



Seek The Old Paths

“Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths. . . and walk therein”
(Jeremiah 6:16)

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THINGS ABOUT THE LORD'S CHURCH THAT SURPRISE PEOPLE

Jon Gary Williams

One important task of Christians is to convey to people what the Bible teaches regarding the Lord's church. Many times this is not an easy thing to do for people often have certain preconceived ideas about the church, ideas that are unknown to the Scriptures. However, I have noticed that when shown what the Bible actually teaches about the church, some folks will immediately see the difference between what they may have been taught and what the Bible really teaches.

There are times when some of the most fundamental truths about the church are brought out, people will show surprise. They may say, for example, *“Why, I never knew that was in the Bible!”* or *“I've always been told something else!”*

Following are several illustrations pertaining to basic truths about the church which often surprise people. And while these truths serve to illustrate the differences between the Lord's church and denominations, they also reveal the simplicity of true New Testament Christianity.

THERE IS NO “TITHING”

Who could count the times people have exclaimed, *“You mean the church of Christ does not teach tithing!?”* But why are folks so surprised about this? It's simply because they have always been taught that tithing (giving 10%) is a fundamental church activity and have never heard anything else.

Though tithing was a part of the Old Testament law of Moses, God never intended for it to be a part of Christianity. Rather, the New Testament teaches that Christians are to give as they prosper, as they purpose, and with a cheerful heart (1 Cor. 16:2; 2 Cor. 9:7). In essence, Christian giving is a free-will offering.

PREACHERS ARE NOT “PASTORS” OR “REVERENDS”

Quite often, just about every Gospel preacher finds himself being referred to as “pastor” or “reverend.” When a preacher points out that he is a preacher or minister and not a pastor, people show surprise. But why? Because through the years this term has been commonly used and many are not aware of what the Bible really teaches. The expression “pastor” is synonymous with the word “elder” and refers to men who oversee local congregations. In Ephesians 4:11 preachers (evangelists) are spoken of separately from pastors.

As to the use of the word “reverend,” it is never to be used with reference to man. This is a unique term showing veneration and sacred awe and, hence, only God is so designated (Psa. 111:9). No man is to ever be “revered.”

PEOPLE DO NOT “JOIN” THE CHURCH

The term “joining the church” is an expression commonly heard in re-

ligious conversation. It is so much a part of today's religious vocabulary that few have ever given it much thought. Once, when I was speaking with a man about the spiritual nature of the Lord's church, this subject arose. I told him that people might “join” a denomination, but could not join the church found in the Bible. With astonishment he said, “You mean I can't join the church of Christ?” At that point I clarified what I meant — that people are “added” to Christ's church. But why was he so surprised? It's because “joining” a church was something he had heard all his life.

Becoming a part of the church is not like joining a social order or civic group. The Bible teaches that when people obey the Lord, being baptized for the remission of sins, He adds them to His church (Acts 2:38, 42, 47).

COMMUNION OBSERVED EVERY WEEK

More than once those who are unfamiliar with the Lord's church, after a few visits with a local congregation, have been heard to say, “One thing I notice about the church of Christ is that they have communion every Sunday.” Why would this surprise them? Again, because of popular denominational practices. They have never known of anything but monthly,

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Things About the Church...



Editorial...

LIBERALS, LIBERALISM & THE WORD

Garland M. Robinson

God's power to save is the word of God. Take away the Gospel and God is powerless to save. Liberals add to and take from the Gospel.

One of the greatest admonitions of the Bible is found in the words of Revelation 2:25, “*that which ye have...hold fast till I come.*” The same is pointed out in other passages. “**Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me...**” (2 Tim. 1:13). “**Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers**” (Titus 1:9). These words exhort us to cling to God’s unchanging Word.

