in unrighteousness among elders, deacons, teachers, preachers, employers, police, husbands and fathers?
6. Describe the perils of beauty, a good personality and popularity.
7. How can being a good, moral person be misdirected toward a sinful purpose?
8. Through what three avenues does temptation affect humanity?
9. How can youthfulness and good health pose a threat to one's soul?

Chapter 3: Strangers And Pilgrims

Part One: Homiletics

“Here We Are But Straying Pilgrims” is one of my favorite songs. I once heard that song sung in a crescendo/decrescendo fashion; it sounded as though a happy band of Christians, at first singing in the distance, marched past and continued the glad, songful march toward the horizon of heaven itself. I desperately want to make that pilgrimage, and travel with as many family members, friends, neighbors, co-workers and brethren as possible. In the here and the now, though, we are not only pilgrims but strangers, too.

“Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation” (2 Peter 2:11-12).

Abraham was a stranger and a pilgrim in the literal sense of the words. Doubtless, the accent and pronunciation of Abraham and his fellow travelers readily identified them as aliens (Matthew 26:73; Acts 2:7; Judges 12:5-6). The speech of Christians also either identifies them as part of the world or apart from the world (John 17:15-16; James 4:4; 1 John 2:15-17). Intermingling with the heathen once corrupted the Jews’ language and caused many of them to speak the language of Ashdod (Nehemiah 13:23-24). Christians must be careful lest they too (figuratively) speak the language of Ashdod (i.e., worldly language). Sometimes our speech betrays us!

As nomadic people, sojourners in a land not theirs, the patriarchs often were unable to live in peaceful co-existence amidst settled peoples. Today, Christians, sojourning in the lost world sometimes run afoul and are likewise unable to peacefully co-exist with their neighbors, though we ought to try (1 Timothy 2:2; Hebrews 12:14). This is especially true if we “have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them” (Ephesians 5:11)!

The social customs of native people often differ widely from the social norms of foreigners; the do’s and don’ts, moral codes and ethics frequently conflict between unlike peoples. Certainly social customs greatly differ between the world today and true Christian pilgrims (i.e., marriage and divorce, alcohol, modesty, abortion). Practicing Christians are foreigners in this sin-sick and dying world; social friction, therefore, is inevitable (2 Timothy 3:12).

Aliens are also sometimes at a legal disadvantage while abiding in a host country since the laws of any land primarily serve the citizens of that nation. Emigrants may be discriminated against under laws not designed with their protection in mind, or foreigners may simply be unfamiliar with applicable laws and consequently be found in non-compliance. The early church was outlawed, first by the Jews (Acts 4-5) and later by the Roman Empire. Today, our government legalizes many things that are contrary to God’s law (i.e., alcohol, prostitution, divorce, nudity, pornography, vulgarity, etc.). Additionally, the legal system itself is beginning to turn on religion with a rising new area of American law aimed at churches (i.e., tort law suits for exercising church discipline and malpractice suits). The Lord’s church, like the patriarchs of old, is increasingly in danger of becoming legally disadvantaged in this wicked world.

The children of God about whom one can read in Bible history were also adversely affected when they intermarried with the native peoples among whom they found themselves. Frequently, the worship of God was exchanged for idolatry and morals were grossly corrupted. Today, marriage to non-Christians — or even weak or unfaithful Christians — can spiritually ruin God’s people.

One of the greatest distractions to pilgrims is the temptation to abandon the pilgrimage, settle down and integrate into the host society. Whereas Abraham remained separate from the heathen people, Lot settled “toward” Sodom — and later was found “in” Sodom! Christians are also tempted daily to abandon their spiritual pilgrimage and become homesteaders. This world has nothing to offer which can

begin to compare with the joyous heavenly hereafter with God for eternity (Matthew 19:28-29; 2 Corinthians 4:17-18; 5:1-8; Revelation 21:10-21).

Part Two: Exposition 1 Peter 2:11-12

The words “dearly beloved” are terms of endearment employed by the apostle toward the brethren who were the recipients of his inspired epistle. The phrase “I beseech you” represents a pleading, tender admonishment. Next, Peter referred to his Christian readers as “strangers” — sojourners, aliens, foreigners in a strange land, dwelling near or beside another.

Christians often become as aliens to friends and family members who remain lost — outside Jesus Christ; a spiritual gulf exists between practicing Christians and all others. Christian “citizenship is in heaven” (Philippians 3:20 ASV; Hebrews 11:9-10, 13). A foreigner thinks of his homeland though he may be far away from it; Christians ought to never lose sight of heaven — always seeing it clearly in the mind’s eye and ever marching toward it.

The apostle Peter called the addressees of First Peter “pilgrims,” too. A pilgrim is a person who remains in a place a short time while traveling through as on a journey, especially a journey to visit a holy place. Therefore, the Christian pilgrim avoids alliances with the world that would impede his spiritual journey to the holiest of all places; neither wealth, possessions, marriage, job nor anything else is entertained with equal or more interest than heavenly and eternal pursuits by conscientious Christians. The pilgrim takes as little baggage as possible with him! Alert Christians relentlessly bound for the promised land and carefully skirt around the lusts of the world (1 John 2:15-17; James 4:4).

To “abstain” here means to hold back from and to continue to hold back from something. “Fleshly lusts” are equivalent to all evil desires (Galatians 5:16-24; 1 Peter 4:3-4) and that from which successful pilgrims hold back. This is so crucial to a successful pilgrimage that the New Testament repeatedly records exhortations concerning “youthful lusts” (2 Timothy 2:22), “former lusts” (1 Peter 1:14), “worldly lusts” (Titus 2:12) and “crucified lusts” (Galatians 5:24).

The idea of “war” is an active, constant aggression; this word depicts a protracted campaign — not a single battle. The “soul,” of course, is the immortal part of man and the object of the devil’s never-ending assaults.

The word “conversation” refers to the Christians behavior or conduct; favorably influencing other souls is dependent upon keeping one’s own soul. “Honest” is the deportment which Christians are exhorted to exhibit; the lost are to be allured through a beautiful, attractive lifestyle rather than by illicit lusts or worldly inducements.

The world, however, is prone to coarsely evaluate the children of God and ‘speak against us as evildoers.’ Literally, we are perceived as “bad actors,” dramatically out of step with the ungodly, lost world. Christianity was a brilliant light in the sin-darkened Roman ruled world of the first century. Jesus Christ himself was maligned as an evildoer (1 Peter 2:21-23) and his faithful followers will fare no better (Matthew 10:23-25).

In the first century, Christians were erroneously imagined to be evil doers variously: (1) politically, as enemies of government (Acts 17:7-8), (2) religiously, as atheists for their opposition to idolatry (Acts 17:16-32; 19:24-41), (3) commercially, for undermining the manufacture of idols and interfering with the commerce of curious arts (Acts 19:19, 24-41), and (4) ethically, because they opposed the widespread corruption of the day (Ephesians 5:11; Galatians 5:19-21). Consequently, Christians were blamed for every malicious deed and calamity which transpired (e.g., robberies, all kinds of villainy, arson, murder as well as floods, famine, earthquakes and disease).

“Good works,” however, readily visible in the lives of Christians, dispelled the evil attributed to Christians; honest auditors of Christian living (beautiful deeds versus crimes) exonerated Christianity. Thereby, Christian living possesses a strong missionary appeal (1 Peter 3:1). Actions really do speak louder than words!

The word “behold” means to scrutinize minutely, examine carefully or closely inspect. The world will vigorously test one’s claim to be a Christian, and God intends that evaluation should reveal “light” — not “darkness” (Matthew 5:16).

The phrase “day of visitation” refers to a day of examination by God. In this verse, emphasis is on God’s desire that all souls prepare for this event and save themselves (2 Peter 3:9).

It is imperative that Christians, as strangers and pilgrims, do not unnecessarily burden themselves with worldly distractions so that their pilgrimage will not be hindered; it is in the Christian’s own spiritual self interest to abstain from fleshly lusts. Secondly, godly lives can influence others to obey the Gospel of Christ.

Discussion Questions:

1. In what way can Christians, in a sense, speak the language of Ashdod if not careful?
2. Though trying to live peaceably with all men, what especially can hinder the Christian’s peaceful co-existence with non-Christians?
3. In what ways are Christians sometimes disadvantaged under the legal system to which they are responsible? How should Christians react in such instances?
4. Describe the special dangers inherent in marriages between Christians and either non-Christians or weak Christians.
5. Explain how Christians today can, in a sense, settle toward Sodom.
6. Discuss the heartache often experienced by Christians whose family members and friends do not become Christians.
7. List some of the ways in which Christians can more easily keep their eyes fixed on the heavenly horizon.
8. What kind of *baggage* can impede the Christian pilgrim on his spiritual journey?
9. How compelling a threat is lust to the child of God? What emphasis does the Bible accord lust?
10. How does the Christian pursuit compare to a war?
11. In what way might faithful Christians be viewed as *bad actors*?
12. Describe the value of Christian living in the face of an ungodly world.

Chapter 4: In Times Like These: Solidifying the Home by Godly Fathers

Times Like These

To what does the phrase, “In Times Like These,” refer? What negative impact does our society have on our children that godly fathers must counteract it? Further, are “Times Like These” significantly different from earlier times?

We live in an age where human life has been cheapened. The most prominent disregard for the sanctity of human life is abortion on demand. About a million and a half babies are murdered in America each year since the legalization of abortion on January 22, 1973; around the world, about 50 million babies are aborted annually. Doctor assisted suicide has proved newsworthy in recent years. Teenage suicide continues to increase; many American youths believe they have no reason to live. Gang violence, ghastly crimes committed by children, television and movie violence all are indicative of a devaluation of human life in our nation. To what lengths is euthanasia (mercy killing) likely to go? In view of earth’s several billion population (which increases about 270,000 per day), some people advocate taking the life of this world’s less productive and less educated people. Their concept is not much unlike thinning the deer population “for its own good,” and frighteningly similar to Hitler’s campaign of extermination against people he viewed as inferior to his so-called “super-race.”

Increasingly, America is becoming amoral (unaware of any authoritative code of ethics or moral conduct of which one is in violation). There was a time generations ago that even immoral people realized that they were immoral for violating what they knew to be morally right.

Homosexuality is openly advocated and practiced. Single-parent homes (largely due to illegitimate births and rampant divorce) are rapidly replacing two-parent homes as the national norm. Widespread corruption in politics is generally conceded. Religious leaders are routinely embroiled in scandals. The religious community is confused and often apathetic. The heinous doctrine of humanism has infiltrated virtually every public and private institution throughout our nation and much of the world. Hedonism, our nation’s interpretation of the constitutional right to “the pursuit of happiness,” is the primary and all encompassing goal of nearly every man, woman and child — including Christians. Treason is commonplace. Taxes are burdensome. Even many of our poor people enjoy an affluence superior to the majority of this world’s population; our prosperity has corrupted us. Americans often have too much idle-time, during which they play with new toys to commit old sins; essentially man sins through “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (1 John 2:15-17). Pornography is everywhere (books, videos, computer, live sex shows [i.e., in West Virginia total nudity is legal — and proponents of such say that it cannot be stopped]). Our nation has practiced democracy to a fault; everyone has so many rights that essentially no one can be assured of any rights. We are approaching a new milestone in legalized chaos and debauchery. Our democratic way of life has even affected our concept of the Gospel (i.e., we would rather refer an item to a popular vote, if it is a matter of expediency, instead of allowing elders to determine the course of action, or if it is a matter of doctrine instead of turning to God’s Word). In all these things, the typical citizen of our nation consents to follow a multitude to do evil (Exodus 23:2).

Have “times” ever been as bad or worse than “Times Like These”? Yes! Both biblical and secular histories acknowledge the atrocities enacted upon mankind by his fellow man. Repeatedly man has demonstrated a moral bankruptcy. None of our contemporary sins are *new*. Have “times” been better than “Times Like These”? Yes, again. What we notice is that “Times Like These” today differ from past generations, such as those portrayed on “The Waltons” or “Little House on the Prairie.” The “times,” then, are worse than we or our parents or our grandparents recall. Godly fathers must solidify the home in times like these.

Godly Fathers Solidify the Home

“In Times Like These,” fathers need to accept the responsibility (for which God holds them accountable) to guide the home. How wonderful it would be if what God said about Abraham could justly be said about Christian fathers today. “For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him” (Genesis 18:19). Commenting on Genesis 18:19, Joseph D. Meador wrote:

. . . God chose Abraham to become the father of the nation of Israel because he took seriously his own role as a father to his own children. . . . The answer to Abraham’s effectiveness as a role model and family leader lay in the fact that he practiced what he taught others to observe. . . . Abraham provided leadership through his own consistent behavior. . . . Abraham provided spiritual instruction to his children and household, he also provided them with clear spiritual goals.¹

Too many fathers have abdicated their leadership roles in the family. However, the para-church, denominational to-the-core, false doctrine propagating organization called *Promise Keepers* is not the resource to which Christian men should appeal to refresh themselves on responsible fatherhood. All fathers, instead, need to turn to the Bible to learn how to be better fathers, “In Times Like These.” “Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged” (Colossians 3:21).

Godly fathers must thoroughly and continuously instruct their children in spiritual matters. “And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up” (Deuteronomy 6:7). A marginal reading indicates that fathers are to “sharpen” their children. Fathers may not reveal something new each time they teach their children. However, each spiritual lesson can increase a child’s proficiency in biblical matters of which he was previously informed.

Fathers make a grave mistake if they permit their children’s biblical education to be limited, at best, to four one-hour segments of Bible class and worship per week. An unsigned bulletin tidbit reads: “No man ever really finds out what he believes in until he begins to instruct his children.” Some fathers, then, must not believe much, for the little to nothing they teach their children about God’s ways.

The home has sometimes been called “The Laboratory of Life.” What children experience in the home will make them respectively fit or unfit for their later physical, psychological, social, spiritual, intellectual and economical lives. Children, among other lessons, must be taught that learning how to live is more important than learning how to make a living. Our children, of course, need to learn both, but they must be taught about priorities. **Christianity is a way of life!**

It is in the home that fathers must teach children law and order. Learning how to abide by rules and regulations in the home prepares children to abide in the rules and regulations of both God and man (government). Responsible discipline is essential to successful parenting (Hebrews 12:5-11; Proverbs 13:24; 23:13-14).

This, though, is an area in which society and the legal system challenge Christian homes. Children may be taken by the State if parents administer corporal punishment (spank). It has happened and it will doubtless happen again. Further, promoters of children’s advocacy or children’s rights would have children evaluate their parents, their home environment and religious training to which they are subjected. Children may then inform on their parents or sue to divorce their parents. Even godly parents are at legal risk for the whims of an unruly child.

It is in the home that fathers must ensure that their children learn to practice reverential public worship. Our children need to know what worship is. Further, our children must come to know God — He who is worshipped. They must know how to worship. Again, Christianity is very much supposed to be a way of life — of which reverential, public worship is a necessary part. The home and public

worship complement each other and contribute to fortifying our children in the face of many perils to their faith.

Perils to Our Children's Faith

In an excellent tract, "What's Happening To Our Christian Homes?," Robert L. Waggoner wrote:

. . . Christian parents . . . must be more knowledgeable of the problems their children will face in this world, and they must be more purposeful to achieve their desired goals of child raising.²

Obviously, unless we recognize and are alert to the problems that buffet them, we are ill-prepared to help our children keep the faith. The sources of these perils to faith surround us. The primary vehicles through which the Christian faith is confronted in our society are public schools and the media.

The father of American education, John Dewey, instilled atheistic humanism in our schools, beginning with teacher training colleges through and thereby every grade of school life. Christian principles on which this nation was established were pushed out of our educational system long ago. As Waggoner observed:

. . . subtle and deceptive . . . techniques as role-playing, survival games, encounter group sessions, daily journals, sensitivity training, etc. the public schools are turning our children away from God, and destroying our Christian homes.³

(Employers sponsor classes in which their employees who may have escaped the indoctrination to which the schools subject children, are fed humanism on the job. Role playing, survival games, encounter group sessions and sensitivity training are the fad of corporate America.)

Further, ". . . sex education is taught without moral values."⁴ Teaching "safe-sex," irrespective of and sometimes promoting experimenting with either heterosexual or homosexual intercourse, may include dispensing condoms — at school. For "unfortunate" pregnant girls, a school counselor may be their first stop on the way to an abortion clinic. Often, parents are **not welcome** to participate in any area of our children's education, unless it is explicitly manipulated by the public schools.

Several years ago, my family served a congregation where the required physical education class in that school district was co-ed swimming. We refused, for religious conscience, based on biblical principles, to allow our teenage daughter to participate or be present for that activity. The local school board overruled our religious convictions, and added that, "Members of the church for which you preach, including past ministers, sent their children to school here, and not one of them ever had a problem with mixed swimming." Our appeal to the State School Board was unsuccessful; we were ordered to submit our daughter to the prescribed physical education class. Bonnie and I refused and told the superintendent that we would meet him in court ('appeal unto Caesar') — after which, to my surprise, the educational system relented.

My wife and I have not abdicated our parental responsibility to the public schools. Thousands of parents today homeschool because they, too, refuse to surrender their parental responsibilities to the public schools, especially considering the humanistic, anti-Christian dogma so apparent in education, "In Times Like These."

Please do not misunderstand. We do not despise education. Further, surely there are many good teachers who do not push humanism, etc., some of whom are Christians. Our daughter is a school teacher.

God and prayer are banned from school, but the religions of humanism, atheism, mythology and New Age are invited to school. Moral purity and chastity are old world hindrances to popular, personal expression, while "safe-sex" and experimenting with homosexuality is exciting.

Ungodly media pummels the home. Television, movies and music present no less a peril to the faith of our children than the schools. The detrimental affect of television and movies as they glorify illicit sex and senseless violence is barely veiled at all. The danger of rock music may be suspected by some

parents to be harmful, but country music is no better. The lyrics of either type of music often are ungodly and hardly supportive of Christian values. On whatever our minds feast they will thrive. Paul by inspiration directed: “ Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things” (Philippians 4:8).

“Christian parents cannot build strong Christian character in their children unless these influences are greatly minimized.”⁵ Though we may not fully appreciate the Amish and Jehovah’s Witnesses for their religious errors, among some admirable traits is their respective minimization of society’s affect on their children. **We cannot fully embrace all that society offers and expect to minimize its affect on our children — and ourselves.**

Some Biblical Portraits of Fathers

- Fathers who made obvious mistakes (sinned): Noah (Genesis 9:21), Lot (Genesis 19:33-38).
- A prime example of a good father and an obedient son: Abraham and Isaac (Genesis 22:7-19).
- A spiritual father and son team: Paul and Timothy (1 Timothy 1:2; 2 Corinthians 1:1).
- A father who was blameworthy for the sinful lives of his children: Eli (1 Samuel 2:13, “For I have told him that I will judge his house for ever for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not.”).
- A father who was **not** responsible for the sinfulness of his children: Samuel (1 Samuel 8:1-5, “And it came to pass, when Samuel was old, that he made his sons judges over Israel. Now the name of his firstborn was Joel; and the name of his second, Abiah: they were judges in Beersheba. And his sons walked not in his ways, but turned aside after lucre, and took bribes, and perverted judgment. Then all the elders of Israel gathered themselves together, and came to Samuel unto Ramah, And said unto him, Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now make us a king to judge us like all the nations.”).
- Fathers who love their sons in spite of their sons’ wickedness: David and Absalom (2 Samuel 18:31-33), the prodigal son and his father (Luke 15:11-24).
- A rash father: Jephthah (Judges 11:30-39).
- A father who chastises his son because he loves him: God the Father (Hebrews 12:5-12).

Conclusion

“. . . [T]he Christian home is deteriorating today, because, among other reasons, it is being less effective in establishing a strong Christian faith in its children.”⁶ When should we start, in the home and in the church, to teach children? From the cradle! “There was not a word of all that Moses commanded, which Joshua read not before all the congregation of Israel, with the women, and the little ones, and the strangers that were conversant among them” (Joshua 8:35). With whom did Israel leave the babies if everyone else assembled?

We have our Sodom and Gomorrah’s. We have idolatry (idols fashioned from the imaginations of men — denominational gods). Yet, there is hope. Sinners can be washed, sanctified and justified (1 Corinthians 6:9-11). Though all have sinned (Romans 1:18-32; 3:23), sinners can obey from the heart and be made free from sin (Romans 6:17-18).

What Is A Home?

A roof to keep out the rain. Four walls to keep out the wind. Floors to keep out the cold. Yes, but home is more than that. It is a laugh of a baby, the song of a mother, the strength of a father. Warmth of loving hearts, light from happy eyes, kindness, loyalty,

comradeship. Home is the first school of young ones, where they learn what is good, what is right and what is kind. That is a home, May God Bless It! (Anonymous)

The Parents' Faith

- **We** believe our children are a gift of God — the hope of tomorrow.
- **We** believe that immeasurable possibilities lie slumbering in each son and daughter.
- **We** believe that God has planned for their future, and that His love shall always surround them; and so . . .
- **We** believe that they shall grow up! — first crawling, then toddling, then standing, stretching skyward for a decade and a half — until they reach full stature — a man and a woman!
- **We** believe that they can and will be molded and shaped between infancy and adulthood — as a tree is shaped by the gardener, and the clay vessel in the potter's hands, or the shoreline of the sea under the watery hand of the mighty waves; by home and church; by school and street, through sights and sounds and the touch of our hands on their hands and Christ's Spirit, through His Word, on their hearts!
- **We** believe that they shall mature as only people can — through laughter and tears, through trial and error, by reward and punishment, through affection and discipline, until they stretch their wings and leave their nests to fly!
- O, God — **We** believe in our children. Help us so to live that they may always believe in us — and so in Thee. (Anonymous)

Discussion Questions:

1. List some evidences of a depreciated value for human life.
2. In what ways is the multitude leading our society to spiritual ruin?
3. Compare the similarities and dissimilarities between sins of the past and sins commonly practiced today.
4. Who has the ultimate responsibility in the home for the moral aptitude of the family? When did this responsibility inhere?
5. With what frequency should the morality of the family be addressed?
6. Describe in what ways the *laboratory of life* affects developing children.
7. Weigh the value of discipline in the home versus intimidation by society to dispense with discipline.
8. Discuss the affect of public education and the media on our homes.
9. What should Christian parents do when confronted by authorities over family issues that involve conscience and biblical conviction?
10. Summarize different types of fathers from observations of biblical fathers.
11. Discuss the efficiency of educating small children and the value of the presence of children among older children and adults to their Christian education.

Endnotes

¹ Joseph D. Meador, "Q&A," *Firm Foundation*, Vol. 112. No. 6, June, 1997, pp. 26-27.

² Robert L. Waggoner, *What's Happening To Our Christian Homes?*, Haun Publishing Co., p. 17.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

Chapter 5: Biblical Canonicity

Have you ever pondered: “Which books belong in the Bible?” Probably not. The question of biblical canonicity, though perhaps never considered by most people, is of paramount importance if men are to appropriately serve God. God’s Word must be sure in order for men to confidently prepare themselves for eternity. God’s Word must also be free of corruption, subtraction or addition that might otherwise adversely affect that preparation.

Fortunately, mortal man has no need to become alarmed pondering which books belong in the Bible. Our God is powerful enough to preserve his Word. Ample evidence overwhelmingly confirms that the Bible with which we are familiar is the complete and uncorrupted Word of God.

Insofar as translations have been accurately translated from the original languages, those translations are the inspired Word of God. No doctrine has been corrupted in reliable translations. Some translations, however, have not been accurately translated, but there is no doubt concerning the validity of the Bible text in the languages in which it was originally written.

The word “canon” appears in the Greek New Testament about five times (2 Corinthians 10:13, 15-16; Galatians 6:16; Philippians 3:16) and its meaning has been applied to the inspired body of Scripture — the Bible. Frequently, the word “canon” is translated as “rule” and refers to God’s rules by which men are supposed to live righteously before God, and certainly the rules by which men will ultimately be judged for their non-compliance.

“Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing” (Philippians 3:16).

“And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God” (Galatians 6:16).

Which books belong in the Old Testament? The Old Testament as we know it has never been seriously doubted. The Old Testament books claim for themselves divine inspiration (e.g., “Thus saith the Lord”). The prophets quoted one another and recognized each other as inspired of God (Micah 4:1-4; Isaiah 2:2-4; Daniel 9:2). Joshua received Moses’ teachings as the Word of God, and some of the writing prophets are even listed in the Bible (1 Chronicles 29:29).

Historically, the Old Testament books can be traced back to the time in which they were supposed to have been written and in which the writers lived. The Old Testament books agree with all known facts characteristic of the time of their purported writing and make no mistakes concerning historical information or geography. The Jewish people, the long time custodians of God’s Word, always received the books that comprise the Old Testament. The inspiration of the Old Testament canon was never in doubt by God’s people.

Confirmation of the Old Testament is also abundantly found in the New Testament. All the Old Testament books are said to be quoted in the New Testament except Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon. These books only lacked opportunity for use in the New Testament.

The New Testament claims that the Old Testament is inspired (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21). Jesus Christ placed his stamp of approval on the Old Testament (Luke 24:44). The early church, first under the direction of inspired apostles, recognized the Old Testament as inspired and true (Acts 13:16-41). Further, in one sweeping statement, Jesus endorsed the entire Old Testament, from Genesis 1:1 to 2 Chronicles 24:20-21 (2 Chronicles was the last book according to the Hebrew arrangement of the Old Testament, Matthew 23:35).

Which books belong in the New Testament? The vast majority of New Testament books were never doubted by God’s people. The determining factor of whether a book belonged in the Bible rested with the integrity of the book, not with the integrity of the church. The uninspired church was not charged

with officiating a list of inspired books (canon). The merit and divine qualities of the New Testament books themselves determined the New Testament canon.

The proof, testimony and evidence of the validity of the New Testament as we know it are abundant. The books themselves claim inspiration. The New Testament writers believed their writings to be inspired Scripture and commanded Christians to circulate them as such (1 Thessalonians 5:27; Colossians 4:16; Revelation 1:3). The apostle Peter recognized the apostle Paul's writings as Scripture (2 Peter 3:16). Warnings appear in the New Testament concerning deviation from or corruption of the New Testament, which attests its divine nature (Galatians 1:6-9; Revelation 22:18-19).

The basis of the New Testament is fulfillment of the Old Testament, chiefly the incontrovertible resurrection of Jesus Christ, which the New Testament affirms. The New Testament is historically correct in all of its facts and geography. The New Testament was accepted as Scripture from the time it was first written, at least initially by those to whom various parts of it were addressed.

Uninspired writers who knew some of the inspired writers personally verified the validity of many of the New Testament books. Some of those upon whom the apostles had laid their hands doubtless participated in the early collection of our New Testament books. Miracles were to last until the "unity of the faith" (Ephesians 4:13) or until "that which is perfect is come" (1 Corinthians 13:8-13).

Which ancient books do not belong in the Bible? First, there is a vast amount of literature that never claimed nor was thought to be biblical (e.g., poetry, legal documents, histories). Additionally, the Apocrypha are extra-canonical books that do not belong in the Bible. None of them are ever quoted or referred to by the biblical books.

The Old Testament apocryphal books were written in the period between the testaments when admittedly there were no prophets of God. Some apocryphal books do not claim to be inspired. The apocryphal books contain factual errors concerning events and geography. The oldest catalog of canonical books of the Old Testament does not include the apocryphal books. The Old Testament apocryphal books were never accepted by the Jewish community as inspired. The New Testament apocryphal books are also biblically inaccurate and often conflict with inspired books about which there is no question.

There are about 15 apocryphal books which were written between the testaments, which once even the Catholic Church did not accept. There are also about 15 New Testament apocryphal books besides about 20 pseudepigraphal books.

Pseudepigraphal books do not belong in the Bible either. These books are falsely ascribed to Bible times or to inspired writers. They were never accepted as inspired. Both the apocrypha and the pseudepigrapha are spurious writings and therefore sometimes both are referred to simply as the apocrypha. The same criticisms leveled against the apocrypha largely apply to the pseudepigrapha.

In summary, there are sufficient copies of the original texts in the original languages of the Bible to verify both the Old and New Testament texts. Further, enough ancient translations of the Old and New Testaments have survived to verify the Bible text. Some of the versions are even older than the manuscripts surviving.

The Old Testament canon was accepted as it is at least by the second century B.C. The New Testament canon was accepted within one generation after the death of the apostle John. The Bible canon has stood the tests applied to it by critics throughout the centuries. Counterfeit books of the Bible have been discovered to be false when compared with the genuine. The inspiration of the Bible books is inherent and does not rely upon verification by outside sources.

The Old Testament apocrypha includes: The First & Second Books of Esdras, Tobit, Judith, The Additions to the Book of Esther, The Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus, The Letter of Jeremiah, The Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Young Men, Susanna, Bel and the Dragon, and First & Second Books of Maccabees.

The New Testament apocrypha includes: The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles, The Epistle of Barnabas, The First & Second Epistles of Clement, The Shepherd of Hermas, The Apocalypse of Peter,

The Acts of Paul, The Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians, The Seven Epistles of Ignatius, The Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew, The Protevangelium of James, The Gospel of the Nativity of Mary, The Gospel of Nicodemus, The Gospel of the Saviour's Infancy, The History of Joseph the Carpenter.

The pseudepigrapha includes: The Gospels of Andrew, Bartholomew, Barnabas, Matthias, Thomas, Peter, and Philip; The Acts of John, Paul, Peter, Andrew, Thomas, Matthias, Philip, and Thaddaeus; The Epistle of Paul to the Laodiceans; The apocalypse of Peter, Paul, Thomas, and John the Theologian.

Discussion Questions:

1. Describe the significance of having a reliable translation of the Bible available.
2. How does the assumption that a reliable translation of God's Word is not available today impugn the divine characteristics of God?
3. Discuss the meaning of the word *canon* and how it is used in the New Testament.
4. Discuss the various ways in which the Old Testament can be received confidently as God's Word.
5. Contrast the concept of religious authority residing in the church versus residing in the Word of God. List some churches that place religious authority in *the church* instead of the Bible.
6. In what ways are the New Testament books validated to be canonical?
7. Explain how non-canonical books are discerned as uninspired.
8. Distinguish between apocryphal and pseudepigraphal books.
9. Describe the value of the oldest textual witnesses to the content of the original manuscripts or autographs.

Chapter 6: A Burning And A Shining Light

“He was a burning and a shining light: and ye were willing for a season to rejoice in his light” (John 5:35). This statement was made by Jesus Christ about John the Baptist. However, Jesus essentially applied the same frame of reference as well to all who would be his disciples. “Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 5:14-16). **All Christians should be careful to always be ‘burning and shining lights.’**

Light and **darkness** are used extensively in Scripture to depict the polar opposites of righteousness and wickedness. Additionally, many of the songs we sing teach this biblical distinction. **Singing**, as God’s choice of music in worship, teaches and admonishes (Colossians 3:16) and speaks (Ephesians 5:19) to the assembly about holy things. Further, **singing**, though praising God, is also both to be sung with and result in **understanding** (1 Corinthians 14:15). Songs about **light** include: “Ye Are the Light of the World,” “Let the Lower Lights Be Burning,” “Sunlight,” “Stepping in the Light,” “Send the Light,” “Heavenly Sunlight,” “Walking in the Light of God,” “There Is Sunshine in My Soul” and “The Light of the World Is Jesus.” These songs variously emphasize themes like (1) the source of Divine Light (God, Jesus, Heaven, the Bible), (2) Christians exhibiting that Light (Christian living) and (3) Christians reflecting the Light to the lost world (evangelism). Listen carefully to the hymns sung and sing not what for you personally would be lies.

Greater And Lesser Lights

The sun of our solar system serves as the greater light, whereas the earth’s moon is a lesser light (Genesis 1:16-19). Ordinarily, the sun shines on the moon, which in turn reflects that light in earth’s night skies; the moon has no light source of its own. Similarly, Jesus Christ is our spiritual Son; his Sonlight should enlighten Christians (the church) who in turn reflect Sonlight upon the darkness of a sin-sick and dying world (the lost); the church has no other light source and does not originate its own light. **The moon and the church both possess reflective functions, without which neither have a purpose** (Ephesians 3:10-11).

However, in the physical universe a solar eclipse (or bashful moon) sometimes blocks sunlight, leaving the earth in darkness. The same thing can occur in the spiritual universe, whereby the church fails to reflect Sonlight to a darkened and lost world. In either case, this represents the failure of the reflective function respectively assigned to the moon and the church. The church cannot afford to be a **bashful moon**.

In addition to a solar eclipse, sometimes a lunar eclipse occurs. This happens when the earth comes between the sun and the moon, and the moon is in darkness. Spiritually, this occurs when the world (worldliness) comes between the Son and the church; a church or Christians caught up in the world are also darkened and cannot enlighten the lost. This, too, is a failure of the ordinary reflective function.

Generally, a solar eclipse may be total or partial. Likewise, spiritually speaking, the Sonlight which Christians or the church should reflect may be wholly or partially obscured. Comparisons between physical and spiritual eclipses bring to mind (1) passages noting that though we live in the world we must not be of the world (John 17:14-16) and (2) the enumerated deficiencies of the churches of Asia (Revelation 2-3). God’s people must resolve to reflect the Sonlight and obscure it not at all; their souls and the souls of the lost world require it.

The Light Of Righteousness Contrasted With The Darkness Of Wickedness

The Bible contrasts the light of righteousness with the darkness of wickedness. Light and darkness represent the opposites of righteousness and wickedness (2 Corinthians 6:14). “Be ye not unequally

yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath **righteousness with unrighteousness?** and what communion hath **light with darkness?**” Outside Christ’s kingdom of light is only darkness (Colossians 1:12-13; 1 Peter 2:9). **There is no middle ground between light and darkness, righteousness and wickedness, the kingdom of Christ and the darkness of sin.**

Light Is Divine In Origin

Heaven itself is the power plant of divine light (1 Timothy 6:16); the abode of God is a dwelling place of light. Further, light is said to emanate from God himself (James 1:17; Revelation 21:23-25; 22:5). Also, prophecy (fulfilled in Jesus Christ) predicted that divine light should dwell on earth in the ministry of the Savior (Matthew 4:13-17). Our Lord came to be a light to Jews and Gentiles alike (Matthew 4:13-17; Luke 2:32; Acts 26:23), and he is the only light of the world (John 1:4-9; 8:12; 9:5). Christ’s mission involved coming to earth to give light to men (Ephesians 5:14), which light he imparted by preaching repentance and the kingdom (Matthew 4:13-17). Hereby, Jesus empowered men to become the children of light, (John 12:35-36).

Light Shines On Earth Through The Word Of God

Paul referred to the “light of the glorious gospel of Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:4). The same divine power which spoke physical light into existence has also provided spiritual light (revelation, knowledge) (2 Corinthians 4:6). Hence, spiritual light today shines on earth through the Word of God. This word is called a “light that shineth in a dark place” (2 Peter 1:19-21). The Christian’s source of light, which he in turn must reflect toward others, comes today through the Word of God, the Gospel.

The Followers Of Christ Reflect Divine Light

Heaven’s light resides in the children of God; Christians, therefore, have the divine charge to let that light shine (Matthew 5:14-16; Luke 8:16; 11:33-36; 12:35). Christians are called the “children of light” (Luke 16:8; Ephesians 5:8; 1 Thessalonians 5:5-8), since God is the “Father of lights” (James 1:17). We become the children of light when we are “enlightened” by the Word of God (Hebrews 6:4-6), and are required to give that light away to all men (Luke 1:79; Acts 13:47; 26:17-18). The Christian light must not only burn, it must also shine, Matthew 4:14-16; John 5:35.

Christians Are Cautioned Against False Lights

Satan and his servants take on the appearance of light and righteousness (2 Corinthians 11:14-15). Sometimes men are false lights as the Jews often were (Romans 2:19). Numerous passages warn about false teachers (lights) (Romans 16:17-18; 1 Timothy 4:1-3; James 3:1). “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1).

How Can Christians Let Their Lights Shine?

The **practical application** of any assessment of the do’s and don’ts of religion (or any other field of inquiry) is essential, without which the value of one’s study is greatly diminished. So, “How can Christians let their lights shine?” (1) Reflect only light emanating from the divine source (heaven, the Father, Christ, the Word of God). (2) Reflect all of the light radiating from the divine source (Acts 20:27).

(3) Allow no darkness a place in one to overshadow or dim the light of the Gospel.

“No man, when he hath lighted a candle, putteth it in a secret place, neither under a bushel, but on a candlestick, that they which come in may see the light. The light of the body is the eye: therefore when thine eye is single, thy whole body also is full of light; but when thine eye is evil, thy body also is full of darkness. **Take heed therefore that the light which is in thee be not darkness.** If thy whole body therefore be full of light, **having no part dark**, the whole

shall be full of light, as when the bright shining of a candle doth give thee light” (Luke 11:33-36).

(4) Putting away unholy things.

“Do all things **without murmurings and disputings**: That ye may be **blameless and harmless**, the sons of God, **without rebuke**, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom **ye shine as lights in the world**; Holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain” (Philippians 2:14-16).

(5) Seeking only that which is holy.

“**Ye are all the children of light**, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober. For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night. **But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation**” (1 Thessalonians 5:5-8).

(6) Put on the armor of light.

“The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore **cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light**. Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying” (Romans 13:12-13).

(7) Finally, let us hold forth the Word of God (Philippians 2:14-16). “. . . ye shine as lights in the world; Holding forth the word of life . . .” See also Philippians 1:17 and Jude 3.

Conclusion

Light reproves sin and darkness (John 3:19-21; Ephesians 5:13), and the light of the Gospel is the only means by which one can avoid stumbling as if walking in the night (John 11:9-10). Men can walk in light or darkness, not both and not in between (1 John 2:8-11). Only by walking in the light can one enjoy fellowship with God and the forgiveness of sins (1 John 1:5-7). May each Christian determine to be “a burning and shining light” (John 5:35).

There is a distinct difference between the light of righteousness and the darkness of sin; won't you be led by the light of the Gospel today? Erring Christians can be rekindled (Acts 8:22). Others can begin their walk in the light by being immersed in water for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16; 1 John 1:7).

Discussion Questions:

1. In what ways is *light* contrasted with *darkness* in God's Word and the songs we sing?
2. Describe the similarity between the sun and moon regarding light versus the Son of God and Christians. Also, note the dependency in both instances.
3. How can the relationship of the church or Christians to Jesus Christ be compared to solar and lunar eclipses?
4. In the analogy employed in this chapter, to what would *twilight* be compared?
5. Describe the ultimate origin of spiritual light, also noting the origin of faulty or competing would-be spiritual lights.
6. What is the exclusive medium by which spiritual light shines on earth today? Also, in what form is it presented today?
7. Describe the vessels that hold spiritual light on earth now. Compare these vessels of light to flashlights – some with batteries and shining, some with batteries and not shining and some without batteries.

Chapter 6: A Burning And A Shining Light

8. Who or what are *false lights* on earth today? How can one discern a *false light*?
9. What are some practical ways in which the child of God can let his light shine?
10. List some activities that can dim the Christian light, and from which the Christian should remove himself.

Chapter 7: Modesty: Biblical Investigation, Contemporary Application

The subject of *modesty* is definitively addressed in the New Testament. The New Testament is authoritative, which authority has not diminished with the passing of the centuries. What the Bible says regarding *modesty* is binding today. Further, what the New Testament teaches about *modesty* is truth, which if violated constitutes sin.

Modesty Defined

The English word *modesty* appears only once in the King James Version of the Bible (1 Timothy 2:9). The word *modesty* is from the Greek term *kosmios*. It means: orderly, well-arranged, decent, modest, harmonious arrangement, adornment. This Greek word also appears in the Septuagint (Ecclesiastes 12:9) and is translated “set in order” and is applied to Solomon’s proverbs. *Kosmios* is derived from *kosmos* which means: order, regular disposition, ornament, decoration, embellishment, adorning and is used, among other ways, of the world on which we live (Matthew 13:35; Mark 16:15). *Kosmos* is used of modest attire and translated as “adorning” in 1 Peter 3:3. “Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel.”

Modesty can apply to one’s manner of dress. The context of 1 Timothy 2:9-10 especially concerns gaudy dress. Also, the word for “apparel,” in the same verses, is from the Greek *katastole* which means: letting down, and is used in the Septuagint in Isaiah 61:3 as “garment” for the Hebrew meaning “covering” or “wrapping.”

Modesty is also biblically applied to one’s demeanor or behavior. *Kosmois* appears in the qualifications of elders as “good behavior” (1 Timothy 3:2). The apostle Peter also taught *modesty* and addressed both what one may wear and an internal modesty (1 Peter 3:1-5); The Greek word for “adorning” in this context is *kosmos*.

The summary definition of *modesty* involves both one’s manner of dress and inward qualities. The well ordering is not of dress and behavior only, but also of one’s inner life which exhibits itself outwardly. Biblical *modesty* starts on the inside and works its way to the outside of a person.

Modesty In Context

“In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; But (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works” (1 Timothy 2:9-10).

The context of 1 Timothy 2:8-11, in which verses 9 and 10 address modesty, relates first to the public worship assembly. Especially in the public worship, women are cautioned to be careful lest their outward adornment pose a distraction both to themselves and others. “Shamefacedness” is the natural internal moral quality of blushing when sin is viewed as repulsive. “Sobriety” is soundness or soberness of mind, resulting in self-restraint. “Not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array” refers to the gaudy show in which women braided their hair with strands of gold and silver which glistened in the sunlight and layered themselves with jewels (Isaiah 3:16-23). “But which becometh women professing godliness with good works” is contrasted with a mere outward display; the inner display is more precious before God and more representative of Christian womanhood. The prohibition is on the extreme and otherwise addresses the priority of adornment, extolling praise on inward over outward adornment.

“Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives; While they behold

your chaste conversation coupled with fear. Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price. For after this manner in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands” (1 Peter 3:1-5).