Without the Truth and holding steadfastly to the Truth, there can be no salvation. Jesus made it plain that salvation is inseparably connected to **hearing, learning and obeying** the inspired Word. Liberals don’t like that, but the Lord said: “*It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me*” (John 6:44-45). It is the Truth and only the Truth that makes men free from their sins. “*Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, IF ye continue in my word, THEN are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free*” (John 8:31-32).

This great principle is made clear by way of example in Acts 10:1-2. In these verses we read about a man named Cornelius. He was a “*devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway.*” It is interesting to note that even though he was pious, revered God, helped the needy and was fervent in prayer, he was not a Christian. He needed to be saved from his sins. For that reason, he was told to send for

Peter “*who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved*” (Acts 11:14). When Peter arrived Cornelius told him about the vision he received and said, “*Immediately therefore I sent to thee; and thou hast well done that thou art come. Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God*” (Acts 10:33).

Liberals don’t like the connection we have to God’s holy word. They want something more and/or something less — something different. Denominations want an experience, liberal brethren want to have their ears tickled by fair speeches and feigned, empty words (cf. 2 Tim. 4:4; Rom. 16:18; 2 Peter 2:3). They are gullible and easily deceived! “*...Whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not.*”

The means of salvation is the simple Gospel of Christ, not the doctrines, traditions and commandments of men (Matt. 15:8-9), not the words of the educated elite who lull unwary souls to their destruction. This is nothing new. This practice has always been around. The Holy Spirit inspired Peter to write, “*But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of*” (2 Peter 2:1-2). This is exactly what liberals are doing today! They destroy people’s confidence in the inspired word. They tell their unsuspecting hearers that they can’t

really know the Scriptures and that if they want to know, they need to ask “them” what it means. They are very good at twisting and perverting the word. In fact, they are the ones who are “*unlearned and unstable*” who distort and corrupt the scriptures “*unto their own destruction*” (2 Peter 3:16).

Because of the precious Word and the warnings it gives to not depart from it, it is incumbent upon us to get the saving Word out to the whole world. Therefore, Jesus said, “*Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature*” (Mark 16:15). Paul made it clear, “*For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek*” (Rom. 1:16). “*For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God*” (1 Cor. 1:18). “*For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe*” (1 Cor. 1:21). Preaching the Gospel is urgent! Without it, men cannot be saved.

Because men’s hearts are often turned away from the pure Gospel, Paul exhorted Timothy to “*Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine*” (2 Tim. 4:2). When was the last time you heard the forcefulness of the Gospel preached in its fullest like this verse demands?

To “*preach the word*” means preach it without fear, favor or compromise. Paul told the elders at Ephesus that he had “*...kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publickly, and from house to house...*” (Acts 20:20). “*Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all [men]*” (Acts 20:26). Dear fellow preacher, can you honestly say that? If so, great, if not, shame on you! You need to repent and preach the word!

To preach the word “*in season and out of season*” means to preach the whole counsel of God at all times, not just when its popular and favored. When there’s sin in the camp, that’s the time to sharpen your sword and proclaim the word. One of the great principles of preaching is to preach to the needs of the people. That means

when they like it and when they don't — especially when they don't. Your labor in preaching the whole counsel of God is to save a soul from death (cf. James 5:20).

Preaching involves *reproving*, *rebuking* and *exhorting*. “Reproving” is to show one their fault, convince of sin, expose the error, call to account. “Rebuking” is to warn, charge, censure. “Exhort” means to invite, beseech, call for, desire. Ideally, every sermon would include all three elements: 1) We point out sin and one’s guilt regarding it, 2) Convince and convict those involved, shame them regarding it, and 3) Call upon them to repent, and change their thinking and life by obeying the Gospel in baptism or coming back to the fold as wayward Christians.