From the first verse of this context, one’s *behavior* rather than anything else, such as physical adornment, is commended. Verses one and two champion chaste or holy behavior as the means for a Christian wife to influence a husband whose wife’s words are ineffective toward him. The Christian woman does not rely on lavish outward adornment to secure and keep the attention of a man; the references to adorning here are the same as those of 1 Timothy 2:9.

Comparatively speaking, the inward spiritual adornment is more precious to God and more effective for Christians than outward physical adorning. The apostle Peter teaches a disposition that was also practiced by godly women, such as Sarah (verses 5, 6). Peter did not prohibit wearing jewelry, cosmetics or clothes; he did prohibit extreme adornment or that adornment which overshadowed (displaced) a holy and referential behavior. Both Paul and Peter urge holiness that is to be exhibited, not hindered, outwardly.

Is Modesty A Variable?

There is a sense in which *modesty* is not variable. God’s Word does not change. There are no special circumstances either then or now which mitigate or set aside this teaching. It will never be right for one’s dress or degree of undress to overshadow and displace a Christian’s holy behavior. God is concerned about Christian *modesty* (men and women) in and out of the worship assembly. Men and women should be modestly attired (inwardly and outwardly) always, especially in public.

There is a sense in which *modesty* is variable. *Modesty* in public worship is equivalent to what constitutes *modesty* in any public setting. However, what is biblically *modest* in public differs from what is biblically *modest* in the private setting of a married couple’s bedroom. The modern day problem over *modesty* is not primarily the putting on apparel, but the taking off apparel or clothes. People, and unfortunately Christians too, have taken modesty confined to private settings and moved it to public display. This is sinful, for it discounts biblical modesty, numbs the senses of morality (shamefacedness), displaces holy behavior and influence, as well as promotes lust.

Immodesty Relates To Lust

The attire of a harlot has always aroused the base nature of men. The “attire of a harlot” is discernible and has a calculated result (Proverbs 7:10). Is it reasonable to suppose the dress or lack thereof which if worn by a harlot encourages men to lust will lead to less lust if worn by a Christian woman?

Watching a woman bathe has been known to arouse unlawful lusts in a man. King David saw Bathsheba washing, lusted after her, committed adultery with her, fathered a child, murdered her husband and brought much misery upon himself and the nation (2 Samuel 11:2-5). Is it advisable for women, especially those professing godliness, to bathe in the presence of men, whether it be sunbathing or swimming?

Lust is a sin which especially men are cautioned in Scripture to avoid; is it any more praiseworthy for women to dress provocatively and excite lust? Lust is viewed by our Lord as adultery only not yet enacted (Matthew 5:28). Lust is a sin for which souls will be lost (Titus 2:12; Romans 6:23; James 1:14, 15; 1 Peter 2:11).

Application Today

It is improper and sinful for Christians to dress immodestly in the worship assembly. The greater context of 1 Timothy 2:9-10 addresses the public worship. Mini-skirts, skimpy dresses, high-slit skirts and low-cut blouses have no place in public worship. Especially women should be careful to wear appropriate undergarments that contribute to modesty.

It is improper and sinful for Christians to dress immodestly in any public setting. Public immodesty displaces positive Christian influence and promotes lust, and is, therefore, sinful. Added to the former list, short-shorts, halter or tube tops, sheer blouses, swimsuits and other revealing or provocative clothing should not be worn publicly by Christians. The beach or a swimming pool does not lessen the need for Christians to dress modestly.

At home, the modesty of one's dress varies. What may be biblically modest in the inner chambers of one's home is biblically immodest in the public areas of the house while entertaining guests or out in the yard. Further, what may be modest between husband and wife can be immodest in front of the children. What may be modest family dress is immodest when exhibited to others (e.g., night-clothes).

Persistence in immodesty has serious ramifications. Immodesty in the face of biblical instruction demonstrates willful lack of subjection to God and one's father or husband. Immodesty is not a usual and orderly arrangement of clothing. Immodesty overshadows and displaces "shamefacedness and sobriety," "professing godliness" and "good works." Immodesty makes impossible the influence of another with the Gospel "without a word" (1 Peter 3:1-5). Finally, immodesty is sinful, leads to additional sins and corrupts others.

Conclusion

The topic of *modesty* is taught in the New Testament and is binding today. *Modesty* is an orderly arrangement of clothes that does not hide the inner or spiritual side of man. Immodesty leads to lust and other sins. Faithful and knowledgeable Christians do not wear some clothes in public: mini-shirts, skimpy dresses, high-slit skirts, low-cut blouses, short-shorts, halter or tube tops, sheer blouses, swimsuits and other revealing clothing. Persistent immodesty is evidence of rebellion toward God, his Word, the church, fathers and husbands. Immodesty ruins the Christian influence and impairs the effectiveness of the Gospel.

Discussion Questions:

1. How does the word *modesty* apply to both the physical universe and to personal adornment? What is the relationship between the physical universe and personal adornment regarding *modesty*?
2. In what way is modesty both an internal and an external matter?
3. Whereas often today modesty applies to a degree of undress, how does biblical modesty also include some degree of overdress? How is the latter manifested today?
4. Contrast the effects of different types of adornment on other people, including one's family members. What type of adornment has the greater potential for a positive and holy effect?
5. What from 1 Peter 3:1-5 signals that God does not prohibit personal adornment completely (e.g., jewelry and cosmetics)?
6. In what way is modesty variable? In what way is modesty not variable?
7. Compare the "attire of a harlot" to contemporary fashions and denote the similarities and dissimilarities. Can one know what type of attire is likely to incite lust in the opposite sex?
8. How serious are immodesty and the lust that it may encourage? Who bears a responsibility for lust?
9. Are bathing suits in public or even nudity biblically permissible as long as water, sand and several other people similarly unattired are present?
10. Evaluate the sinfulness of immodesty and the additional potential sins to which it can lead.
11. Describe the effect of immodesty on Christian influence.

Chapter 8: Divorce & Remarriage: Scourge Of Our Day

The subject of *marriage-divorce-and-remarriage* must be the **scourge** of our day; of all the doctrinal errors that threaten Christianity in this generation, perhaps nothing else is more infectious as well as lethal. Doctrinal errors concerning divorce and remarriage are probably as widely spread throughout the Christian religion as any other heresy. It promises to blemish the spotless bride of Christ and fill the church with adulterers.

The ark of safety is taking on worldly water and cannot long remain afloat, unless the gash in the hull is quickly repaired and that water bailed. Unchecked, courtesy of false teachers, future teachers, preachers, elders and deacons will be selected from among adulterous congregations.

“But,” we are told, “don’t you know that Jesus was only speaking to his disciples in Matthew 5:32? Therefore, our Lord’s teaching about divorce only applies to Christians today; it doesn’t affect non-Christians.”

In essence, we are asked to believe that a non-Christian may marry, divorce and remarry several times before baptism, and with whomever he happens to be when he is baptized, to that person he is married. It would seem, then, that God does not recognize the marriages of non-Christians. Hmm! How do you suppose God views a marriage between a non-Christian and a Christian; is the former not married whereas the latter is married; or, does God not recognize such an arrangement as a marriage at all?

Audience: Disciples Or Multitudes Too

Yes, the disciples of our Lord were present when Jesus taught the Sermon on the Mount, including when he addressed the subject of marriage and divorce (Matthew 5:1-2, 32). However, multitudes who gathered from Galilee, Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judaea and beyond Jordan followed Jesus (Matthew 4:25). The multitudes were the reason for which he went into a mountain; but, did he go to the mountain to escape the crowd or to address the multitude from a natural crest (Matthew 5:1)? It is true that his disciples came close to him, but that does not necessarily exclude the multitude. The greater audience, including the vast gathering, was present considering Matthew 7:28-8:1.

“And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine: For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. When he was come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed him.”

Notice, that when Jesus concluded the Sermon on the Mount, “the **people** were astonished at his doctrine.” The Greek word for “people” here means “a throng” or “multitude,” hardly an appropriate reference to twelve disciples. Obviously, the multitude was present for the Sermon on the Mount; that is why they were astonished at his doctrine. Further, had Jesus deserted the multitudes, taking refuge in the mountain, the multitudes would have dispersed, and could not have followed him, when he descended the mountain, as they did.

Luke 7:1, pertaining to the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount, definitively settles any question whether the people (in addition to the disciples) were present; the multitude was there: “Now **when he had ended all his sayings in the audience of the people**, he entered into Capernaum.” The Greek word for “people” here means “people, not one’s own populace.” Jesus did not call his disciples, essentially, people not his own; they were his close disciples.

The Sermon on the Mount was not an instance of private instruction for the close disciples alone. This was an occasion of public teaching to the multitudes. Therefore, Matthew 5:31-32 concerning divorce and remarriage was taught to all, and is binding on all, both non-disciples and disciples.

Teachers Teach

Jesus, the Master Teacher, purposed to teach his disciples so they in turn could teach others; he told his disciples he would make them “fishers of men” (Matthew 4:18-22). Likewise, the apostle Paul also instructed Timothy to teach those who could teach others, too (2 Timothy 2:2). A preacher today sometimes finds himself laboring with a church that wants its minister to subscribe to sound doctrine, but not preach it. How lamentable! But, who believes Jesus did not want his disciples to teach what he taught them? Were they forbidden, for instance, to teach “seek ye first the kingdom of God” (Matthew 6:33) or “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 7:21)? Or, were they only restricted from teaching about marriage and divorce? How strange!

Whosoever

The word “whosoever” equates to all, everyone. At the very conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus bound what he had just taught on all men, all present and all men in that generation not present, forward to our day, too. “Therefore **whosoever heareth these sayings of mine**, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock” (Matthew 7:24). Jesus did not say his sayings were bound only on those to whom he personally spoke, but upon all those who hear what he said, namely in this context, the Sermon on the Mount. So, it does not even matter if the apostles only were present during the presentation of the Sermon on the Mount; all men (“whosoever”) are bound by it.

Also, the word “whosoever” is used by our Lord in Matthew 5:32 about divorce and remarriage. “But I say unto you, That **whosoever** shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and **whosoever** shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery” (Matthew 5:32). Therefore, Jesus applied his teaching to all men although this speech is contained in the Sermon on the Mount. Whether the apostles alone were present is immaterial.

Must Do Better

In order for one to enter the kingdom of heaven, his righteousness must exceed the corruption characteristic of first century scribes and Pharisees. “For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:20). Though true of the apostles, how is it any less true regarding non-disciples or non-Christians? Is it not certain that others besides the close disciples of Jesus had to exhibit superior righteousness to the scribes and the Pharisees to “enter into the kingdom of heaven”? Surely, corruption by non-disciples is not satisfactory with God! This superior righteousness (Matthew 5:20) is part of the Sermon on the Mount; did it only apply to the twelve disciples then, and only Christians now? Absurd!

Matthew Nineteen

As Matthew Chapter Nineteen opens, great multitudes follow Jesus (Matthew 19:2). In that vast audience are Pharisees who pose a question about divorce to our Lord (Matthew 19:3). This is not the occasion of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 19:1).

Jesus first refers his auditors to the original plan of God for marriage (i.e., no divorce; Matthew 19:4-6). Next the Pharisees interject that Moses commanded divorce (Matthew 19:7). Our Lord replies that Moses did not command divorce, but “suffered” divorce because of the hardness of men’s hearts (Matthew 19:8). Verse Eight then concludes with another reference to God’s original plan: “but from the beginning it was not so.”

In Matthew 19:9, Jesus restores God’s original plan for marriage, and applies it to all men with the word “whosoever.” “And I say unto you, **Whosoever** shall put away his wife, except it be for

fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and **whoso** marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.”

The multitude present (yes, the disciples were present, too), Jesus specifically addressed the unbelieving, tempting and corrupt Pharisees. Disciples and non-disciples, believers and non-believers, were plainly told this is God’s law on marriage, divorce and remarriage now binding on all men. The disciples understood what Jesus taught and recognized it as a difficult teaching; “His disciples say unto him, If the case of the man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry” (Matthew 19:10). They did not, however, reject either the teaching or their Lord! How is it, then, that people today *cannot understand* the same teaching, or do reject the teaching and the Lord?

First Corinthians Seven

Contrary to what multitudes hope, the apostle Paul did not modify or rescind anything Jesus taught concerning marriage and divorce. In the first four verses, the apostle wrote the Corinthians that marriage provides safeguards against fornication and is God’s designated outlet for sexual desires. Marriage is God’s exclusive provision for sexual gratification.

Verse Five notes the only separation between husband and wife of which God approves is temporary for prayer and fasting. Verses Six through Eight represent inspired advice to unmarried people not to marry during the then present distress (Verse 26). Verse Nine affirms marriage is preferable to burning lust.

Verses 10 and 11 prohibit divorce, as do Matthew 5:32 and 19:9; verse 11 adds, should a divorce occur, the only biblical options are celibacy or reconciliation.

Beginning with Verse 12, Paul addresses an area of marriage about which the Lord did not speak. The apostle did not contradict anything spoken by Jesus, but by divine inspiration gives a wider treatment of the topic. Verses 12-14 further teach that God recognizes marriage between Christians and non-Christians. Hence, God must also recognize marriages between non-Christians. Therefore, God’s marriage laws apply equally to Christians and non-Christians.

Verses 15 and 16 do not provide *new grounds* for divorce and remarriage. The Christian should desire reconciliation, but is not guilty or contributory to the separation (and possible subsequent adultery of the one leaving), since the non-Christian left the Christian because of the Christian’s religion (Matthew 5:32). The potential salvation of one’s marriage partner is sufficient reason to try to preserve a Christian to non-Christian marriage.

In Verses 17-24 Paul addresses several responsibilities and relationships which were in danger of being compounded and more difficult due to the then impending *present distress*. To *walk as the Lord hath called* is not a prescription to transform an adulterous marriage into a righteous relationship. Repentance would stop an adulterous marriage before baptism; therefore it is impossible for anyone to legitimately entertain the remotest possibility baptism could turn a sinful relationship into an honorable marriage. Through these verses, Paul urges the preservation of marriages and a measure of contentment, in spite of various unavoidable circumstances or great distress (e.g., slavery, marriage, being single, married but deserted).

Verses 25 and 26 represent additional inspired advice in view of what is styled “the present distress” (possibly the then impending destruction of Jerusalem and widespread persecution). Under such circumstances it is advisable to incur no new responsibilities (Matthew 24:19). Similar distresses today could include: war, economic crisis, catastrophe or famine.

Verse 27 again forbids divorce. The unmarried are advised not to marry, considering “the present distress.” Verses 28-35 caution against marrying under the “present distress,” but again affirm it is better to marry than burn with lust. Yet, marriage itself is somewhat of a distraction to full service to God, not to mention how much more so when under duress. Verses 36-38 assure fathers though the single life, during the time-frame of the epistle, is preferable, they do not sin should they allow their daughters to marry.

Finally, Verses 39 and 40 prohibit divorce, but permit widows to remarry, though celibacy is again urged. Throughout First Corinthians Chapter Seven, divorce is disallowed; the chapter concurs perfectly with Matthew 5:32 and 19:9. Nothing here rescinds or modifies what Jesus taught; further, if what Jesus and Paul taught about marriage and divorce does not apply to non-Christians, then unbelievers may continue in fornication and adultery without any spiritual consequence. If so, the Lord's disciples were right: "If the case of the man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry" (Matthew 19:10). How strange!

Gospel For All Or Not?

Just what is it about Jesus' teaching on marriage and divorce that is unsuitable for all men? Is it part of the Gospel? John Chapters 14-16 is an occasion during which Jesus addressed his apostles only; and, there are portions of that address that apply only to the apostles (e.g., promises concerning the Holy Spirit). Yet, vast portions of that context are suitable for all men. There is nothing in Matthew 5:32 or 19:9 or their surrounding contexts to suggest the slightest possibility that Jesus' teaching on marriage and divorce is not suitable for all men.

Either the Gospel of Christ as a unit (barring specific, verifiable instances of exclusive reference) applies to all men, or someone with *divine inspiration* himself must accept the task of distinguishing the applicable from the non-applicable in the Word for the rest of us. God's Word reads like it applies to all of humanity!

Conclusion

Emotional turmoil is not an acceptable excuse for refusing the Word of God. Yes, we are aware of the heart-wrenching stories of potentially divided families over the application of Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 to all men. Answer me this; is it better for a family to be physically parted from one another, or dwelling in a devil's hell, eternally separated from Almighty God? Was dissolution of illicit marriages (including those with children) any easier for Old Testament peoples (Ezra 10)? Be it also remembered, God did not encourage forbidden marriages, but warns all who will read the Gospel against such.

Our Lord's marriage instructions are not difficult to discern (Matthew 5:32; 19:9). What you do with the words of Jesus will determine what disposition he will make of you at time's end. "He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day" (John 12:48).

Discussion Questions:

1. How thoroughly does the dilemma of marriage-divorce-and-remarriage that buffets our society also encumber the church of our Lord? Why does this societal problem so greatly affect the church, too?
2. What ill effects is marriage-divorce-and-remarriage likely to proffer upon the church?
3. To whom do the marriage instructions spoken by Jesus Christ apply? Explain.
4. What and to whom did Jesus expect his disciples to teach? Would our Lord's instructions regarding marriage and divorce be a part of that teaching?
5. Was the teaching of Jesus about marriage-divorce-and-remarriage more palatable in the first century than it is now? Was the teaching more easily understood, perhaps, in the first century?
6. Describe the nature and duration of separation between a husband and a wife of which God approves.
7. Enumerate some contemporary *distresses*, were they to occur, that would make marriage ill advised.
8. Though 1 Corinthians 7:10 prohibits divorce, what instruction does the apostle Paul add in verse 11 to encourage divorced persons not to compound their sin?
9. Are non-Christians any less amenable to Our Lord's marriage instructions than they are to his instructions for redemption?

10. When a Christian's spouse requires the Christian to choose between him and Christianity, what does Paul by inspiration instruct?
11. What biblical prerequisite to baptism makes it impossible to transform an adulterous relationship into a God-honored marriage?
12. Throughout 1 Corinthians 7, marriage is presented as advisable and the cure for what, despite the present distress?
13. Who bears the responsibility for the disruption of families that are formed through violation of God's marriage instructions? Is human, emotional investment sufficient to override divine directives on marriage-divorce-and-remarriage?
14. How serious is the disregard of the Word of the Lord? Do Christians have divine permission to exempt themselves from portions of divine instruction?

Chapter 9: The Role of Women in the Church

Discussion of “The Role of Women in the Church” treats the topic of *subjection*, though only a single facet of that God-appointed chain of authority. Excepting God the Father, everyone is subordinate to someone else (1 Corinthians 15:24-28; Hebrews 2:8). “But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God” (1 Corinthians 11:3). “It is just as wrong for a woman to take man’s place as it is for man to take Christ’s place” (Lottie Novak).

The church is subject to Christ (Ephesians 1:22; 5:24); all men are subject to “the righteousness of God” (Romans 10:3; James 4:7); everyone is subject to governments (Romans 13:1-7; Titus 3:1; 1 Peter 2:13); and, children are subject to parents (Luke 2:51; Hebrews 12:9). Further, it cannot be denied that the Bible also **plainly teaches** that women are subject to men (1 Timothy 2:12; 1 Corinthians 11:3). Further, Scripture abundantly denotes that wives are required to be subordinate to their own husbands (Ephesians 5:22-25; Colossians 3:18; Titus 2:5; 1 Peter 3:5-6), even if their husbands are not Christians (1 Peter 3:1).

The “Role of Women in the Church” or the home is only controversial to those who exhibit diminished respect for the authority of God and his Holy Word! Christians who reject the subordinate role of women despise “**sound doctrine**” (Titus 2:1, 4-5) and **blaspheme the Word of God** (Titus 2:5)!

The subjection of women to men is a divinely given principle that predates both Christianity and Judaism; God instituted the respective roles of men and women in the Garden of Eden, at the dawning of Patriarchy. “Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and **thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee**” (Genesis 3:16). Therefore, the subordinate role of women to men does not pertain to custom or culture, but predates both. Also, the Gospel has not altered or removed the subordinate role of women any more than it has affected (1) painful childbirth, (2) sweat and labor, and (3) physical death (Genesis 3:16-19), all of which will remain until the end of time.

The inspired Word of God gives several reasons for the subordination of women: (1) “For Adam was first formed, then Eve” (1 Timothy 2:13); (2) woman, not man, was deceived by Satan (1 Timothy 2:14); (3) woman was created *from* man (1 Corinthians 11:8); and, (4) woman was created *for* man (1 Corinthians 11:9). Yet, a woman’s salvation and worth are not tied to a man (Galatians 3:28). Still, the Gospel does not dissolve physical distinctions between races, political or economic status, or genders.

This passage [Galatians 3:28] deals with the *worth* of Christians in God’s sight, not the abolition of *roles*. The death of Christ certainly did not do away with roles. There are still the roles of husbands and wives, parents and children, governments and citizens, elders and congregations, in addition to others. While we have different roles to play, all Christians have the same *worth* in God’s sight (Jane McWhorter).

However, in consequence of the subordination of women, God assigned women a unique role and placed some restrictions upon them as well. “All commands are to all Christians unless God has made an exception, and He made some exceptions concerning women” (Lottie Novak).