The word of God is the power that changes people’s lives. Not philosophy or opinion. I don’t know why God chose to save the world by the means of preaching/teaching, but He did. The task of preaching/teaching was not given to angels. It was not, is not, spread through the means of dreams, visions or feelings. A so-called “salvation experience” does not come upon one in the corn field, at the factory, in the “still of the night” or in any other place or method of man’s imagination. Salvation comes about through the means of the simple teaching of the Gospel. The power is in the Gospel. Take away the Gospel, and God is powerless to save (Rom. 1:16). When men “hear” and “learn” God’s Word (John 6:45), “believe” the Word (Acts 2:41), “repent” of their sins, “confess” Christ according to the word (Acts 17:30; Rom. 10:9-10) and obey the Word in “baptism” (Acts 2:38), forgiveness of sins is the result (Rom. 1:18). God has always used “words” by which to save sinful man. Without the hearing of “words” there is no salvation.

Liberals despise the Word of God. Appealing to the Scriptures to learn God’s will is what they call “proof texting.” They can’t handle it. Their appeal is to human wisdom. Since they have no love of the truth, their words cause division and thereby offend God. The Holy Spirit tells us what to do with those who turn away people’s hearts from the truth. “*Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are*

such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple” (Rom. 16:17-18).

The word “mark” in Romans 16:17 means to call attention to, look toward, fix one’s eyes upon, to take aim at, regard, consider, take heed. The word “mark” does not indicate whether we look to one to observe their good or bad behavior. It just means to appraise/judge one’s life. The context tells us whether our judgment of one’s life is to be imitated or avoided. For example, in Philippians 3:17 it is used in a good sense, showing we are to follow one’s good example. “*Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample.*” We also look at ourselves to make sure we’re on the right path. Jesus said, “*Take heed (mark) therefore that the light which is in thee be not darkness*” (Luke 11:35). Paul wrote, “*Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering (mark) thyself, lest thou also be tempted*” (Gal. 6:1).

In Romans 16:17 the word “mark” is used in a bad or negative sense. In this case, we are to observe one’s life in order that we make sure we don’t follow them. There are good examples and there are bad examples. Obviously, we imitate the good and do not imitate the bad. Some brethren cause division in the local church. Their disruptive doctrine and behavior spills over into area churches. Sometimes they cause division in the entire brotherhood! Such brethren are targeted by God for destruction. They are on God’s hate list because God hates those who sow discord — division (Prov. 6:19). No wonder the Lord tells us “*mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them.*” So few today are obeying Romans 16:17. Instead of pointing out their error and warning brethren about them, they are praised and encouraged. False teachers and their supporters (sowers of discord) try to shift the blame onto the faithful who do what God said do. They play the sympathy card to drum up support and the weak in the faith fall in line.

The Lord’s church is pure. Those who disrupt that purity have a sad day awaiting them unless they repent. Titus 1:10-11,13 says, “*For there are many unruly and vain talkers and*

deceivers, specially they of the circumcision: Whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre’s sake. ... This witness is true. Wherefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith.”

Liberals tells us we must not call attention to those who are sowing discord. They say, don’t call their names, don’t specify who they are, what they’re teaching or where they’re located. If I were one of them I would not want to be exposed either. But expose them we must. It’s not pleasant to do, but God says do it. Now, do we seek to please men or God? If we seek to please men, we are not faithful servants of God (Gal. 1:10).

If you’re a preaching brother, who are you trying to please, God or man? Elders, the same is true for you. Deacons, Bible teachers, members, it’s the same for you. Make up your mind who you follow, God or man.

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ARE WE WRONG TO SAY THEY ARE WRONG?

Jason Patrick Hilburn

*Those critical of judging others are hypocrites
because they are judging others for judging others!*

In today's "politically correct" world, most people do not want to hear anyone saying that someone else's beliefs are wrong. This is a controversial subject that is often avoided at all costs. In the early days of the church, men did not avoid subjects that were "too controversial." The message of Christ was extremely offensive to the non-believing Jews, but notice Jesus' reaction to it: "*Then came his disciples, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the Pharisees were offended, after they heard this saying? But he answered and said, Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up*" (Matt. 15:12-13). Jesus did not go back and apologize to those who were offended by Him preaching the Truth. These same people who were offended later tortured and killed Jesus and almost all of the apostles for declaring their controversial message.