In the home, a wife and mother has chiefly domestic duties (1 Timothy 5:14; Titus 2:1-5). This area of godly service especially includes for a mother the care for and guidance of young children; a mother has no more important duty before God and in service to the church than the proper care of her family. “When woman vacates her place, she has vacated a place that no one else can fill” (Lottie Novak).

The American Standard Version of the Bible reads: “workers at home” where the King James Version has “keepers at home” (Titus 2:5). Truly, God has given to women **work** to do: (1) which they must accept to please him, (2) which mission should be joyfully received, and (3) for which women deserve ample appreciation for their godly labors.

. . . the simplicity of the phrase “keepers at home” demands our understanding of it. Just as a zookeeper runs or works in a zoo, so a ‘home keeper’ runs or works in the home (Cindy Colley).

As a wife, woman is more than a mate. She is a partner with her husband in their mutual quest for earthly and heavenly goals, through separate roles. A subordinate and dutiful wife deserves love and kind treatment from her husband (Ephesians 5:25, 28, 33; Colossians 3:19; 1 Peter 3:7). Aquila and Priscilla are a noble Bible example of a husband-wife team worthy of contemporary emulation.

In the church, leadership roles are assigned to men and supportive roles are delegated to women; yet, not even every man can be an elder (1 Timothy 3:1-7), or deacon (1 Timothy 3:8-13), or preacher or teacher (1 Corinthians 12:18). However, men as a group are charged by God with the responsibility to guide and publicly teach the church; God has forbidden women these same duties.

“I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting. In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; But (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works. Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence” (1 Timothy 2:8-12).

The context of 1 Timothy 2:8-12 pertains to worship and notes the respective roles of men and women regarding its public aspect. The apostle Paul used a Greek word (a derivative of *aner*) denoting men in contrast to women in verses eight and 12 to identify: (1) who was to offer public prayer, and (2) whom women are prohibited to teach by exercising authority. Earlier in 1 Timothy 2, Paul repeatedly used a different Greek word (a derivative of *anthropos*) when referring to mankind, which includes women (verses 1, 4-5). Woman . . .

. . . has never been given the right to teach over him in an authoritarian way. The broad principle applies to the situation anywhere that Christians have assembled for spiritual matters, whether it be at a church building, a home, a convention hall, or a lectureship at a Christian college. No man, not even an elder, can give the woman permission to violate God’s law (Jane McWhorter).

Though women are forbidden to do a certain **type** of teaching, yet they are **commanded** to teach (Titus 2:3-5), and women taught — not publicly, not exercising dominion over men — in New Testament times, teaching men privately (Acts 18:24-26), other women (Acts 21:9; Titus 2:3-5), children (2 Timothy 1:5; 3:14-15) and their husbands (1 Peter 3:1).

Women also speak and teach when they participate in singing (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16). Women are not commanded to be absolutely quiet in the assembly, as “silence” (KJV) or “quietness” (ASV) in 2 Timothy 2:12 means “silent attention.”

Instead of bemoaning God’s chain of authority and dwelling on what women cannot do, all should realize that there is more that women can do than what God does not permit them to do in the church. Women today are in the ministry — they are servants — if they serve the church (Romans 16:1) and do good works (1 Timothy 5:10). The same is equally true of men who, though are not themselves elders, deacons, or preachers, also work for the church.

Some of the works which women may do include: write Bible class material, visit the sick — shut-ins — weak members — newcomers, see that recreation through the home is provided for the church’s youth, prepare the communion, assist women at baptism (and wash baptismal towels & garments), grade Bible correspondence courses, teach women’s and children’s classes, office work (bulletins, etc.), clean the church building, help evangelize, baby-sit for other church workers and arrange bulletin boards. Only one’s imagination limits the work which women may do in the church, yet within the bounds set forth by God in his Word.

Even much of what the church overall or a family does is done by the industry of women; hospitality depends on wives. For instance, benevolence is often the direct result of women seeing to the needs, carrying the items to the needy or buying the canned goods for a church pantry. Women are indispensable, but in the role God ordained for them! So is it with men also — as God ordained.

Discussion Questions:

1. Evaluate whether the subjection of women is a unique and unsavory role.
2. Explore the origin of the subordination of women to men. Is it divine in origin?
3. Is the attitude that is willing to dispense with biblical teaching regarding the role of women in the home and the church any less culpable than the attitude by which any other divine instruction is discounted?
4. List the God-given reasons for the subordination of women to men.
5. How does the role of women in the home and in the church, as portrayed in the Bible, affect the salvation of women?
6. How does the subordination of women to men affect the worth of women any more than the subordination of any other person to another affect personal worth?
7. Define the primary sphere of responsibility assigned by the Bible to women. How important is this role?
8. Describe the interaction between a husband and wife in their respective roles as God designed those roles. How do those roles complement each other?
9. Are women alone subordinate to men in the church? Explain, including references to the roles of elders, deacons and preachers.
10. What is the scope of the biblical prohibition of “not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man”?
11. Though prohibited from a certain type of teaching, enumerate the several kinds of teaching women may and even must do.

Chapter 10: American Idolatry

Though often characterized as a Christian nation, America is really filled with idolatry. Furthermore, millions of religious souls, among whom are many Christians, unwittingly practice this idolatry. Proportionately, there is as much idolatry in our esteemed and beloved country as the apostle Paul found in Athens (Acts 17:16-23). Since God views idolatry as spiritual adultery (Jeremiah 3:26; Judges 2:17; Ezekiel 6:9), these equate to highly serious charges.

One idol god often worshipped in the world's prosperous nations is the god of materialism. This type of idolatry dominates much of the western civilization of which Americans are major stockholders. There is no question that the world in which we live is becoming increasingly more materialistic. The many blessings and relative prosperity with which Christians have been endowed also pull them toward the worship of the idol god of materialism. Therefore, materialism poses a threat even to the Lord's church.

A myriad of people **sincerely but mistakenly** engage the following type of idolatry, too. Another popular idol god on which much homage is bestowed in America is the god of denominationalism. Really, there are thousands of denominational gods competing among themselves and with the God of heaven for the hearts and souls of men. This type of idolatry is strikingly similar to the idolatry with which the heathen and the children of God have been beset throughout human history.

Though denominational peoples purportedly believe in and worship Almighty God, such simply is not the case! Forasmuch as denominational people boast of and urge others to attend the church of their choice, they also worship the god of their choice. So, thousands of different gods are worshipped and served throughout America. The facts are not altered the least by denominational claims to membership in Christendom. An objective, unbiased observer (were there such a creature) could only conclude after carefully scrutinizing the religious community that idolatry is the true portrait of religion in America.

Most American communities host a religious shopping center in which the religious consumer can shop for whatever his heart desires. The church-goer is invited to shop for the church of his choice, which implies shopping for the god of his choice. The same process allows him to shop for the salvation of his choice and the heaven of his choice. To complement all this, he frequently also shops for the Bible or creed of his choice. A flood of modern mistranslations of the Bible has been produced in addition to denominational creeds, disciplines, manuals, catechisms or doctrines.

Therefore, the god of Baptists possesses a different notion about salvation from the god of Presbyterians. The former attributes salvation to faith only whereas the latter declares that salvation is the product of unconditional election. The god of Universalists disagrees with them both and declares that his character will not allow any souls to be lost.

The god of Jehovah's Witnesses instructs his followers that at the commencement of eternity he will annihilate the wicked and assign most of his followers to a made-over earth. The God of heaven, however, has vowed to destroy the earth (2 Peter 3:10), punish the wicked in hell (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9; Matthew 5:22) and reward all his faithful followers with eternity in heaven (Matthew 25:46; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

A sampling of the idol gods worshipped in America includes the god of Catholicism, the god of Adventists, the god of Pentecostals, the god of Mormonism, the god of Methodists, the god of Lutherans and the god of Mennonites. The many gods of denominationalism possess different characters, issue forth different laws or creeds and teach about different heavens. Amazingly, however, the followers of these several gods have the audacity to claim they are all really worshipping only one God, the God of the Bible.

(I hasten to affirm no animosity toward anyone, despite one's denominational affiliation. Please, though, review the proposition presented herein with as much objectivity as possible. My only interest is the spiritual welfare of all souls. Many souls, regrettably, though sincere, are nevertheless deluded by denominationalism.)

Books such as *Handbook of Denominations in the United States* by Mr. Frank S. Mead indicate that there are hundreds of different denominations and thousands of divisions within those denominations, all claiming membership in Christendom. Each group has its own god with its unique character and creeds. So, there are really at least 27 differing Baptist gods, four differing Adventist gods, eleven differing Lutheran gods, 22 differing Methodist gods, over 19 differing Pentecostal gods, 10 differing Presbyterian gods and so on the list goes. Every American community is in effect, a religious shopping center!

The idols about which one can read in the Bible were fashioned by men from lifeless wood, molten metal and stone (Isaiah 44:9-20; Habakkuk 2:18-19). Modern men have fashioned their idols from their imaginations. The power and hold of these idol gods emanates from the creeds which councils, conventions and synods have adopted.

God refuses to walk with them who refuse to walk with him (Amos 3:3). He will no more walk with modern day idolaters than he would with Israel and Judah in their idolatry. The God of the Bible is not the god of denominationalism! Neither will he remain the God of Christians or churches who adopt denominational gods or fashion new ones. Those who would be the faithful children of God must recognize the distinctiveness of the God of the Bible and the church for which Jesus died.

Nothing should be allowed to cloud one's knowledge of the distinctiveness of the one God of the Bible (Ephesians 4:4-6) and the church of Christ (Romans 16:16). The apostle Paul warned first century Christians about establishing relationships with idolaters (2 Corinthians 6:14-18). Intermarriage with the heathen frequently led Old Testament Israel into idolatry (Deuteronomy 7:1-6; Nehemiah 13:23-27). Under Patriarchy the "sons of God" married the "sons of men" which resulted in widespread wickedness, for which God destroyed the world with the universal flood of Noah's day (Genesis 6:1-7).

Although the Bible does not prohibit Christians from marrying non-Christians, our sons and daughters are biblically required to avoid unequal yokes in which they may be led away from the true God. Extreme caution is, indeed, in order when our children propose to court and marry the children of a strange god (Malachi 2:11).

There is only one God by whom "we live, and move, and have our being" and who "will judge the world in righteousness" (Acts 17:28, 31). As Paul with great boldness declared the True and Living God to the Athenians, let us with the same boldness declare the same Almighty God to the world and keep ourselves from vain idols! "Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen" (1 John 5:21).

Discussion Questions:

1. Explain the analogy of idolatry compared to adultery.
2. Define idolatry and its effect on those involved in it. Does an idol have to be an object crafted by men from wood, stone or precious metal?
3. Do denominations really teach conflicting characteristics of God, different religious organizations, contradictory plans of salvation, incompatible ways in which to worship and irreconcilable eternal dispositions of the soul? Explain.
4. Does the expression of grave concern regarding the nature of denominationalism necessarily imply a disregard for denominational people? From a purely pragmatic perspective, is it less commendable to entertain conviction toward unadorned Christianity than for denominationalism?
5. What is the strength of denominational idolatry? What would it take to dissolve denominationalism and revert to simple Christianity?
6. List the biblical designations by which the church of the Bible was known. Who do those appellations glorify? Who or what do denominational names glorify?
7. According to biblical history, what has been the effect of the failure of mankind in the past to distinguish between what God has authorized and what man has presumptuously substituted?
8. Are the churches of Christ a denomination?

Chapter 11: Mark And Avoid

“Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them” (Romans 16:17).

The object of the apostle’s admonition in Romans 16:17 pertained specifically to Judaizing Christians who as Lenski notes were false teachers because they “mixed the law with the gospel.” MacKnight, Whiteside and Barnes respectively observe:

The apostle had in his eye the Jewish teachers, who in many churches set up separate assemblies for the worship of God . . . on the pretense of greater orthodoxy and sanctity than others, and who would admit none into their communion but such as joined them in their peculiarities, and who represented all others as erroneous and impious.

Judaizing teachers were the main trouble makers in the territory of Paul’s labors; they were determined to convince all Gentile Christians that they had to be circumcised and keep the law, or they could not be saved.

. . . he refers here to Jewish teachers, or those who insisted strenuously on the observance of the rites of Moses, and who set up a claim for greater purity and orthodoxy than those possessed who received the Gentile converts as Christian brethren. The Jews were perpetually thus recalling the Christian converts to the law of Moses; insisting on the observance of those rites; troubling the churches, and producing dissensions and strifes.

In the Romans 16:17 context, the divisions and offenses addressed for which marking and avoiding were to occur resulted directly from false teaching (e.g., taught by Judaizing teachers; doctrine that was contrary to what Paul by inspiration had already taught). First, Romans 16:17 applies to the Jewish false teachers of Paul’s day. However, as Lenski correctly remarks:

Paul’s injunction is not to keep away only from total rejecters of the gospel — what Christians ever needed such a warning? His injunction is to keep away from believers who are errorists and teach falsely. Not only the exact duplicates of the errorists of Paul’s day are to be shunned, as though no new ones could arise, as though new ones do not divide, tear, and set traps, as though all errorists new and old, great and small, are not related, all in the same class . . .

By implication, furthermore, Romans 16:17 applies to all false teachers (e.g., those whose false teaching causes divisions and offenses). Grubbs, Lipscomb and MacKnight acknowledge in their respective commentaries that false teaching was the occasion for divisions and offenses, and the subsequent marking and avoiding.

The divisions that are caused by that which is “contrary to the doctrine” which they learned. There is a division between truth and error.

No greater evil, according to the Scriptures, could befall the churches than the divisions arising from the introduction of teachings and practices not required by God.

Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them who set up separate assemblies for worship, and who occasion the weak to fall by false doctrine, or by enjoining things indifferent as necessary, contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned from me in this epistle, and avoid them.

Clarke associates Romans 16:17 with the preceding verse: “Salute one another with an holy kiss. The churches of Christ salute you,” and says: “. . . let them have no kiss of charity nor peace, because they strive to make divisions, and thus set the flock of Christ at variance among themselves . . .”

Romans 16:17 declares that faithful Christians have a responsibility regarding false teachers (cf., 1 John 4:1; 2 Peter 2:1; 1 Thessalonians 5:21; 2 Thessalonians 2:1ff; 1 Timothy 4:1ff). Brother Lard, quoted in the McGarvey/Pendleton commentary, addresses the necessity of a response to false teachers:

Where we, by our own errors of teaching or conduct, to produce divisions among the children of God, we sin against Christ. Nor is it a less offense to countenance or defend divisions, than it is to cause them. They must be utterly disfavored by the Christian. He is not at liberty even to feel indifferent toward them. He must actively oppose them where they exist, and actively endeavor to prevent them where they do not exist.

It is plausible, Whiteside observes, that a false teacher may even propagate his false doctrine sincerely (cf., Matthew 7:21-23). “The man who causes divisions in the Lord’s church by the introduction of things not taught is an enemy of Christ, even though he may not think so.” However, genuine ignorance mitigates neither the obligations impressed upon the church by Romans 16:17 nor final, divine judgment.

The first imperative of Romans 16:17 is to “mark” false teachers. The Greek word for “mark” (*skopeo*), though, is not used in the New Testament exclusively in a negative connotation. Vine records:

to look at, behold, watch, contemplate, (akin to *skopos*, a mark . . .), is used metaphorically of looking to, and translated “mark” in Rom. 16:17, of a warning against those who cause divisions, and in Phil. 3:17, of observing those who walked after the example of the Apostle and his fellow-workers, so as to follow their ways.

MacKnight adds: “mark . . . signifies to observe attentively and diligently, as they do who are placed in a watch-tower to observe the motions of their enemies.” Whiteside writes: “‘mark them’ — eye them closely. Do not shut your eyes to what they are doing, nor make excuses for them . . .” Barnes observes: “Ascertain who are the real causes of the divisions that spring up . . .”

Zondervan’s Analytical Greek Lexicon and Thayer respectively record for the word “mark”:

sokopos a watcher; also, a distant object on which the eye is kept fixed; a mark, goal, Phi. 3:14 . . . *sokopeo* to view attentively, watch . . . to see, observe, take care, beware, Lu. 11:35; Gal. 6:1; to regard, have respect to, 2 Co. 4:18; Phi. 2:4, to mark, note, Ro. 16:17; Phi. 3:17.

sokopeo to look at, observe, contemplate. to mark . . . to fix one’s eyes upon, direct one’s attention to . . . Ro. 16:17; Phil. 3:17.

“Divisions” is the first stated result of the false teaching addressed by the apostle in Romans 16:17. *Robertson’s Word Pictures in the New Testament* says of this word: “Divisions: (*dichostasias*) Old word for ‘standings apart,’ cleavages. In N.T. only here and Gal. 5:20.” Barnes pens:

DIVISIONS: Dissensions; parties; factions, 1 Cor. 3:3; Gal. 5:20. The very attempt to form such parties was evil, no matter what the pretence. They who attempt to form parties in the churches are commonly actuated by some evil or ambitious design.

According to Romans 16:17, the second stated result of false teaching was “offenses.” Clarke and Barnes both observe that the Greek word “*skandala*” translated here “offenses” is also the source of our English word “scandals.” Further, Barnes said of offenses: “. . . that give occasion for others to fall into sin. . . . denotes such a course of life as would lead others into sin.” Interestingly, Lenski renders “offenses” as:

skandala “deathtraps”; see the word in 9:33 and 11:9, and note that it always designates what is fatal. . . . These errorists tear believers out of the unity of the church, and their teachings often act like deathtraps in which souls are fatally caught.

The second imperative of Romans 16:17 is to “avoid” false teachers. The Greek word for “avoid” (*ekklino*) is also variously applied, as Vine indicates:

to turn away from, to turn aside, lit. to bend out of (*ek*, out, *klino*, to bend), is used in Rom. 3:12, of the sinful condition of mankind, A.V., “gone out of the way,” R.V., “turned aside;” in Rom. 16:17, of turning away from those who cause offences and occasions of stumbling (A.V., “avoid”); in I Pet. 3:11 of turning away from evil (A.V., “eschew”).

Grubbs understands the word “avoid” refers to false teaching and not to encourage false teachers in the same (cf., 2 John 9-11).

How “mark them” and “turn away from them”? We must note those who are such as to cause divisions contrary to the doctrine and must have no “fellowship with their works of darkness.” We cannot associate with them in such a way as to endorse their evil practices.

Lipscomb adds: “. . . avoid them by refusing to recognize and associate with them as brethren. This requirement is imperative and necessary to preserve the harmony and unity of the churches of Christ.” Clarke puts it this way: “. . . have no religious fellowship with them.” Whiteside says: “This means that the brethren should have no fellowship with them.” Barnes remarks:

Do not follow them; comp. 1 Tim. 6:3, 4, 5; 2 John 10; Gal. 1:8, 9. That is, avoid them as teachers; do not follow them. It does not mean that they were to be treated harshly; but that they were to be avoided in their instructions.

Vincent’s Word Studies in the New Testament adds: “Better, as Rev. turn aside . . . keep out of their way . . .” *Zondervan’s Analytical Greek Lexicon* simply notes: “*ekklino* to deflect, deviate, Ro. 3:12; to decline or turn away from, avoid, Ro. 16:17; 1 Pet 3:11.” Likewise, MacKnight writes:

It is worthy of notice, that the apostle desires the faithful to mark them who cause divisions, not for the purpose of disputing with them . . . but that they might avoid their company, lest by conversing familiarly with such, they might have been infected with their errors and vices.

It is, however, difficult to separate false teachers from the false teaching that they promote. While like God, brethren should desire that sinners repent lest they be eternally lost (2 Peter 3:9), there comes a time beyond which efforts to reclaim false teachers must reluctantly cease in order to assure the protection of the body of Christ. In this regard, Charles A. Pledge states in an article entitled “Countermanding God’s Orders” (*Seek The Old Paths*, Vol. 3, No. 11/12):

There might be a brief period of exchange before one is discovered to be dishonest. A brief period of giving them the benefit of the doubt might be appropriate. But when it is established that their doctrine is false (contradictory to Scripture), and when they refuse to correct their self-contradictions, then action is called for; the action God commands. Mark them and avoid them. Again, we emphasize that this is the action against a dishonest teacher; one who rejects evidence to the contrary.⁷

Accordingly, Thayer does include the word “shun” as one of the renderings for our word “avoid.”

ekklino Ro. 16:17 . . . turn aside, deviate (from the right way and course, Mal. 2:8 . . . to turn (one’s self) away . . . either from the path or rectitude, Ro. 3:12 . . . or from evil . . . to turn away from, keep aloof from, one’s society; to shun one: Ro. 16:17.

In the same vein, Lenski notes:

. . . definitely, decisively, once for all, incline away from them” — ”from them,” not merely from their teaching, “from them” because of their teaching. “Avoid them” (A.V.) is the sense:

have nothing to do with them. “Turn away from them” (R.V.) with finality. . . . the very nature of false doctrine divides.