People of the world have politically correct attitudes, but sadly, many people who claim to be Christians have become influenced by it. Some who call themselves Christians consider it wrong to teach against what others believe or to say that someone else is wrong. I wonder if these people have considered the fact that when they claim to be Christians, they are saying that their faith is the only valid faith, and all others are wrong. Jesus said, "*I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me*" (John 14:6). By agreeing with Jesus' teaching, Christians are rightly saying Jesus is the only way to Heaven. Christians must then conclude that people who follow Buddhism are wrong, and the same is true for people who follow Islam, Hinduism, or anyone who fails to faithfully follow Christ (Matt. 7:21).

If people claiming to be Christians are afraid to admit it, then they should take notice what Jesus said: "*Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also*

shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels" (Mark 8:38). To say there is nothing wrong with other religions is to deny that Jesus is who He said He was — the Savior, the only way to Heaven (Acts 4:12). To say that Christ is not the only way to Heaven is also equivalent to saying that Jesus died in vain. There is nothing wrong with someone saying that false religions like Islam are wrong, and there is nothing wrong with exposing the teachings of Buddhism or any other false teaching and religion.

At this point someone may say that as long as we are all teaching under "the umbrella of Christianity," we should not say that someone else is teaching falsely. This is basically saying that doctrine is unimportant. If that were the case, then why would the Bible warn us so many times about false teachers and false doctrine (cf. Matt. 7:15-20; 2 John 9-11; 2 Tim. 4:3-4; Titus 2:1; 1 Tim. 4:16; 1 John 4:1; Rev. 2:15)? If doctrine is unimportant as long as one believes in Jesus, why were the Galatians lost (Gal. 1:6-9; 5:3-4)? Why were Hymenaeus and Philetus and their followers lost (2 Tim. 2:17-18)? Why would the Bible give us examples of children of God who were corrected by faithful Christians for errors in their teaching and actions? Notice what Paul did, "...*When Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation*" (Gal. 2:11-4; cf. Acts 18:24-26).

Correction among proclaimed followers of Christ is not only necessary, it is demanded. However, it should

always be done out of love. The term "judging" is often used in a negative sense to describe someone who is trying to correct people because of an unscriptural belief or practice. The accusers are making it sound as if it is wrong to correct other followers of Christ when the Bible teaches we are to judge with righteous judgment (John 7:24; Matt. 7:15-20). They are also being hypocritical themselves because they are judging others for judging others! If it is wrong to correct others, then Aquila and Priscilla must have been wrong to correct Apollos (Acts 18:24-26) and Paul must have been wrong to confront Peter (Gal. 2:11-14). The truth is, they did what was right. They were merely correcting the erring ones out of a love for them and those on whom they had an influence.

If a sincere person holds an erroneous belief or is doing something wrong, he should want someone to correct him. "...*Rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee. Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be yet wiser: teach a just man, and he will increase in learning*" (Prov. 9:8-9; cf. 19:25; Psa. 141:5). "*He that rebuketh a man afterwards shall find more favour than he that flattereth with the tongue*" (Prov. 28:23). "*Open rebuke is better than secret love. Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful*" (Prov. 27:5-6; cf. Gal. 4:16). "*It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise, than for a man to hear the song of fools*" (Eccl. 7:5).

Just as Christians should try to reach those who do not claim to follow Christ, we should also try to reach and teach those who are striving to be Christ's followers, yet are lacking in some way. If they are sincere, they will appreciate it. However, God will be pleased with us, whether they appreciate it or not.

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COMPASSION

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Compassionate Christianity is characterized by action.

We cannot say that we are truly compassionate to the needs of our fellow man and not engage in personal evangelism.

Compassion is defined as “sympathy for the suffering of others, often including a desire to help.” It might also be defined as “to have the bowels yearn” for the well-being of another. It means for one to have a deep, inward yearning for the good and welfare of another person — even in cases where they are not deserving of our sympathy. The word for compassion is used several times in the Old and New Testaments.