Faithful brethren have responsibilities toward those of “like precious faith” (2 Peter 1:1) as well as toward brethren overtaken in sin (Galatians 6:1; James 5:19-20). Therefore, it is responsible and loving conduct to protect the Lord’s church from error (1 Corinthians 5:6ff) and rebuff sinners in order to reclaim them (Ephesians 5:11). Garland M. Robinson observes in an article entitled “Is It Sowing Discord To Expose Error?” (*Seek the Old Paths*, Vol. 3, No. 7/8 and reprinted in *Unity in Truth*, Vol. 6, No. 12):

The most loving thing we can do for others is to help them not to fall into error by warning them of it or, if they have embraced it already, to help them see the error of their way. To do otherwise shows that one has no love at all for the truth or the souls of men.⁸

Finally, Romans 16:17 is comparable to other passages that call for a withdrawal of fellowship from ungodly or disorderly brethren (1 Corinthians 5:6-13; Ephesians 5:11; 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14-15) and false teachers (1 Timothy 6:3-5; Titus 3:9-11; 2 John 9-11). Romans 16:17 does not present a unique doctrine, but a principle that is abundantly taught throughout the New Testament. It is true that the Bible is its own best commentary (interpreter), and an analysis of each similar passage on any subject will contribute to a correct understanding of God’s Word.

Discussion Questions:

1. The first application of Romans 16:17 applied to whom? Explain the false teaching of which these persons were guilty.
2. Describe the effect of the false teaching for which the extreme action of Romans 16:17 was announced in the Roman epistle. Evaluate the possibility of similar effects occurring today and whether the same action is warranted.
3. What would Romans 16:16 and other passages regarding fellowship and unity have to do with the instruction found in Romans 16:17?
4. Review several biblical passages regarding false teachers and ascertain what the required response by faithful Christians ought to be, if anything.
5. Does the sincerity of the false teacher mitigate the Christian responsibility toward the one who teaches error? Why or why not?
6. Does the Christian have a responsibility to be aware of false teaching? Does the Christian bear any culpability for defending error though he may not be the one publicly proclaiming that error?
7. Describe the effect of false teachers on the unity and fellowship of Christians.
8. Explain what it means to “avoid” the false teacher. What contact with the false teacher is not prohibited and what contact is prohibited?
9. Is it the false teacher’s false teaching alone or the false teacher, too, because he teaches falsely, that Scripture warns to “avoid”?
10. Christian love for the church, fellow Christians and false teachers will prompt what action toward false teachers?
11. Analyze how Romans 16:17 corresponds to other New Testament passages that pertain to some form of church discipline.

⁷ Charles A. Pledge, “Countermanding God’s Orders,” *Seek The Old Paths*, Vol. 3, No. 11/12, November

⁸ Garland M. Robinson, “Is It Sowing Discord To Expose Error?” *Seek the Old Paths*, Vol. 3, No. 7/8, July reprinted in *Unity in Truth*, Vol. 6, No. 12

Chapter 12: The Providence Of God

Like God himself (Genesis 1:1), providence is not precisely defined in the Bible. Neither does the word providence appear in the Bible with reference to God. However, God's providence is amply taught throughout the Bible.

There are two types of providence. There is **general providence**, under which all of humanity shares physical blessings irrespective of individual relationships with God. “. . . 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” (Matthew 5:45).

There is also **special providence**, under which faithful children of God are the direct recipients of physical or spiritual blessings.

“And Joseph said unto his brethren, Come near to me, I pray you. And they came near. And he said, I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt. Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life. For these two years hath the famine been in the land: and yet there are five years, in the which there shall neither be earing nor harvest. And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God: and he hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt” (Genesis 45:4-8).

In the strictest sense, God's providence does not employ miracles today. During miraculous times God sometimes used miracles to aid his providence. Miracles, though, have ended, as every mature, faithful child of God will attest (1 Corinthians 13:8-13; Ephesians 4:11-14). Yet, God does use divine power (i.e., power that you and I do not have) to affect natural law to execute his providence.

What, then, is the difference between miracles which have ceased and divine power which God uses to make providence work? Miracles, among other things, were always **visible** demonstrations of supernatural power. Divine power that God uses today in his providence is not discernible to human beings (i.e., though the result of God's providence may be visible, **how** God causes it to occur cannot be known). Therefore, God's providence appears mysterious to us. God simply does not tell us some things about his providence (and other matters, Deuteronomy 29:29). “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!” (Romans 11:33).

The purpose of God's providence is the ultimate redemption of humanity. Therefore, suffering (e.g., Joseph, Job; Acts 8:1-4) or even death (e.g., “The blood of martyrs is the seed of the kingdom”; the death of Christ; Revelation 2:10) rather than earthly happiness may better serve the purpose of the providence of God.

How does God's providence affect humanity? (1) The created world is sustained by divine, providential power — the same power by which it was created (Colossians 1:16-17; Hebrews 1:1-3; John 1:1-3). (2) Prayers are effective through providence. “Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit” (Jam. 5:17-18). (3) Christians are to be worry-free because of providence (Matt. 6:24-34).

(4) God, through his providence, appoints rulers (e.g., Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel 4:17-34), raises up or pulls down nations (e.g., Jeremiah 18:7-10), arranges circumstantial events of people and Christians (i.e., brings parties together who will predictably or through foreknowledge react a certain way (e.g., Pharaoh's hardened heart)). God, though, does not interfere with free moral agency.

How does humanity affect the providence of God? (1) God works through people who voluntarily conform to the purpose or will of God (e.g., taking the Gospel to the world, Mark 16:15-16). (2) God

will use other persons to achieve his will if one through his own free moral agency does not do the will of God (e.g., Esther 4:15).

Providence as it pertains to Christians is circumstantial. Only faithful children of God directly benefit from the goal of God's providence (Romans 8:28); the Egyptians became the indirect beneficiaries of the unfolding of God's providence to save Joseph's family. Otherwise, though the ungodly may appear to prosper in this life, they will not persevere in eternity (e.g., Luke 16:19-31; however, not all rich people in this life are evil — Job, Abraham).

God uses imperfect humanity to further his providence. He uses imperfect people who are generally righteous (e.g., Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Peter, you and me). Additionally, God uses people to accomplish his providential goals who may be generally unrighteous (e.g., rulers, nations, etc.).

A key element of providence is that through it God **provides**. The truth-seeker will find the truth (John 7:17). Providence provides for the fulfillment of God's ultimate goal for humanity (Philippians 1:12). "But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel."

God, through providence, is attentive to the needs of his people. God does not slumber (Psalms 121:3). God sees and knows.

"And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows" (Matthew 10:28-31).

God hears the prayers of his faithful children; "For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil" (1 Peter 3:12). God will never leave us (Hebrews 13:5-6). God is our defender; "What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us" (Romans 8:31).

The first verse about God's providence to which we usually turn is Romans 8:28. "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." The "good" here corresponds to God's ultimate purpose for humanity. Summarized, the phrase "all things work" equals the **law of operation**; "all things work together" equals the **law of cooperation**. The phrase "all things work together for good" signifies the **law of compensation**; "all things work together for good to them that love the Lord" is the **law of limitation**.

The Bible clearly teaches the certainty of God's providence. However, there is some uncertainty about exactly how it works. We can assuredly say, though, that God's providence works through elders, deacons, preachers, teachers, parents, Christians and the local church (1 Corinthians 3:5-10).

"Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase. Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour. For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building. According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon."

Finally, we can have confidence that the minimal benefit of providence is the ability to remain faithful (Revelation 2:10; 1 Corinthians 10:13). Through providence, nothing and no one can separate us from God (unless we allow it) (Romans 8:35-39).

Discussion Questions:

1. Describe the certainty with which one can or cannot identify general providence and special providence occurring today.
2. Though God used supernatural power to perform miracles and divine providence, distinguish between miracles which have ceased and providence which God employs today.
3. What recourse does mankind have regarding spiritual matters about which we would like to know more, but about which God has not revealed more?
4. How is it that the providence of God, even working on our behalf ultimately, may not result in our earthly happiness?
5. Does the providence of God really have any effect on mankind generally and Christians specifically today?
6. How does humanity affect the providence of God?
7. How is it that the child of God may *directly* benefit from the providence of God and the non-Christian may *indirectly* benefit from the providence of God?
8. How can God providentially use either the righteous or the unrighteous to accomplish his purposes?
9. What is the ultimate purpose of God's providence?
10. How is the freewill of mankind not overpowered by the providence of God?
11. Explain the significance of Romans 8:28.
12. Just how important is the providence of God in the lives of Christians today?

Chapter 13: New Testament Church Government

“And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him” (Colossians 3:17). This verse should constitute every Christian’s marching orders. Further, neither can a congregation hope to please God by ignoring this divine exhortation. Therefore, with Colossians 3:17 in mind, consider “New Testament Church Government” from a perspective not typically examined, but important nevertheless.

Jesus Christ Is The Head Of His Church

Jesus has all authority in heaven and in earth (Matthew 28:18, ASV). By this authority Jesus exercises himself as head of the church and king of the kingdom (Matthew 16:16-19; Ephesians 1:22-23; Colossians 1:18; 1 Corinthians 15:24-28; John 1:49; 12:13; 18:36, 37; Ephesians 5:5; Colossians 1:13; 1 Timothy 1:17; 6:15; Revelation 1:9). Jesus rules his everlasting kingdom (2 Peter 1:11) from heaven (Ephesians 1:20; Acts 7:55; 2 Timothy 4:18), today through His Word (John 12:48; Revelation 20:12-15) and will continue to rule until the end of time (1 Corinthians 15:24). Therefore, Jesus is now ruling his church (e.g., church government) indirectly from heaven through the Gospel and what the Gospel authorizes (e.g., visible forms of church government).

First Visible, Earthly Church Government: Apostles (Acts 6:1-4)

In the Jerusalem church of nearly 2,000 years ago, the apostles pre-occupied themselves with proclaiming the Word of God (vss 2, 4). Therefore, the apostles authorized the appointment of men (whose duties resemble the assignments typically given to deacons; vss 3, 6) to attend to the matter at hand, thereby permitting the apostles to continue uninterrupted in preaching and teaching.

Those who make rules are rulers; since the apostles made a rule in this context, they were rulers. Although the apostles had a position of responsibility that was brotherhood wide or actually worldwide (Acts 13:47; 9:15; 22:15; 26:16-17), the context of Acts Chapter Six pertains exclusively to the church in Jerusalem. So, Acts Chapter Six is a history of church government in a local congregation.

However, there are no present day apostles (there were only 14); death alone was not reason enough to appoint a replacement apostle (Acts 12:1-2). Further, the signs of an apostle have ceased (2 Corinthians 12:12; 1 Corinthians 13:8-13; Ephesians 4:11-13), and the qualifications of an apostle (chief of which was having seen the resurrected Christ, Acts 9:17; 26:16) cannot be met today (Acts 1:20-22).

Further, the original apostles still serve in essence and wield an influence on the church through the pages of inspiration (Matthew 19:27-28). The very books that they penned affect all who read and apply them. Therefore, apostles is not the present form of government for the New Testament church.

Second Visible, Earthly Church Government: Adult Male Members

Initially, no mention of elders is made in the church in Jerusalem. Elders are first observed in Scripture in Jerusalem after some time passed since the establishment of the church (Acts 11:30). Also, it appears that no elders were appointed in the initial part of Paul’s first missionary journey (Acts 13:1-14:21), but that perhaps a year (according to Clarke) after new churches were established, Paul ordained elders in those churches, at the close of that missionary journey (Acts 14:21-23).

Previous to the appointment of elders in the areas of Paul’s first missionary tour, in Acts 14:23, brethren were simply referred to as disciples (Acts 13:52; 14:20), whereas in the Jerusalem church (Acts 11:30; 15:2, 4, 6, 22-23; 16:4; 21:18) and later in the Book of Acts (Acts 20:17) and some of the epistles, elders are addressed separately (Ephesians 4:11; Philippians 1:1; James 5:14; 1 Peter 1:5). Also, apparently churches were established on the Island of Crete that were for a time without elders. Titus was instructed to appoint elders in the churches (Titus 1:5).

In the absence of elders, lacking qualified men due to the newness of the conversion of a congregation's members and the newness of the church itself, congregations functioned for a time without elders. Likewise, today, under similar circumstances, or even should an established work not have qualified men, congregations may have to function for a time without elders. Without elders, congregations of the first century or in our own century, therefore, are authorized to function until qualified men can be appointed.

Since women are restricted from public service in the church over men (1 Timothy 2:11-15; 1 Corinthians 14:34-35), women, though, are not authorized to participate in the government of a local congregation. Since believers were identified as men and women (rather than inclusive of children) (Acts 5:14; 8:3, 12; 9:2; 17:4, 12; 22:4), neither are children authorized to participate in the government of a local congregation. Since an individual man is prohibited from governing the church (3 John 9), and because the only plurality of men less than all the male members allowed to rule the church are elders (Acts 14:23; 11:30), and since obviously civil government has no part in governing the spiritual kingdom of God (John 18:36; Acts 5:29), none of these are biblically authorized to govern the Lord's church. Therefore, without men qualified and appointed to be elders, all the male adult members are responsible for the function of a local congregation (until men become qualified to be appointed as elders).

Third Visible, Earthly Church Government: Elders

Those who would be elders must meet divine qualifications (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:6-9). Elders are always addressed as a plural number (Acts 11:30; 14:23; 15:2; 20:17; Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 5:17; Titus 1:5; James 5:14; 1 Peter 5:1). The New Testament plainly and unmistakably teaches that God desires that elders govern a local congregation under the authority of Jesus Christ, the chief Elder/Bishop/Shepherd (1 Peter 2:25; 5:4). When a congregation is governed by duly appointed, biblically qualified elders, Jesus Christ is enabled to most effectively govern that congregation, though he resides in heaven. The goal of every congregation should be the installation of this biblical form of church government. However, in the interim, a congregation is biblically authorized to function without elders, governed by the faithful, adult, male members.

Discussion Questions:

1. Who ultimately possesses the authority to govern the church of the Bible? Where is the seat of this authority?
2. Who first demonstrated authority in the church on earth? Does this type of authority prevail literally in the local congregational setting today?
3. According to discernible biblical information, what was the implied, first form of congregational government (except for the Jerusalem congregation)?
4. Define the biblically ideal form of congregational government and its relationship to Jesus Christ.

Chapter 14: Apostasy in Corinth

As the Corinthian church was pointed to the examples of fallen children of God (1 Corinthians 10:1-12) — from which they were to learn valuable lessons lest they also be lost — valuable lessons can be learned today from reflection about the Corinthian church, which can contribute to penitence by and perseverance of Christians. The Epistle of First Corinthians identifies numerous sins for which those Christians would be lost unless they repented. Therefore, First Corinthians was an epistle of condemnation and impending doom. In that condition, the Corinthian church **was not** suitable for emulation. Fortunately, the hearts of the Corinthians were honest and their minds were open to apostolic correction. Second Corinthians affirms that they repented — and in their penitent state and for that reason, then they were and are suitable role models.

The first sin addressed by the apostle Paul was the sin of separating into groups which are not authorized by the Gospel (1:12-13); the Corinthians had a bad case of **preacheritis** (1:12), though doubtless the preachers named did not encourage this sinful condition (Paul sternly rebuked them for this sin). The result was a lack of Christian unity (1:10) and contention among brethren (1:11) which is an abomination to God (Proverbs 6:16-19). The church is obligated to withdraw fellowship from such erring brethren if they refuse to repent (Titus 3:10, ASV).

Chapter One also denotes that the Corinthians despised a Christ-centered Gospel (1:18-27) in favor of “signs” and worldly “wisdom” (1:22). The Christ-centered Gospel is no less offensive today to an ungodly world and many contemporary brethren, but we must not be ashamed of this Gospel, for it is the only means by which anyone can be saved (Romans 1:16; Acts 4:12). Our lives, sermons, and radio and television messages must be filled with Christ to be effective and pleasing to God.

The Corinthians further demonstrated their spiritual immaturity (3:1-4). Unfortunately, perpetual, spiritual babies were not only found at Corinth in the first century (Hebrews 5:12-14) and nor is the church in our day without its members who linger in immaturity. Spiritual growth or maturity is essential to discern between truth and error (Hebrews 5:14) and is accomplished through a steady diet of God’s Word (1 Peter 2:2).

In Chapter Five (vss 1-13), the apostle Paul rebuked the Corinthians for allowing sin to continue unchecked in the church. That congregation sinned by not disciplining a brother who was openly committing adultery. Though perhaps the Corinthians commended themselves for their open-mindedness, the adverse consequences were great: (1) Those guilty of adultery were sinning and therein lost, (2) The local church was guilty of sin for at least indirectly condoning adultery, (3) These sins reproached Christ before an unbelieving community, and (4) The tolerance of sin at Corinth encouraged other Christians to commit sin (vs 6). **Much of what ails the church today could have been “nipped in the bud” were biblical church discipline routinely applied when needed** (2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14-15; Romans 16:17-18; Titus 3:10-11).

In Chapter Six (vss 1-8), the apostle rebuffed the Corinthians for appealing to civil law to arbitrate personal disagreements between brethren. This sin can be avoided by enlisting the aid of other brethren (Matthew 18:15-17). In lieu of this course or a decision in one’s favor, it is better to suffer personal loss than to reproach the church before the world.

Chapter Seven recommends marriage as a suitable alternative to lust and fornication. Forcefully, by inspiration Paul commanded that the married not divorce and that the divorced remain single or be reconciled to their respective spouses (vss 10-11); this concurs with our Lord’s instruction about marriage (Matthew 5:32; 19:9).

The responsibilities of mature Christians regarding weaker members are noted in Chapter Eight. Weak Christians, of course, as earlier observed should strive to grow spiritually. The following chapter addresses a congregation’s responsibility to financially support a Gospel preacher and his family. Chapter Ten resorts to Jewish histories to warn against apostasy and to exhort the Corinthians to be faithful.

No more and no less a critical departure from the faith is detailed in Chapter Eleven. The Lord's Supper was grossly perverted, which memorial the apostle Paul urged the Corinthians to restore to its pattern. The purpose of Paul's corrective charge was to cause the Corinthians to separate the profane from the divine in the practice of communion. In a sense, the Lord's Supper is a spiritual feast — not a potluck dinner.

The Corinthian church was as apostate nearly as any Pentecostal church today regarding the use of miraculous gifts — except the Corinthians were alert enough to recognize real miracles whereas Pentecostals fail to discern the absence of genuine, biblical, miraculous gifts in our time — and still abuse them! Three chapters in this epistle are dedicated to the correction of these abuses (12-14). For us, the summary is found in 1 Corinthians 13:8-13 — miracles have long since ceased!

Whether there will be a resurrection from the dead troubled several first century brethren besides the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 15; 1 Thessalonians 4:14-17). Chapter Fifteen is a masterful proposition whereby the General Resurrection (John 5:28-29) is ardently affirmed based on the eyewitnessed resurrection of Christ. In essence, if there is no resurrection possible, then Christ was not resurrected and there is no basis for Christianity. If Christ resurrected (which he did), then resurrection from the grave is not only possible but is guaranteed. Only a resurrected Savior is capable of taking away sins.

First Corinthians concludes by teaching about the church contribution and benevolent cooperation between congregations. The frequency (weekly) and the basis (prosperity) of giving is determined in the opening two verses of Chapter Sixteen. The recipients of funds gathered at Corinth on this occasion were beneficiaries of a cooperative financial effort between several congregations for famine afflicted people in Judaea. Paul was bearing this money to Jerusalem. Whereas Christians were to receive preference in the disbursement of such benevolence, non-Christians were clearly potential recipients of this Christian generosity as long as resources and opportunity permitted (Galatians 6:10).

Much of the New Testament consists of corrective instruction in response to budding apostasy (e.g., Galatians, Jude, five of the seven churches of Asia cited, etc.). First Corinthians is a major component of those exhortations the writing of which was motivated by efforts to stem departures from the doctrine of Christ. We must not pride ourselves in emulating the apostate church of First Corinthians instead of imitating the penitent church of Second Corinthians. It will be an eternally empty consolation to be as good as the apostate Corinthians as we all cross the threshold of eternity toward final judgment. That's like taking joy in being as good as any hell-bound hypocrite — not the least bit satisfactory to me or any right thinking person.

Discussion Questions:

1. Explain how the Bible can be used to learn from the mistakes of others.
2. To what limit can congregations and individuals be used as role models to help the children of God be better Christians?
3. How serious is divisiveness in a local congregation? What are some of the issues, etc. over which brethren often become divisive? What solution or solutions can help remedy such division?
4. What theme must prevail in Christian living and Christian service? Name some substitute themes that the church and Christians are tempted to pursue sometimes.
5. What is the predictable result of Christians failing to take advantage of periods of edification scheduled for the local church and further failure to feed on the Word of God at other times, too? How does spiritual immaturity manifest itself in the local church?
6. Just how serious is the failure of a congregation to discipline itself when necessary? How widespread is the tendency today to ignore what the New Testament teaches regarding church discipline?
7. Compare the teaching of Jesus to the teaching of the apostle Paul regarding marriage and divorce.

Chapter 14: Apostasy in Corinth

8. Was there really a pattern for worship (communion) which the apostle intended the Corinthian church to practice? If there are not patterns in religion, could the Corinthians have erred regarding their unique observance of the Lord's Supper?
9. Contrast the misuse of miracles by the Corinthians and contemporary Pentecostals with the purpose for which miracles were given to the first century church.
10. What is the significance of the resurrection of Jesus Christ?
11. Describe the New Testament procedure for procuring funds by the Lord's church.

Chapter 15: The Sin of Sodom, I

For us, a public discussion of the sin of Sodom is a delicate matter. However, it is a subject that is paraded openly before our families in schools, on television, by famous people, in politics, by religious leaders and even in children's books. Therefore, the sin of Sodom (homosexuality) must be addressed both in the pulpit and in the classroom.

Homosexuality is something about which God speaks in the Bible — in both testaments. God considers this conduct not only sinful, but further belonging to a sub-category of sin called “an abomination.” Therefore, it is important for us to examine what God says about this topic.

Homosexuality cannot be ignored! It adversely affects our nation and often results in death. It also leads to spiritual death for impenitent souls. Homosexuality affects men, women and children. Sometimes, even Christians are involved in the sin of Sodom.

Genesis 19:1-29 introduces the sin of Sodom and the subsequent destruction of this and surrounding cities by God. Genesis 13:13 identifies the men of Sodom as exceedingly wicked sinners. Genesis 18:20 says that the sin of Sodom is “very grievous.” Genesis 18:23 adds emphasis to the portrayal of the inhabitants of Sodom as “wicked.” Genesis 18:24-33 shows that God could not find even 10 righteous souls in Sodom.

Genesis 19:5 (especially in the NKJV) identifies the specific sin by which the city of Sodom defiled itself. This sin is commonly known to us as homosexuality or sodomy. So, under Patriarchy, God's first system of religion given to man, God condemned homosexuality.

Next, under Judaism, God also condemned homosexuality. Leviticus 18:22 reads, “Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it is abomination.” The seriousness of this sin to God is apparent from Leviticus 20:13. “If a man also lie with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination: they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them.”

God mandated capital punishment under Patriarchy and Judaism for homosexuality. Though God especially warned men and women in Israel against this sin (Deuteronomy 23:17), the sin of Sodom is one of the sins that Israel learned from the nations around them (1 Kings 14:24; 15:12; 22:46; 2 Kings 23:7).

The New Testament likewise condemns homosexuality. Three passages refer to the biblical record of the sin of Sodom found in Genesis 19. “And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrha into ashes condemned them with an overthrow, making them an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly” (2 Peter 2:6). Jude adds that the sin of Sodom also results in the punishment of “eternal fire.” “Even as Sodom and Gomorrha, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.” See also Luke 17:29.

Additionally, homosexuality is elsewhere condemned in the New Testament. Romans 1:26-32 addresses this sin.

“For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet” (Romans 1:26-27).

Also, two lists of sins further warn against the sin of homosexuality. In 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 (NKJV) the words “homosexuals” and “sodomites” appear among other sins cited. The apostle Paul by inspiration named “sodomites” again as sinners, among others, in 1 Timothy 1:9-11 (NKJV).

The sins of homosexuality and adultery are forms of “fornication.” Several passages condemn “fornication” irrespective of the form in which it appears (Jude 7; Matthew 5:32; 19:9; 1 Corinthians 5:9; Galatians 5:19-21).

The world says that genetics may be responsible for “sexual orientation.” We are told that God made homosexuals. Many religious people therefore claim to practice homosexuality with God’s approval. These people are unaware of or ignore the preceding Old and New Testament passages that clearly condemn homosexuality.

According to God, sins in general, including “fornication,” are only acted out after they are conceived in the heart or mind (Matthew 15:19). One’s uncontrolled “lust” leads to sin and spiritual death (James 1:14-15). Though certainly outside influences may contribute to temptation, sin can be resisted (James 4:7). Further, God will not allow anyone to be tempted beyond his ability to resist (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Happily, even homosexuals can repent or change. The apostle Paul acknowledged that some of the Corinthians were formerly homosexuals (1 Corinthians 6:9-11). God will forgive any sin for which a sinner will repent (1 John 1:5-10). God also forgets the sins that he forgives (Hebrews 8:12; 10:17).

Though it is distasteful to the child of God, Christians must learn what God says about homosexuality and sodomy. Godly parents must guide their children in God’s Word in this matter as well as others. Every citizen must give special attention to politics, school boards, libraries and television programming since each of these is a vehicle through which the homosexual message is promoted. Christians ought to voice their objections to the homosexual movement. Some ways this may be done are through votes, phone calls and letters. Our families and our nation are at risk!

Discussion Questions:

1. List some of the sins that God further refers to in his Word as “abominations.”
2. How longstanding has mankind practiced homosexuality? When did God begin condemning homosexuality?
3. What about the punishment of homosexuality under Judaism indicates the severity of the sin and its effect on God’s people?
4. Is it possible to view the New Testament objectively and still legitimately deny that homosexuality is sinful?
5. What should one make of the claim that “God made homosexuals”?
6. Is it possible for one, even with temptations to practice homosexuality, to refrain from such a *sexual orientation*?
7. Is it possible, and if so, how, can a homosexual repent of that sin?
8. Whose responsibility is it to resist the sin of homosexuality? What are some of the things that Christians and the church can do to combat this evil?

Chapter 16: The Sin of Sodom, II

Contrary to popular assertions, the Bible amply condemns homosexuality (Genesis 19:1-29; Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; Deuteronomy 23:17; 1 Kings 14:24; 15:12; 22:46; 2 Kings 23:7; Luke 17:29; 2 Peter 2:6; Jude 7; Romans 1:26-32; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, NKJV; 1 Timothy 1:9-11, NKJV). About half the states also have laws against both homosexual and heterosexual sodomy. However, an aggressive and militant homosexual movement has come out of its proverbial closet with disdain for the laws of God and man. Homosexuals and their supporters are trying to force people with moral values into the “closet.”

Homosexuals and some unscientific surveys have for years claimed that 10% of Americans are homosexual. Concerned about such a large, single-issue voting block, politicians have catered to the homosexual movement. A 1994 University of Chicago poll, though, using modern, random polling methods, discovered that less than 3% of Americans are homosexual. Therefore, political concessions to homosexuals are unnecessary. Besides that, God still condemns homosexuality irrespective of the number of homosexuals or a plank in a political platform.

Nevertheless, homosexuals adamantly intend to convert America into a homosexual nation. Anyone who imagines that homosexuality is a passive activity that does not affect non-homosexuals is seriously mistaken. The following quotation of Michael Swift from the *Gay_Community News*, February 1987 will dispel that notion.

We shall sodomize your sons, emblems of your feeble masculinity, of your shallow dreams and vulgar lies. We shall seduce them in your schools, in your dormitories, in your gymnasiums, in your locker rooms, in your sports arenas, in your seminaries, in your youth groups, in your movie theater bathrooms, in your army bunkhouses, in your truck stops, in your all-male clubs, in your houses of Congress, wherever men are with men together. Your sons shall become our minions and do our bidding. They will be recast in our image. They will come to crave and adore us. . . . All churches who condemn us will be closed. Our only gods are handsome young men. . . . The exquisite society to emerge will be governed by an elite comprised of gay poets. One of the major requirements for a position of power in the new society of homoeroticism will be indulgence in the Greek passion. Any man contaminated with heterosexual lust will be automatically barred from a position of influence. All males who insist on remaining stupidly heterosexual will be tried in homosexual courts of justice and will become invisible men. . . . We shall be victorious because we are fueled with the ferocious bitterness of the oppressed who have been forced to play seemingly bit parts in your dumb, heterosexual shows throughout the ages. We too are capable of firing guns and manning the barricades of the ultimate revolution.

Additionally, homosexuals are a major force behind the attempt to place compulsory sex education in every school in America. Proposals include teaching the acceptability of homosexuality and numerous other perversions to children as young as five. Even words like “abstinence” have been re-defined to give parents a false sense of security while still promoting other forms of fornication.

Further, proposed or newly enacted laws and judicial decisions favorably affect homosexual demands for child custody rights, marital status (sometimes called “domestic partnership”), adoption rights, tax exemption for homosexual rights groups, foster care providers, etc. The FCC already forbids programming which speaks against homosexuality and requires that any group doing so pay for air time for homosexuals to present their message. Another danger is that efforts to revise the 1964 Civil Rights Act to include homosexuals will someday succeed. If this were to occur, homosexuals would be legally protected from discrimination in every facet of American life (i.e., housing, employment, etc.).

The homosexual agenda has succeeded frequently so far in having an impact on our society. Mayors of major U.S. cities have declared “gay pride” weeks and homosexuals and lesbians march in “gay

pride” parades. The American family is bombarded regularly with the homosexual message through popular television programs, advice columnists and “gay” children’s books in libraries. Even companies are publicly declaring themselves friends or opponents of homosexuality. There are over 300 homosexual religious congregations in 47 states besides homosexual membership in traditional churches.

Numerous additional incidents of homosexual encroachments throughout American could be listed. These cited, though, are sufficient to underscore the grave threat to our families and the nation. Presently, God can still find “ten righteous souls” (Genesis 18:24-33). However, unless we address this great evil from the pulpit, in the classroom, in our journals, in our homes and before our countrymen, our families and the nation will defile themselves with the sin of Sodom.

Discussion Questions:

1. Contrast the number of homosexuals in our nation with their public voice and political clout.
2. Describe the militancy of homosexuals and the grave threat they pose to our nation, families and the church.
3. How are homosexuals affecting religion in America?
4. Who has the responsibility to combat the abomination of homosexuality in America? How? When should those efforts begin?

Chapter 17: In the Belly of a Big Fish

“Now the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights. Then Jonah prayed unto the Lord his God out of the fish’s belly” (Jonah 1:17-2:1).

Down in the deep, dark chambers and hollows in the belly of a big fish, Jonah, wrapped in seaweed, desperately prayed to God. Like many of God’s children past and present, Jonah in this instance did not pray to God until he had no other recourse. “When my soul fainted within me I remembered the Lord: and my prayer came in unto thee, into thine holy temple” (Jonah 2:7).

Jonah was a prophet of God and a native of the northern kingdom of Israel. Apparently he had made a vow to God respecting his function as a prophet (Jonah 2:9). Jonah, as a prophet, was committed to preaching God’s Word to his fellow Jews. However, he was unwilling to proclaim God’s Word to Gentiles — especially to the Ninevites.

Only when Jonah could not escape from God and the mission on which he was sent, he **reluctantly** preached to the Ninevites. Further, Jonah became **angry** when: (1) the Ninevites repented, and (2) God consequently refrained from destroying them.

Doubtless a poorer example of evangelism could hardly be imagined. Yet, the despicable attitude of Jonah toward the Ninevites may be shared often by the Lord’s church today.

Are we sometimes as though we are in the belly of a big fish? Do we flee from the mission on which God has sent the church? Are there those to whom we have no desire to preach the Gospel? Honestly, are there souls that we do not want to be saved — at least not enough to do anything about their lost condition?

Like Jonah, as Christians we have vowed to proclaim the Word of God. Like Jonah, our responsibility in this matter goes beyond preaching to fellow Christians (Mark 16:15-16). The songs that we sing and the Sacred Gospel which we recite amount to the reiteration of our basic vow as Christians to practice and help spread Christianity. May we be careful to do what we sing (e.g., “The Gospel Is For All”) and practice what we preach.

There are several biblical examples of evangelism. Andrew brought Peter to Christ (John 1:40-42) and Philip brought Nathaniel to the Lord (John 1:43-49). Philip the evangelist went to Samaria and converted many souls with the Gospel (Acts 8:5-13). The Thessalonians carried the Gospel to distant places besides preaching it locally (1 Thessalonians 1:6-8). The greatest example of genuine concern for lost souls is Jesus Christ; he left the splendor of heaven and set aside the glory of being God to come to earth as a sacrifice for us (Philippians 2:5-8). All of these examples should encourage us to take the Gospel to all the world.

The Great Commission is not optional! By teaching the Gospel to others, especially to those who can teach still others, true Christianity can spread in our generation — and from generation to generation (2 Timothy 2:2).

No price is too high to spread the Gospel. Persecution and even death was often the catalyst that spread the Gospel in the first century (Acts 8:1-4, 7). The apostle Paul suffered greatly and willingly as he labored to save souls (2 Corinthians 11:23-28). Though we seldom face persecution because of evangelism, our Lord expects us to practice our Christianity faithfully even if we were to forfeit our lives in his service (Revelation. 2:10).

The opportunities to evangelize the world today are many. Internationally, Russia, Africa, India and other places appear ripe for harvest. Even individual Christians and small congregations can have a part in international labors through church programs (e.g., *Truth for the World* television, radio, literature and campaign ministries). Personal opportunities to share the Gospel with other souls abound also. Enclosing tracts in outgoing mail and placing literature in public places (e.g., rest rooms, buses, lobbies) are two of the passive ways by which anyone can help take the Gospel to the world.

Dear Reader, do you find yourself (or the church of which you are a member) down in the deep, dark chambers and hollows of the belly of a big fish? The Lord's church has the financial resources to take the Gospel to the world. We have the necessary talent. Sufficient modern technology and methods are at our disposal. We just need to decide to evangelize the world — and do it!

Much has been done to evangelize the world in the past. Even with fewer missionaries today, much is being done to evangelize the world. However, we must be ever diligent to maintain these good works — and actively seek additional opportunities to evangelize the world.

Discussion Questions:

1. Describe the bias that Jonah entertained toward non-Jews and how it affected him as a child of God.
2. Do the church and the Christians who comprise the church sometimes demonstrate a similar disregard for lost souls? If so, in what ways is this manifested?
3. What responsibility, if any, do the church and Christians have toward lost souls?
4. List some biblical examples of praiseworthy concern for lost souls.
5. At what costs should the church and Christians be prepared to practice world evangelism?
6. Enumerate ways in which the church as well as individuals can help acquaint lost souls with the Gospel message.
7. What is the greatest hindrance the church must overcome to evangelize the world with the Gospel of Christ?

Chapter 18: Without Excuse

By divine inspiration the apostle Paul plainly teaches that one can know some things about God by observing the created universe. Additionally, there is **no excuse** for not recognizing that a Creator is responsible for creation. Further, God will punish those who dismiss the evidence of God in creation.

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse” (Romans 1:18-20).

“The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork” (Psalm 19:1).

These verses affirm the three foregoing statements. Yet, it is equally clear that the created universe **does not directly** declare anything about God our Creator. The created universe **implies** a Creator and mankind is both able to and **obligated to infer** that implication. From Scripture we learn that creative power is the possession of God.

In his *Commentary on Romans*, Moses E. Lard translates Romans 1:20, “For his unseen traits are perceived since the creation of the world, being known by the things that are made — his everlasting power and divinity, so that they are without excuse.” He then observes:

The word “perceived” means *discovered by the senses or by the mind*. . . . God’s unseen traits . . . have been taken notice of since the creation of the world, being cognizable by the things that are made. . . . Ever since the creation of the world and men have existed, they have been enabled, by means of the works of creation, to arrive at the apprehension of certain traits of the Almighty, otherwise undiscoverable by them. These traits are called unseen, because it is impossible for the outward eye to take notice of them.

The created universe implies an intelligent and highly organized Creator possessing sufficient power both to create and to sustain the physical universe and all that is in it. However, the created universe is incapable of completely acquainting man with either God or his plan for man. Men must turn to God’s revealed will (for us, the New Testament) to know God and his will for us. Brother Lard warns against ascribing **too much** to creation.

And here we must be cautious. The Apostle does not affirm that by means of created things we come to know God. With Paul the conception of God is assumed. It is only certain traits of God that we thus discover. God is not knowable by means of creation. From creation we infer traits, not God.

Regarding the “everlasting” quality of God’s power and the “divinity” of God as they appear in Romans 1:20, Lard does not represent them as also manifested in the created universe. Creation implies an intelligent Creator and the power to create and to sustain. Revelation, including Romans 1:18-20, assigns the quality of “everlasting” to creative power and designates God as the Creator.

From creation as an effect we infer the power of God who produced it. But we infer power only, and not the notion of everlasting. In itself and as a fact, however, the power is everlasting; and this being known to Paul, he so named it. (Lard)

The created universe amply demonstrates a Creator who beginning with Patriarchal revelations is identified as God. However, to progress from the knowledge of creation, to the knowledge of the power of creation, to the knowledge of a Creator, to the knowledge of God our Creator (upon the introduction

of revelation) requires human **reasoning**. God expects every accountable soul to employ sound reasoning and he thereby holds each of us eternally responsible. Lard notes about “reasoning”:

From the works of creation the mind, by a process, passes to the perception of the traits. This process I take to be one of reasoning. Given the conception of God, and from the works of creation **the mind infers, as a matter of knowledge**, certain of his traits, as power, and so on. (**Emphasis mine.**)

Through the context in which Romans 1:18-20 appears, the apostle Paul has forcefully and indisputably proved, that through observation of the created universe coupled with the reception of revelation, men (here especially Gentiles) “are without excuse” for rejecting God. The context also forcefully and indisputably proves that God **requires** humans to **reason** in their acquisition of **knowledge**.

In our day, hermeneutics, logic and reasoning frequently are targets, marked for eradication by some who rebel at the concept of any definitive authority in religion, to which they perceive that man is expected to submit himself. Romans 1:18-20 conclusively proves that hermeneutics in general, logic in particular and especially reasoning is warranted and obligatory in the practice of Christianity. Regarding the subject under discussion in Romans 1:18-20, as well as throughout the Bible, **God implies** truths by which **man must infer** those truths. Divine implication plus responsible inference results in definitive **knowledge**. Divine implication (and this inferred knowledge) equates to human **responsibility**. We “are without excuse.”

God is a God of logic who created men as creatures of logic. The capacity for logic or the ability to reason is a primary discernible distinction between mankind and the rest of creation. Failure to exercise logic in the application of Divine revelation to ourselves and to others equates to discarding the only communication we have from God. That posture is hopelessly lonely, perpetually aimless and eternally unfortunate.

By Divine inspiration and through Divine revelation, the apostle Paul in Romans Two presents argumentation for Jews to ponder. The efficacy of that inspiration, revelation and argumentation is wholly dependent upon the capacity and willingness of men to logically **and correctly** reason.

To deny the foregoing is essentially to lodge an indictment against God or man or both, for such a denial involves: (1) Either God cannot or will not communicate with mankind in a way in which he can comprehend, or (2) Mankind cannot or will not comprehend the communication which God has supplied (namely, the Bible), or (3) Both are true (God and man are each deficient in either ability or moral fortitude).

It is the case that God has provided a permanent, written, changeless revelation which men generally can understand. It is the case that men can but sometimes choose not to understand God’s Word (unaccountable souls excepted). Note Romans 2:1-4:

“Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things. But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth against them which commit such things. And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God? Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?”

The Jews exercised good judgment when they discerned that the Gentiles were guilty of the same sins attributed to the Gentiles by the inspired apostle. God confirmed that the Jews had properly ascribed sinful practices to the Gentiles. However, since the Jews were also guilty of the same sins for which they rightly condemned the Gentiles, by implication the Jews equally condemned themselves.

The testimony of the Jews and the testimony of God together conclusively proved the abominable quality of the sins under discussion (Romans 1:18-32). Verses three and four portray the concept of the partiality with which the Jews erroneously believed God favored them. Then, these verses utterly dispel this unfounded notion that God would overlook their sins because they were Jews.

The Jews were called upon to make the correlation — **through correct reasoning** — that: (1) like sins merit like condemnation, (2) there is no partiality with God, and therefore, (3) the Jews are as equally repugnant and lost before God for their sins as are the Gentiles for the same sins.

Therefore, the Jews, too, were without excuse. The case of the Jews was compounded to their shame because they enjoyed greater spiritual light than the Gentiles; the Jews were the recipients of the law of Moses. The Jews knew better and when Paul concluded his argument, the Jews could not successfully deny that their knowledge of God’s Word far exceeded their conformity to it.

However, doubtless had some of our “new hermeneutics,” “no logic” contemporaries been present to advise the Jews, the Jews would have offered Paul a lame excuse or so. “The law of Moses is just a love letter from God.” “Only direct commands possess authority.” “Biblical implications, though correctly inferred, are not binding.” To offer any excuse in view of the evidence presented in Romans 2:1-4 would be an indictment of God, man or both. The Jews **were without excuse** and they **knew** it after Paul’s discourse. Then as now, the harder task is to submit to God’s authority, admit our sins and commit ourselves to penitent reformation.

Discussion Questions:

1. Explain what the created universe reveals about the Creator and what it is incapable of revealing.
2. Explain the difference between *implying* something and *inferring* something. Regarding Scripture, mankind has the obligation to do which one?
3. How critical is it that every accountable soul employ sound reasoning in religion?
4. How is biblical knowledge derived?
5. How essential is logic to understanding the will of God for mankind?
6. To deny man’s ability to reason actually says what about God and mankind?
7. Without logic (reason), what would be the point of the apostle Paul’s argument in Romans Chapter Two? How essential is logic to Paul’s argument about the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15?
8. What is the harder chore, ascertaining what God’s will is for us or complying with it? What does correct reasoning have to do with authority in religion?

Chapter 19: Saved By What?