In the New Testament, the word compassion is combined with an action in connection with the expression of sympathy. Simply stated, we need to act compassionately toward those who deal with various physical, mental, and spiritual afflictions. If we wish to be like the Master, we should have the same type of compassion within ourselves.

It is not enough for us to acknowledge that a person has a need and do nothing in connection with their problem. This problem was addressed among those who lived in the diaspora (Jews who lived outside of Israel). James 2:14-16 says, “*What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?*” The poor brother was dismissed from this assembly to fend for himself. This is not characteristic of genuine Christianity.

Contrariwise, Christ was moved with compassion upon the people He encountered in His earthly ministry. He showed compassion to the man possessed with a “Legion” of demons (Mark 5:19). He had compassion upon a leper (Mark 1:41). Jesus had compassion on over five thousand people that he fed with five loaves and two

fish (Mark 6:34). One could say that His entire ministry was characterized by compassion.

One might reason that the most compassionate act of Jesus’ earthly ministry was His final — laying down His life at Calvary for the sins of the world. Jesus did not deserve to die for our sins. Without His atoning sacrifice, our sins would eternally condemn us. Paul says it well in Romans 5:6-10. “*For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. 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.*”

Compassionate Christianity is characterized by action. The church was not purchased with the precious blood of Jesus (Acts 20:28) for the purpose of warming pews. Just as Jesus was about the business of His Father (Luke 2:49), we need to be about the business of the kingdom (cf. Col. 4:11).

We cannot say that we are truly compassionate to the needs of our fellow man and not engage in personal evangelism. The single greatest need of any human being is salvation from sin and eternal punishment. If the church does not understand the nature of its purpose, it cannot possibly accomplish God’s will regarding lost humanity. To that end, Ephesians 3:9-11 says, “*And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be*

known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

This is why the church is called upon to show forth the excellencies of Christ. First Peter 2:9-10, “*But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises (excellencies) of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.*”

When we show compassion to people who have a need, we truly make a difference in their lives. Sadly, there are people who have never truly known what compassion is. Perhaps they have been mistreated their entire lives or even abused. Jude 21-22, “*Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. And of some have compassion, making a difference.*”

Showing compassion would include people not normally within our social sphere of comfort. Jesus lists strangers and prisoners in Matthew 25:34-36 as people that were shown compassion by His followers. “*Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.*”

God’s people should lead compassionate lives. John 3:16 says, “*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*”

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GREAT IS YOUR REWARD IN HEAVEN #2

Bill Boyd

In Part One of this article (May/19), I noted where N. T. Wright said that our reward in heaven is like a beer in a refrigerator, and that Jesus will bring this beer to us when he returns to the earth (N. T. Wright; Surprised by Hope; pages 151-152). At the end of "Part One," I promised to show you something better. Here it is.

While awaiting trial in Roman confinement, Paul wrote of *"having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better"* (Phil. 1:23). Paul knew where Christ was; if going there was *"far better,"* why would he want to come back here? After reading this some ask, will we go directly to heaven when we die? Jesus said to the dying thief, *"Today thou shalt be with me in paradise"* (Luke 23:43). Therefore we conclude that immediately after our death we will rest in paradise while we await the final judgment. However, when Paul was *"caught up into paradise"* (2 Cor. 13:4), he called it *"the third heaven"* (2 Cor. 13:2). To reconcile this, I suggest that while this paradise is in heaven, it is not the heaven of our eternal home. When the beggar died he *"was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom"* (Luke 16:22). Visualize that as Abraham's embrace. Jesus was not waiting for the beggar in paradise, because Jesus was on the earth, but Jesus is now in heaven. When I read how Paul desired *"to depart and be with Christ,"* this makes me think that Jesus is waiting to embrace us on the other side the way Abraham embraced Lazarus. Though Jesus is now in that part of heaven where his throne is, *"at the right hand of God exalted"* (Acts 2:30-33), I conclude from Paul's words that there is a sense in which we will be comforted by his presence in paradise as we await the resurrection. After the resurrection, we will depart to be with Jesus in the heaven of our eternal home.

Elsewhere in Philippians Paul wrote, *"Our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour; the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he*

is able even to subdue all things unto himself" (Phil. 3:20-21). That is the King James Version. *"Conversation"* usually means *"manner of life"* in the King James Version, but the word translated *"conversation"* in this passage is not the word usually so translated. This word is better translated in later versions as *"citizenship,"* hence, *"our citizenship is in heaven,"* but that is not quite right either. The word translated *"heaven"* is plural, therefore we have, *"our citizenship is in the heavens,"* but we are not there yet. The word *"whence,"* that follows *"heavens,"* is singular. The singular *"whence"* cannot grammatically refer back to the plural *"heavens,"* therefore it must refer back to the singular *"citizenship,"* but what does it mean to say that we *"look for the savior"* from our *"citizenship?"* Because of the grammar, the word translated *"citizenship"* in this passage, refers to the city where we have our citizenship. The singular *"whence"* points back to the singular *"city"* and not the plural *"heavens;"* therefore a more complete rendering of the passage is this: *"The city (singular) of our citizenship is in the heavens, from whence (singular) we look for the savior."* The city in the heavens is our home country. That is why we call this city our heavenly home. If I may borrow from the words of two popular songs, one spiritual, and the other secular: *"When we all get to heaven..."* we will be *"...coming home to a place we've never been before."* Christ will come again, and we will *"depart"* with him for our *"city"* in the *"heavens."*

Peter wrote, *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time"* (1 Peter 1:3-5). Peter did not say that our inheritance was kept in heaven for us to have on earth; he said that we are kept for the inheritance that is reserved

in heaven. According to Peter, the heavens and the earth which exist now, will *"perish," "pass away," "melt with fervent heat,"* and be *"dissolved,"* not to mention *"burned up,"* or *"laid bare"* (2 Peter 3:5-12). Peter did not say that the old earth would be renewed, he said that we *"look for new heavens and a new earth"* (2 Peter 3:13). We do not know just what this *"new heavens and new earth"* will be, and to the credit of N. T. Wright, he said as much in his book (Wright, 107,162). Though the nature and substance of the new heavens and new earth has not been revealed, we know that our inheritance is *"ready to be revealed at the last time"* (1 Peter 1:5), that it is *"incorruptible, and undefiled,"* and that it *"fadeth not away"* (1 Peter 1:4). That is why Christ said that our *"treasure in heaven"* is *"where moth and rust doth not corrupt, and where thieves do not break through and steal"* (Matt. 6:20).

Peter said that we are *"strangers and pilgrims"* (1 Peter 1:1; 2:11), and admonished, *"pass the time of your sojourning here in fear"* (1 Peter 1:17). His words recall what we read of Abraham. *"By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God"* (Heb. 11:8-10). Abraham was not looking for a city on the earth. His seed would one day inherit the land through which he walked, but Abraham was looking for a better heavenly country. *"These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to*

have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city” (Heb. 11:13-16). That is the city of our citizenship (Phil. 3:20). Abraham knew that he was just “passing through.”

Are you convinced yet? If not, then bare with me a little longer; this should make it clear. As you read this, remember that after Jesus rose from the dead, “he was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God” (Mark 16:19; Luke 24:51; Acts 1:9-11; 1 Tim. 3:16). Now, when Jesus came to walk among men, many of the Jews were hoping for an earthly kingdom. Christ gave us “a better

hope.” The text is Hebrews 7:19: “For the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did; by the which we draw nigh unto God.” This better hope is an anchor for the soul. “Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus” (Heb. 6:19-20). Having entered to that “within the veil,” Jesus is “set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens” (Heb. 8:1). Lest there be any misunderstanding, “Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself; now to appear in the presence of God for us” (Heb. 9:24).