Is salvation by faith? Yes! “Therefore being **justified by faith**, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1). Is salvation by faith alone? No! “Ye see then how that by works a man is **justified**, and **not by faith only**” (James 2:24).

Is salvation by repentance? Yes! “And that **repentance and remission of sins** should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (Luke 24:47). Is salvation by repentance alone? No! “Then Peter said unto them, **Repent and be baptized** every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ **for the remission of sins . . .**” (Acts 2:38).

Is salvation by professing Christ? Yes! Is salvation by professing Christ alone? No! “That if thou shalt **confess** with thy mouth the Lord Jesus **and** shalt **believe** in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, **thou shalt be saved**. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth **confession is made unto salvation**” (Romans 10:9-10).

Is salvation by baptism? Yes! “The like figure whereunto even **baptism doth also now save us . . .**” (1 Peter 3:21). Is salvation by baptism alone? No! “He that **believeth and is baptized shall be saved . . .**” (Mark 16:16).

Is salvation by calling on the name of the Lord? Yes! “For whosoever shall **call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved**” (Romans 10:13). Is salvation by calling on the name of the Lord alone? No! “And now why tarriest thou? arise, and **be baptized**, and wash away thy sins, **calling on the name of the Lord**” (Acts 22:16).

Is salvation by grace? Yes! “Being **justified freely by his grace** through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:24). Is salvation by grace alone? No! “For **by grace are ye saved through faith**; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God” (Ephesians 2:8).

Is salvation by mercy? Yes! Is salvation by mercy alone? No! “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but **according to his mercy he saved us . . .** That be **justified by his grace . . .**” (Titus 3:5-7).

Is salvation by the blood of Christ? Yes! “And from **Jesus Christ . . .** that loved us, and **washed us from our sins in his own blood**” (Revelation 1:5). Is salvation by the blood of Christ alone? No! “Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through **faith in his blood**, to declare his righteousness **for the remission of sins . . .**” (Romans 3:25).

Is salvation by obedience? Yes! “And being made perfect, he became the author of **eternal salvation unto all them that obey him**” (Hebrews 5:9). Is salvation by obedience alone? No! “**By faith** Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, **obeyed . . .**” (Hebrews 11:8).

Is salvation by hope? Yes! “For **we are saved by hope . . .**” (Romans 8:24). Is salvation by hope alone? No! “If ye **continue in the faith** grounded and settled, and be **not moved away from the hope of the gospel . . .**” (Colossians 1:23).

Is salvation by the death of Christ? Yes! “For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that **Christ died for our sins** according to the scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:3). Is salvation by the death of Christ alone? No! “Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were **baptized into his death**? Therefore we are buried with him by **baptism into death**: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:3-4).

Though the above pattern of argumentation could doubtless be continued, the foregoing is sufficient. The inescapable conclusion is that a person is not saved by any element **alone**, to the exclusion of others to which also are ascribed saving power. We are not saved by anything **only** or **alone**. However, all elements to which the Gospel ascribes saving power **work together** for the salvation of souls. These elements to which Scripture ascribes saving power are not antagonistic toward each other (e.g., **faith only, grace only**). They complement each other and harmoniously combine to procure salvation.

However, who are the active participants in the redemptive process? Is salvation by Jesus Christ? Yes! “For the Son of man is come to seek and to **save that which was lost**” (Luke 19:10). “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). Without Jesus there can be no salvation!

Is salvation by Jesus alone? No! The heavenly Father and the Holy Spirit have participated in the salvation of mankind. “And we have seen and do testify that **the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour** of the world” (1 John 4:14). “For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but **holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit**” (2 Peter 1:21). “For **by one Spirit** are we all **baptized into one body . . .**” (1 Corinthians 12:13). We owe our salvation, then, to the participation of each divine personage in the Godhead.

Is salvation by the Godhead alone? No! Salvation is conditional and partially dependent on the imperfect participation of the saved. “And with many other words did he [Peter] testify and exhort, saying, **Save yourselves** from this untoward generation” (Acts 2:40). “Wherefore, my [Paul’s] beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, **work out your own salvation** with fear and trembling” (Phil. 2:12).

The human participation in salvation, summarized, is obedience. “And being made perfect, he [Jesus Christ] became the author of eternal **salvation unto all that obey him**” (Hebrews 5:9). Admittedly, even the most earnest attempt to obey is faulty. “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). Fortunately, mankind’s imperfect obedience is augmented by the mercy and the grace of God (Titus 3:5; Ephesians 2:8). By mercy, God **does not give us what we deserve** — eternal doom. By grace, God **gives us what we do not deserve** — eternal bliss (ultimately). Salvation, though, is conditional upon the saved’s consistent effort to comply with divine instructions. “But if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sins” (1 John 1:7).

Obedience or walking in the light can be categorized biblically as follows. “So then **faith** cometh by **hearing**, and hearing by **the word of God**” (Romans 10:17). The natural and logical progression is: (1) the Word of God, (2) hearing, (3) faith. “And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to **repent**” (Acts 17:30). “That if thou shalt **confess** with thy mouth the Lord **Jesus**, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation” (Romans 10:9-10). “Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and **be baptized** every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ **for the remission of sins . . .**” (Acts 2:38). Logically, faith is followed, then, by (4) repentance, (5) professing Christ and (6) baptism.

All of Christian worship, living and service is contained in (7) faithfulness. “. . . be thou **faithful unto death**, and I will give thee a crown of life” (Revelation 2:10). Finally, because we are fallible creatures, sometimes we sin as Simon did in Acts 8. Happily, God has provided a second law of salvation for erring Christians, (8) repent and pray. “**Repent** therefore of this thy wickedness, and **pray** God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee” (Acts 8:22).

Man **cannot** be saved without divine participation in his salvation. The Godhead **will not** save man without human participation in his salvation. Dear Reader, are you truly saved (according to what the New Testament reveals regarding redemption)?

Discussion Questions:

1. List several of the elements to which are attributed saving qualities in the New Testament. Does any one of them by itself save souls?
2. Explain how the various elements to which are ascribed saving power work together for the redemption of souls.
3. List the participants involved in the redemption of souls. Whose participation can be excluded without also excluding redemption?

Chapter 19: Saved By What?

4. Explain the respective roles of each person involved in the redemption of a soul. What activates the mercy and grace of God?
5. Describe the *conditional* aspect of redemption.
6. Explain the reasonable sequence of events in the redemptive process.

Chapter 20: Christian Living: Soberness, Righteousness and Godliness

“Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world” (Titus 2:12).

Titus 2:12 and the rest of Titus is addressed to Christians (the church, the saved). It does not detail how to become a child of God, but it details how the child of God should be moved by the Word of God in Christian living. Further, Titus 2:12 is the summary definition of the manifestation of true Christianity in the lives of Christians and the Lord’s church. While it is possible for individuals and churches to appear to manifest Titus 2:12 when really they are corrupted with sin, Christians and congregations cannot be acceptable to God without demonstrating Titus 2:12.

The implementation of Titus 2:12 involves both the eradication of some things from one’s life (“ungodliness and worldly lusts”) and the replacement of such with godly virtues (‘soberness, righteousness and godliness’). Reflecting on Titus 2:12, the Gospel song, “I Surrender All,” comes to mind: “All to Jesus I surrender . . . In His presence daily live . . . Humbly at His feet I bow; Worldly pleasures all forsaken . . . Lord I give myself to Thee . . .”

There is a sense in which all the Book of Titus seems to revolve around Titus 2:12. Nearly every verse sustains a relationship to our text. Note the following reflections from Chapter One.

The message of the verse (2:12) rests in the authority of an apostle (1:1). Heeding truth and practicing godliness are the bases of hope (1:2). The Word of God is the sole medium by which this truth is revealed to men (1:3). The appointment of elders is a contributor to individual Christian and congregational ‘soberness, righteousness and godliness’ (1:4-9). Manifestation of the lack of ‘soberness, righteousness and godliness’ is evident among unruly, vain talkers and deceivers (1:10). The Jewish error and abuse of the Gospel opposes ‘soberness, righteousness and godliness’ (1:11-14). A defiled conscience prohibits ‘soberness, righteousness and godliness’ (1:15). Further, evil works negate professions of godliness (1:16).

Observe also how Chapter Two closely pertains to Titus 2:12. Sound doctrine (truth) underlies ‘soberness, righteousness and godliness’ (2:1). Elderly men (2:2), elderly women (2:3), young women (2:4, 5), young men (2:6-8), and servants (2:9-10) are exhorted to be models (patterns) of ‘soberness, righteousness and godliness.’ All men are availed of salvation — the path of which is ‘soberness, righteousness and godliness’ (2:11). Putting off and putting on NOW is the key to eternal hope (2:12-14). The apostolic authority with which these instructions were initially given is equally forceful and authoritative today (2:15; 2 Timothy 2:2); there is no cause to despise the messenger — it is not his message nor is it given by his authority.

Chapter Three continues to enumerate ways in which Titus 2:12 is fulfilled in truly Christian lives. Submission to government (3:1), meekness (3:2) and putting off or abandoning old ways (3:3) are necessary to fulfill Titus 2:12. Old evil ways must be replaced with better ways; a void must not be left after casting off old ways (3:4). Additionally, the third chapter denotes one cannot earn a favored position with God, but if one does his little part, God will do his big part [grace] (3:5-8) and apostasy is an ever present threat (3:9-11).

Timely lessons for today are abundant in Titus and, if applied to our lives, will greatly enhance and undergird Christian living — and the fulfillment of Titus 2:12. Consider: (1) The pursuit of ‘soberness, righteousness and godliness’ is predicated upon DIVINE AUTHORITY (1:1; 2:15). (2) DIVINE INSTRUCTION by which Titus 2:12 is facilitated is the Word of God (truth) or sound doctrine (1:1, 3, 9; 2:1). (3) Valid Christian HOPE is tied diametrically to implementation of Titus 2:12 (1:2; 2:11-13; 3:7).

(4) Titus 2:12 is accomplished through DIVINE COMMANDMENT KEEPING of the “common faith” (1:3, 4) versus KEEPING COMMANDMENTS OF MEN (1:14). (5) Practicing Titus 2:12

equates to being “sound in the faith” (1:13; 2:2). (6) Without “living soberly, righteously, and godly” the Christian’s conscience is defiled and his profession of Christianity is vain (1:15-16).

(7) Elders, elderly men, elderly women, young women, young men, servants (slaves, employees — in principle, anyone who is subject to someone else) are given specific instructions in Titus by which they can practice Titus 2:12 (1:6-2:10). (8) Living “soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world” involves being: blameless, not self-willed, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre (not covetous), hospitable, sober, just, holy, temperate, one who holds fast the faithful word, of good conscience, of sound doctrine, sound in the faith, charitable, patient, not a false accuser, teachers of good things, compassionate, discreet, chaste, a pattern of good works, uncorrupted, sincere, sound in speech, under subjection, not a brawler, gentle, meek, not foolish, not disobedient, not deceived, not lustful, not lovers of pleasure, not living in malice, not envious, not hateful, workers of good, and not factious (1:6-3:10).

(9) When Christians do what they can, they still fall short of righteousness whereby they can come into the presence of God. However, through mercy and grace God makes up the difference — conditionally (2:11, 3:5-7). (10) Mercy and grace are conditional on good works (2:7, 14; 3:1, 8, 14). (11) There is an emphasis in Titus on “sound doctrine” (1:9; 2:1) and “sound in the faith” (1:13; 2:2).

In his contribution to the *Gospel Advocate Commentaries*, David Lipscomb made these astute observations regarding Titus 2:12.

To live soberly is to discharge the duty one owes to himself. . . . To live righteously is faithfully to discharge our duty to our fellow men in all the relations of life. . . . To live godly is to discharge our duties to God. The obligation and duties we owe in these several relations interweave into and overlap each other. They depend upon each other, yet they are distinct and cover man’s whole duty.

Consultation with Greek reference works for the various words found in Titus 2:12 also help to provide a definitive analysis of Christian living — apart from theory, what it means to be a practicing Christian. “Soberly” derives from two Greek words which respectively mean ‘to save’ and ‘the mind’; hence, “soberly” equates to self-control, sober-minded, temperate, sound of mind and a condition enabling one to conform to the mind of Christ.

“Righteously” is also translated ‘justly’ and is a state of being right or conforming to a standard of what is right. The old English spelling of ‘righteous’ is ‘rightwise,’ indicating one who is wise pertaining to what is deemed right. “Godly” means piously, religiously, devout and reverence for God manifested in actions. The word “ungodliness” is simply the opposite of “godliness” (the negating ‘a’ prefix precedes the Greek word for ‘godliness’).

“Worldly” pertains to this world concerning spiritual matters — opposite of heavenly concerns. “Lusts” comes from a Greek word meaning desire or craving and is a comprehensive term including a wide range of desires or lusts — usually with an evil application. The word “instructing” is an interesting word in the Greek; it means to train, instruct, teach, correct, chastise, discipline — even severely and physically if necessary. It seems that **the intensity of the instruction is dependent upon the receptivity of the one being instructed**, and in the case of family discipline could include spanking.

“Denying” equals rejecting, renouncing or forsaking. “Present” means now — this age. The word for “world” in this verse is not the ‘kosmos,’ but another word, meaning age or period of time.

In conclusion, in every assessment of Christian living from Titus and verse 2:12, these two points become apparent: (1) It is not enough to obey the Gospel by which one’s past sins are remitted and (2) Hope of eternal life is conditional upon implementation of the Word of God in one’s life to produce truly Christian living. Sadly, many Christians and churches fall far short in this area and it simply cannot be so without adversely affecting their prospect of spending eternity in heaven with God.

“Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?” (2 Corinthians 13:5)

Discussion Questions:

1. How important are the biblical principles in Titus 2:12 to individual Christian living and congregational conduct?
2. How do the songs we sing in worship reinforce Christian living and service? Do we mouth the words or do we sense a heartfelt rededication each time we sing them?
3. In what way does Titus 2:12 appear to be central to the entire Book of Titus?
4. Describe the folly of despising the messenger of God.
5. What motivates God to exercise grace and mercy on individuals? Are grace and mercy conditional or unconditional?
6. How does Titus 2:12 involve one's responsibility toward himself, others and God?
7. Explain the difference and significance between forgiveness from past sins and Christian living.

Chapter 21: Bible Baptism: Is It Sprinkling, Pouring or Immersion?

There are several different baptisms that are mentioned in the New Testament. The **baptism of Moses** was figurative. It pertained to the nation of Israel during its exodus from Egypt and as the Israelites crossed the Red Sea (1 Corinthians 10:2). Jesus Christ endured the **baptism of suffering** when he was crucified (Mark 10:38-39). The suffering was real, though the baptism was figurative. The **baptism of Jesus** in the Jordan River was literal and to “fulfill all righteousness” (Matthew 3:13-17). The **baptism of fire** is future and is reserved for the ungodly at the end of time (Matthew 3:11). It is a figurative reference to hell. The **baptism of the Holy Spirit** was promised exclusively to the apostles (John 14-16; Acts 1:5; 1:26 - 2:4). The **baptism of John** was literal and was preparatory for the Lord’s kingdom (Acts 19:3). Then, the Great Commission baptism, which is literal, superseded the baptism of John, after the establishment of the kingdom or church (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16).

The subject of the biblical study review in this article pertains to the **baptism of the Great Commission**. This is the *one baptism* of Ephesians 4:5. When the apostle Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus, only one baptism was then (and is now) effective. This baptism is in water (1 Peter 3:20-21). Further, the Great Commission baptism is for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16). However, is this baptism performed by sprinkling, pouring or immersion in water? Does it matter which of these actions is employed for biblical baptism?

Consulting a dictionary is not completely satisfactory when defining a biblical word. Dictionaries reflect common, current usage of a word. Therefore, dictionaries modify the definitions of words accordingly. A dictionary definition for baptism might define baptism to allow sprinkling, pouring or immersion, irrespective of what the biblical word meant in New Testament times. Below are three dictionary definitions.

Webster’s New World Dictionary (Home Library Second Concise Edition) says of *baptism*, “1. the rite or sacrament of admitting a person into a Christian church by **dipping him in water or sprinkling water on him**.” The entry also indicates that *baptism* comes from a Greek word meaning “immerse.”

The *Webster’s Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary* reads, “1. a Christian sacrament signifying spiritual rebirth and admitting the recipient to the Christian community through the **ritual use of water**.”

Webster’s Talking Dictionary defines baptism as, “1. a **ceremonial immersion in water, or application of water**, as an initiatory rite or sacrament of the Christian church.”

The first and third definitions above of the word baptism each first portray it as submersion in water. All three definitions, though, provide for other applications of water for baptism. However, Vine’s *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* defines biblical baptism as immersion. The Greek word from which our word baptism is derived is *baptisma* and means, “. . . consisting of the processes of **immersion, submersion and emergence** (from *bapto*, to dip . . .”

Other Greek words, wholly different from *baptisma*, are used in the Greek New Testament for the words “pouring” and “sprinkling.” The Greek word *rhantismos* means “sprinkling” and is not used in the New Testament to describe baptism. Several Greek words (*ballo*, *katacheo*, *ekcheo*, *ekchuno* and *epicheo*) are translated as “pouring” in the New Testament. None of them are employed in the New Testament for Christian baptism.

Only one word is used in the Greek New Testament for Christian baptism. That word is *baptisma*. The Bible, therefore, teaches that baptism is immersion. Our teaching and practice ought to correspond to what the Bible teaches about every matter — including baptism.

Besides consulting an English-Greek dictionary, New Testament verses in English adequately demonstrate that true, biblical baptism is immersion. Two passages describe baptism as a burial — which is a reference to immersion.

“**Buried with him in baptism**, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead” (Colossians 2:12).

“Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are **buried with him by baptism into death**: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:3-4).

Another verse portrays baptism as a **planting** — also a reference to immersion.

“For if we have been **planted** together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection” (Romans 6:5).

There are also passages that complement the foregoing verses. Their testimony is consistent and supportive of biblical baptism being immersion.

“And John also was baptizing in Aenon near to Salim, because there was **much water** there: and they came and were baptized” (John 3:23).

Much water is required for immersion, whereas, little water is required for sprinkling or pouring.

“And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and **they went down both into the water**, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. and when **they were come up out of the water** . . .” (Acts 8:38-39).

That these two men **went down into and came up out of the water** suggests that baptism is immersion. Neither sprinkling nor pouring requires either person to enter the water. Further, for immersion, a person must go to water, but for sprinkling and pouring water can be brought to a baptismal candidate.

“The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 3:21).

The parenthetical expression explains that though baptism may appear to be a bath to cleanse the flesh, its purpose is to cleanse the conscience. While immersion might appear to the uninformed to be a bath, neither sprinkling nor pouring could be mistaken for a bath. Therefore, 1 Peter 3:21 alludes to immersion for baptism.

In conclusion, **the Great Commission baptism is immersion in water for the remission of sins**. Dear Reader, have you been immersed in water for the remission of sins? If not, are you ready to receive true, biblical baptism now?

Discussion Questions:

1. List baptisms of which the Bible speaks and explain which were figurative and which were literal.
2. Which baptism or baptisms remain effective today? Identify it or them.
3. Describe the limitations of English dictionaries when researching biblical topics. How is this demonstrated regarding the so-called *mode* of baptism?

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4. What are some of the Greek words that God could have chosen to describe modes other than immersion for Christian baptism? What is the significance of the Greek word that God did choose for the act of Christian baptism?
5. Explain how knowledge of New Testament Greek is not essential to understand the act that God has authorized for Christian baptism.

Chapter 22: Three Crosses

Jesus of Nazareth was crucified outside the city of Jerusalem on Golgotha or the hill of Calvary (Matthew 27:33; Luke 23:33). Two other men were led to that place of execution along with Jesus (Luke 23:32). All three were crucified, one thief on each side of our Lord (Luke 23:33).

One of the thieves and his cross represents rebellion and arrogance, and depicts impenitent, lost humanity. He scoffed at Jesus: “If thou be Christ, save thyself and us.” Remarkably, that thief’s scorn for Christ was greater than his physical pain or the fear of his impending, dreadful death. Jesus, though, had done nothing to arouse this malicious attitude.

This thief crossed the threshold of eternity unprepared and unconcerned about meeting God. Likewise, millions of souls have entered eternity with little or no concern for their souls. Lamentably, they made no preparation to spend eternity in heaven! Many are the souls who even live outside the lowly standards of righteousness established by men. They rebel against civil authority and are often openly without either penitence or remorse when caught and punished. Some sinners claim they have no desire to go to heaven and equally disdain companionship with godly people in this life.

This thief was an unbeliever. If he were to have salvation, he demanded it on his own terms. Further, he wanted to test Jesus — requiring of him miraculous signs. This thief has many cousins possessing a similar inclination living today.

The second thief and his cross represent penitence and depict the only attitude that will lead a soul to be saved. He acknowledged Jesus as the Christ (Luke 23:40-43) and God (Luke 23:40). Even this thief was aware of the public ministry of our Lord. He believed that Jesus was the Messiah or Savior who was to establish the long prophesied about kingdom. This thief, therefore, attributed innocence to Christ (Luke 23:40). He entrusted his soul and eternity to the man on the middle cross.