Read it again: “Christ... entered... into heaven itself.” Therefore, he is our “forerunner...into heaven itself.” We will follow him there. If you are doubtful of this, look up the meaning of the word translated “forerunner.” The hope we have in Christ is not that he will return to the earth as an earthly king with an earthly kingdom on a renewed planet, our hope is to follow our “forerunner” to the “throne of the Majesty in the heavens...into heaven itself.” That is “a better hope” (Heb. 7:19). It is “far better” (Phil. 1:23). And, that is why Jesus said, “Great is your reward in heaven” (Matt. 5:12).

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Things About the Church...

(Continued from page 41)

quarterly or in some instances, yearly communion.

Early church writers speak of the Lord's supper involving regular, weekly participation. This confirms what the Scriptures teach regarding its frequency — that the disciples partook of the communion when they assembled (1 Cor. 11), and that they assembled on the first day of every week (1 Cor. 16:2; Acts 20:7).

NO HUMAN CREEDS OR ARTICLES OF FAITH

Statements similar to these are sometimes heard: “You mean you people follow only the Bible?” or “You mean to say that the church of Christ does not have a creed for its members?” Why should this be so surprising? Because most people have been under the influence of such things as creed books, articles of faith, manuals, disciplines and the like.

However, the Bible plainly teaches that the Scriptures supply all the spiritual needs of man (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Jesus said it is His word that will judge us in the last day, not man's word (John 12:48). Hence, there is no place in the Christian system for man-made creeds designed to regulate spiritual matters. Such works either “add to” or “take from” God's word and are, therefore, condemned (Rev. 22:18-19).

NO EARTHLY HEADQUARTERS

On several occasions I have been asked, “Where is the headquarters of the church of Christ?” Of course, by this people are speaking of an earthly headquarters. People have shown surprise when I tell them there is none. “You mean you have no central offices anywhere?” Since all denominations have some sort of centralized body, people feel the same should be true of churches of Christ.

A Pentecostal preacher once asked me the location of the headquarters of the church of Christ. I told him, “In heaven” (Phil. 3:20). Seeing he was puzzled at this reply, I asked him, “Who is the head of the church?” He said, “Well, Christ is.” Then I asked, “Where is Christ?” He, of course, said, “He's in heaven.” I then explained that if Christ is the head of the church and if Christ is in heaven, then the headquarters of the church must be in heaven. To him this was an entirely new concept. The Bible clearly reveals that Christ is the head (Col. 1:18,24) and that Christ is in heaven (1 Peter 3:22).

PEOPLE CAN BE BAPTIZED AT ANY TIME

Some people, following a Bible study with a member of the church, have said, “Do you mean that I can be baptized at any time?” Now why should this be so surprising? It is due to the fact that most people are under the impression that baptism must be done during a special “baptismal service,”

a time set aside for “candidates” of baptism.

When we read the New Testament it is clear that in every example of conversion when people wanted to be baptized there was no waiting. Since baptism is the time at which a person's sins are forgiven, it is essential that it be done immediately. This is illustrated in the accounts of conversion recorded in the book of Acts (2:41; 8:36-38; 10:47-48; 16:14, 15, 32, 33).

ANY CHRISTIAN CAN BAPTIZE OTHERS

Once a young man stopped me in the middle of a home Bible study and said something like this, “I didn't know that anyone in the church can baptize people. I thought only a preacher could do that.” And why was this surprising to him? Simply because this is the impression almost everyone has regarding baptism — it is something to be done only by the so-called “clergy.”

The Bible places no such restriction on who can baptize. If a Christian can teach a lost person what to do to be saved, he can also baptize him. The great commission applies equally to all (Matt. 28:19-20).

Are you surprised concerning what the Bible teaches regarding the church? “Study to shew thyself approved” (2 Tim. 2:15).

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SEEK THE OLD PATHS

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