The second thief not only was a believer, but he also repented. This thief acknowledged his sins versus the sinlessness of Jesus (Luke 23:40-41) and appealed for salvation to the sole Savior this world has ever known (Luke 23:42). Christ forgave him according to the terms of the religious law under which they both lived — dependent on and in prospect of the death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord. Likewise today, men and women can only be saved according to the terms of the religious law under which they live (now, the Gospel) — dependent on and with retrospect to the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. Though forgiven, as often is the case, the penitent thief still had to endure the consequence of his sins (in this instance — death).

The penitent thief also rebuked his sinful cohort and defended Jesus. Followers of the Lord today oppose unrighteousness, too (1 Peter 5:8-9; James 4:7). Further, we are to defend the Gospel (Philippians 1:17; Jude 3). His conduct demonstrates that it is imperative for penitent souls to turn from their former sins and evil associations. “And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them” (Ephesians 5:11).

The middle cross was viewed from contrasting perspectives. The impenitent thief saw a man, evil like himself and an impostor Savior. Whereas, the penitent thief saw on the middle cross the Son of God — the Savior (Messiah).

That middle cross is immensely important because on it Jesus Christ suffered vicariously (in our place for us). The thieves died for themselves, but Jesus died for the sins of others (2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 2:21-24; 3:18).

That center cross was also the cross of fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy (Isaiah 53:4-12). The precious, matchless blood shed thereon saves souls (1 Peter 1:18-20; Ephesians 1:7). (That blood is contacted when one is baptized into the death of Christ, Romans 6:3-5; Colossians 2:12.) The redemption of souls was the mission for which Jesus left heaven and came to earth (Luke 19:10; Matthew 1:21-23).

Man's part of salvation (Philippians 2:12) includes faith (John 8:24; Mark 16:16), repentance (Luke 13:3), confessing Christ to be Lord (Romans 10:9-10), and obedience (Hebrews 5:8-9; Luke 6:46), which requires immersion in water (1 Peter 3:21). Then Jesus adds one to his Church (Acts 2:47).

In summary, impenitent sinners are lost until they repent. Penitent sinners need to obey the Gospel plan of salvation — the redemptive terms under which we now live. The road to salvation begins with the statement “I have sinned” (Nehemiah 1:6). Jesus Christ's blood is the propitiation for sins by which God saves men by grace (Romans 3:23-25).

“For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God.”

Discussion Questions:

1. Identify, generally, some of the people today who exhibit a similar disposition as the impenitent thief on the cross.
2. Describe the type of salvation in which the impenitent thief was interested. Who today wants to be saved, in a sense, in a similar fashion today?
3. How are even Christians somewhat like the penitent thief on the cross?
4. How is redemption of us like and unlike the way in which the penitent thief was saved?
5. Contrast forgiveness of sin with the consequence of sin.
6. How did the penitent thief demonstrate militancy for Christ, even under duress and with little opportunity?
7. What does perspective have to do with one's view of the center cross — and the Savior upon it?
8. Describe the effect on mankind had there been no center cross on which our Savior died.
9. How efficient is the cross of Christ for us if we fail to participate in our redemption?

Chapter 23: I Am Dying!

I am dying! Yet, I am not surprised. I knew my life ultimately would come to this. Simple reflection on the births, lives and deaths of people around me, teaches me that death is a common experience of humanity. Further, the Bible instructs me of the certainty of death — and judgment.

“Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble. He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down: he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not” (Job 14:1-2).

“And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment” (Hebrews 9:27).

No, as far as I know, I am not afflicted with a terminal illness. I have never been so sick that I was in danger of dying. Neither have I sustained a mortal wound. I have never suffered an injury from which I was not expected to recover.

However, I adamantly affirm again that I am dying. Further, you are dying, too. Every living thing is in the process of dying. From the moment babies are born and begin their maturation, they march throughout life toward their ultimate deaths (untimely and prematurely or expiration at the conclusion of several decades, Psalm 90:10).

Since we refuse to acknowledge our vulnerability, we often live as though we will never die. Were a doctor to tell us we have only three months to live, we would with great urgency and much carefulness do those things that are the most important to us. If we had no more than 90 days to live, we would also do our best to prepare to die.

The truth is that we may live long lives — or you may die before finishing this paragraph. For all we know, Jesus may return an hour before our next supper meal.

“Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away” (James 4:13-14).

“But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only” (Matthew 24:36).

“But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up” (2 Peter 3:10).

All people need to sense the urgency of making the most of the remaining days we have among the living on this earth. After death (Luke 16:19-31) or when Jesus comes again, no more preparation for eternity can be made. After death (or the return of our Lord) we will also be unable to guide friends, neighbors, co-workers and family to heaven (Luke 16:27-31).

It is now that we must work out our own salvation with fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12). It is now that we must continue to work out our own salvation (Revelation 2:10). It is now that we must apply ourselves to whatever good work we hope to do.

“Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest” (Ecclesiastes 9:10).

“... be ready to every good work” (Titus 3:1).

It is now that we must tell lost souls (non-Christians and erring Christians) about a Savior who died to save them from sin (John 11:51; Romans 5:6-10). We must tell the world now about the Savior who has prepared heaven for the saved (John 14:1-3; 2 Peter 3:13). It is now that we must tell lost souls about

Jesus who will assign disobedient humanity to eternal punishment in hell (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9; 2 Corinthians 5:10-11; Revelation 20:12-15).

I think I fall into the category of what is considered middle-aged. Yet, to children (as I also once thought) I must seem “old,” and older people must appear to be ancient. To these “ancient” ones I am but a youngster. However, I am aware that should I be granted a long life, I have lived more years than I probably have left to live. Hence, I sense the urgency of “redeeming the time” (Ephesians 5:16; Colossians 4:5).

We cannot earn our salvation, but neither do we dare to neglect our participation in our salvation. We must prepare to meet God (Amos 4:12). We have the additional responsibility to help others prepare to meet God (Mark 16:15-16; 2 Timothy 2:2). The summary of our earthly duties is to prepare now, in this life, for eternity.

“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil” (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14).

Discussion Questions:

1. As a consequence of refusing to acknowledge our inevitable death, how do we live our lives?
2. How urgent is it that we prepare for our journey across the threshold of death into eternity?
3. Who is affected if we do not prepare now to spend eternity in heaven?
4. What would you like to accomplish for the Lord in the remaining days you may have on earth?
5. Are you ready this instant to go and be with the Lord forever? If not, what are you going to do about it?

Chapter 24: Straight Talk About Hard Things: What About Mom and Dad?

One April day in 1994 a woman was jogging in Placer County, California. Suddenly, unexpectedly and without provocation, a mountain lion pounced on her from the peripheral of the trail. As they tumbled down the stony hillside together, the lion mauled her to death. What a tragic encounter with wildlife! What a hurtful empty void that tragedy must have left in the lives of her loved ones!

In view of the catastrophic consequences of being on that trail at that moment, who could imagine that such a victim would want her husband or one of her children to be the next person to follow in her footsteps that day? Surely, no one would exclaim that to choose another trail to safety would be a dishonor to the memory of the beloved but departed victim of that attack. Doubtless, she would not fault her family for choosing a trail to safety. A wife and mother would earnestly hope that her family would not fall prey to the mountain lion also.

The Bible records this thought provoking conversation between departed spirits.

“There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence. Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house: For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment. Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.” (Luke 16:19-31).

Straight talk about hard things means that we must think about loved ones who have died. If your mother or father, brother or sister, or husband or wife did not make adequate preparation for eternity, do you really think that they want their loved ones to make the same mistake? If you were to learn from the Bible how to prepare yourself to meet God, but your loved ones did not do that, would it really be a dishonor to their memory to obey the truth?

God the Father has a role in the salvation of mankind. Through his mercy he withholds from Christians the punishment that all souls deserve (Titus 3:5). Through God's grace he extends to Christians redemption that no soul deserves (Ephesians 2:8). To make mercy and grace possible God sent Jesus Christ into the world (John 3:16) by which he draws souls to himself (John 14:6). This is the only way that sinful mankind could boldly re-establish fellowship with a sinless, holy God (Hebrews 4:16).

Jesus Christ has a role in the salvation of mankind. Jesus willingly came to earth and did the will of the Father (John 6:38). He became the perfect sacrifice for the sins of all souls (Hebrews 9:26). The blood of Jesus takes away sins (Ephesians 1:7).

The Holy Spirit has a role in the salvation of mankind. The Holy Spirit delivered divine messages from the Father to mankind (2 Peter 1:20-21). The Holy Spirit is a divine participant in baptism (1 Corinthians 12:13).

Mankind also has a role in his salvation (Philippians 2:12). We must hear God's Word whereby a Bible faith develops (Romans 10:17). God requires us to profess before men that Jesus is the Christ (Romans 10:9-10). Souls on Pentecost were told by the apostle Peter to repent and be baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38).

Initially the saving blood of Jesus is applied to a soul when baptized into the death of Christ (Romans 6:3-5). Erring Christians can receive the cleansing blood of Jesus through penitence and prayer (Acts 8:22, 24; 1 John 1:7). Follow the footsteps of Jesus on the trail to heaven. That is what your mother and father or other loved ones who have died want you to do.

Discussion Questions:

1. Describe the attitude of people who love their families when contemplating some great tragedy that threatens to engulf them.
2. What kind of a family reunion did the rich man in Luke 16 desperately desire not to convene?
3. If mom and dad's religion did not in actuality usher them into paradise on the other side of death's door, do you really think mom and dad want you to sing (and live) the refrain, 'Give me that ole' time religion, it was good enough for mom and dad, it's good enough for me?'
4. Detail the respective roles of the Godhead and man in the redemption of mankind.
5. Explain the dual application of the blood of Jesus Christ to the souls of mankind.

Chapter 25: Unity Among God's People

How God's people may attain unity is an ever popular query for which different and conflicting answers are invariably given. However, God's Word clearly reveals how *true, biblical unity* is derived and maintained. Yet, alternate, unscriptural propositions for achieving unity are entertained frequently by even members of the Lord's church. Further, not only in the 19th and 20th centuries, but in the 1st century as well, the Lord's church sometimes experienced problems practicing unity.

Unity problems relate, in part, to faulty concepts and failure to define the topic within its biblical context. The word, "unity," *is not* a commodity that can be purchased at some local retail store; it is not available wholesale, either. Additionally, "unity" *is not* as much a *goal* as it is the *result* of something. "*Biblical unity*" *is the result of establishing and maintaining fellowship with God as well as fellowship with those who are in fellowship with God.* This fellowship, and hence unity, is dependent upon completely molding our lives with the Word of God only.

The English word "unity" appears only three times in the King James Version (Psalms 133:1; Ephesians 4:3, 13). The Greek word for unity (henotas) appears only in Ephesians and means: oneness, unity, unanimity, agreement, a unit. The root word from which "unity" comes is used by Jesus in Matthew 19:5-6 regarding marriage, to teach the oneness of a couple united by matrimony.

The "unity of the Spirit" (Ephesians 4:3) relates directly to and includes the seven "ones" following in Ephesians 4:4-6, and was first accomplished by means of miraculously endowed workers and partial revelations (Ephesians 4:11; 1 Corinthians 13:8-13). It was ultimately and is now accomplished through the written, revealed, preserved Word of God (Ephesians 4:13; 1 Corinthians 13:8-13; James 1:25; 2 Timothy 3:16-17). "Unity of the Spirit" and "unity of the faith" provide for the perfecting of the saints, the work of the ministry, the edification of the church and the protection of the church from doctrinal error (Ephesians 4:12, 14). In our day, the "unity of the Spirit" is accomplished solely through the "unity of the faith," the Word of God. *The Bible is central to biblical unity and fellowship.*

Unity among brethren was desirable in Old Testament times, too (Psalms 133:1; Proverbs 6:16-19). Further, unity was prophesied of the church long before it was founded. "Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice; with the voice together shall they sing: for they shall see eye to eye, when the Lord shall bring again Zion" (Isaiah 52:8).

Jesus prayed for a spiritual oneness or unity among his followers (John 17:20-21). Also, the early church was repeatedly exhorted to be of one mind and one accord (Romans 12:16; 2 Corinthians 13:11; Philippians 1:27; 2:2; 4:2; 1 Peter 3:8). Likemindedness enables God's people to with ". . . one mind and one mouth glorify God . . ." (Romans 15:5-6). This unity deters division among the children of God, too. "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (1 Corinthians 1:10).

Unity is enjoyed exclusively by those in the Lord's church, for all of God's children are made one in Christ, in the body of Christ (Romans 12:5; 1 Corinthians 10:17). "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" (1 Corinthians 12:12). "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 3:28). Speaking of the relationship of Jews and Gentiles in Christ, the apostle Paul penned of our Lord, "For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us" (Ephesians 2:14).

The first century church practiced a singleness of heart (Acts 1:14; 2:1; 5:12). "And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common" (Acts 4:32). Both Old and New Testament passages additionally refer to unity as being "knit together" (Judges 20:11; Colossians 2:2). The contemporary church needs as much *singleness of heart* and *knit togetherness* as the infant church of long ago.

The first century church sometimes experienced problems practicing unity. On occasion, the infant church was cautioned to put away division, (1 Corinthians 1:10-13).

Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?

Other times, the first century church was warned *not* to practice unity with (1) false teachers (Romans 16:17-18; 1 John 4:1), (2) immoral people (1 Corinthians 5:9) and (3) non-Christians, (2 Corinthians 6:14-17). Fellowship and unity are directly related to doctrine (2 John 9-11).

Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.

Disrupting unity among God's people in the first century was a grave offense. Diotrephes stands indelibly in Scripture as such an offender (3 John 9-10). Further, the qualifications of elders include the ability and willingness to combat assaults on the church, instantly if necessary (Titus 1:9-11). Unity in the early church also was threatened by false Gospels (Galatians 1:6-9; Jude 3; Philippians 1:17) and a lack of knowledge of God's Word (Hosea 4:6; Hebrews 5:12-14; 2 Timothy 2:15; 1 Peter 2:2). Doubtless these ailments no less afflict contemporary churches than they did our first century counterparts.

The 19th and 20th century church has sometimes experienced difficulties practicing unity, too. Last century, the churches of Christ and the Christian Church split into separate fellowships over Bible authority, manifested in the introduction of mechanical instrumental music into worship and missionary societies. Other liberties taken with Bible authority since then have resulted in: (1) the teaching of false doctrines, (2) fractured fellowship and (3) division rather than unity among God's people.

Several serious departures have ruptured or threaten to rupture unity among God's people. Several churches of Christ now embrace theological liberalism to some degree (e.g., grace only, women praying, teaching, leading singing, and preaching before men, women waiting on the Lord's Table, errors regarding divorce and remarriage, undermining the authority of elders, perverted translations of the Bible, proposed merger with the Christian church, open fellowship with denominations, etc.).

Also, often churches of Christ today appear not to be enthusiastically *practicing* the Christianity to which they give lip service. Apathy and indifference are unparalleled in the history of the Lord's church. Church discipline is infrequently practiced and evangelism is meagerly practiced. Many of the spiritual malignities that are characteristic of a sinful world are increasingly being discovered among members (including leaders) in the church. Whatever is out there in the perverted world is in the church today.

There is no *quick fix* for the lack of unity among God's people. Further, merger with or attempting to fellowship denominations is not true unity in the eyes of God. After all, how the Almighty views the whole matter is what really (and eternally) counts. In spite of modern day attempts to overlook it, the fact is that doctrine, fellowship and unity are inter-related and inseparable companions. Unity as God would have it cannot exist where disregard for Bible authority also exists.

"Biblical unity" is the result of establishing and maintaining a fellowship with God as well as fellowship with those who are in fellowship with God. This fellowship, hence unity, revolves around the Word of God in our lives. Only the Word of God can give us the knowledge whereby we can exercise ourselves as a unit, one people, many members of the one body, possessing the same mind. We are told in Scripture that a divided kingdom cannot stand, and further, that we cannot walk together unless we be

agreed (Mark 3:24-25; Amos 3:3). We ought to speedily acquire and always maintain a "like precious faith" (2 Peter 1:1).

Discussion Questions:

1. Are problems attaining biblical unity limited to the times in which we live, or are such problems perpetual?
2. Describe the correlation between fellowship and biblical unity.
3. Define the word unity. How does unity apply to relationships in addition to spiritual fellowship?
4. How is revelation from God essential to the establishment and maintenance of unity and fellowship?
5. In what sense does unity form God's children into a single unit?
6. Enumerate those among whom true, biblical unity can exist. Is biblical unity both inclusive and exclusive? Explain.
7. What type of unity and with whom is a certain kind of unity biblically forbidden?
8. Noting that unity is sometimes hard to attain and maintain, how serious a problem is disunity among God's people?
9. List the form in which disunity manifests itself in the church. Do these doctrinal differences really matter?
10. How do apathy and indifference among Christians and congregations affect the unity of the Lord's church?
11. Describe the degree of danger sinfulness in the world poses for the church.
12. Is there a cure for the disunity that adversely buffets the body of Christ? If so, what is it?

Chapter 26: On Such A Day As This

What a beautiful day! From my vantage point, the horizon was framed beneath with green trees and a magnificent, perfect blue sky above. Puffy white clouds accented the sky and a friendly, warming sun shone overhead. A gentle, cool breeze complemented this delightful panorama.

Adding to my appreciation of the day, former days were much less stunning. Though the calendar pages signaled the passing of seasons, the previous winter left only stubbornly, and it seemed that spring likewise gripped us jealously. When finally the lingering snow (upper Ohio River valley) and the relentless rain subsided, summer arrived in a fury of heat and humidity.

This day, though, all that for now at least, was merely a memory. After all, August is expected to be hot and humid here. However, for a while, this day and perhaps a few coming, was flawless.

Doubtless, even a beautiful day such as this would appear less promising if I were encountering hurtful circumstances, which I was not. I was not hungry (perhaps too well fed). I was not suffering. No worries especially pressed me or prompted any anxiety (though of course we all have anxious moments occasionally). I had a place to live and clothes to wear. My family was healthy and happy. All of my immediate family faithfully practiced primitive Christianity. I had purpose in life for now and eternity. I was happy, which was not a bad disposition through which to view the world.

It was true, though, that not everyone shared the same enthusiasm for that day. For instance, I saw a funeral procession go by. Also, I heard about two tragic traffic accidents. Life goes on and it is not always pleasant.

Others that day found themselves gainfully employed. Somewhere, doubtless, a mother gave birth. Somewhere, a bride and a groom exchanged marriage vows. Somewhere, a child rejoiced at a birthday party.

Essentially, on such a day as this, people throughout the world were doing all the things they ordinarily do. On such a day as this, our dear Lord will return as Savior and with consoling arms pull his faithful followers into a loving embrace (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). For others, Jesus will appear as a wrathful judge to punish the unbelieving and disobedient (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9). Whether overcast, snowy, rainy or amidst sunshine, Jesus will come when man least expects him.

“But of that day and hour knoweth no *man*, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only. But as the days of Noe *were*, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two *women shall be* grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh. Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed *is* that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Verily I say unto you, That he shall make him ruler over all his goods. But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; And shall begin to smite *his* fellowservants, and to eat and drink with the drunken; The lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for *him*, and in an hour that he is not aware of, And shall cut him asunder, and appoint *him* his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 24:36-51).

Or, on such a day as this, we will breathe our last and depart the familiar scenes of this life, family and pursuits (Luke 12:16-21).

“Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: Whereas ye know not what *shall be* on the morrow. For what *is* your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye *ought* to say, If the Lord will, we shall live” (James 4:13-16).

The big question, of course, is: “Will we be ready?”

“For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished *my* course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing” (1 Timothy 4:6-8).

Discussion Questions:

1. Describe some of the circumstances in life that make an otherwise *perfect* day far less than perfect.
2. What will mankind be doing on the day on which Jesus returns? How much advance warning will we have preceding the Second Coming of Christ?
3. Or if the Lord delays his return, what will mankind be doing on the day in which any of its members passes away? What will you be doing the day you die? How much advance warning does one usually have preceding his death?
4. What kind of things would one who expects to spend forever in heaven be found doing throughout his life? Are there things left undone in your life that you want to accomplish before either your death or the return of the Lord?

God's Redemptive Plan

GOD'S PART

Love (John 3:16)
Grace (Eph. 2:8)
Mercy (Titus 3:5)
Gospel (Rom. 1:16)

CHRIST'S PART

The Blood of Christ (Rev. 1:5)
Our Mediator (1 Tim. 2:5)

Holy Spirit's Part

Revelation (2 Pet. 1:20-21)

MAN'S PART

Bible Faith (John 8:24)
Repentance (Acts 17:30)
Baptism (1 Pet. 3:21)
Obedience (Heb. 5:8, 9)
Purity (Rev. 22:14)
Faithfulness (Rev. 2:10)
Love (1 John 2:10)
Hope (Rom. 8:24)
Works (Jam. 2:24)
Endurance (Matt. 10:22)
Confessing Christ (Rom. 10:9-10)
Being Born Again (John 3:3-5)
Laying Aside Evil (Jam. 1:21)
Preaching (1 Cor. 1:18, 21)
Calling on the Name of the Lord (Rom. 10:14)
Knowledge of the Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:15)