



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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CRITICISMS OF THE CHURCH

Rusty Stark

People need to be convicted as sinners, to know they are separated from God, to be aware they are bound for a devil's hell for all eternity. How will they escape if they are not warned?

A young member of the congregation called. People had been criticizing the church to him in various ways. What were their criticisms?

WITHOUT EMOTION

They accused the church of Christ of being without emotion. This criticism is in direct contrast to groups whose emphasis is all on emotion. These are people who think they are saved because they are happy, rather than being happy because they are saved. Their faith is based on how they feel, when it should be the other way around. Instead of having faith in God because we feel good, we should feel good based on our faith in God — our assurance that he is and that he will reward us if we diligently seek him (Heb. 11:6).

It is a false and backwards idea that truth arises out of our emotions. And yet, this false and backwards idea can even be found in at least one of the hymns we commonly sing — *He Lives* by Alfred Ackley. The chorus ends by saying: “You ask me how I know he lives: He lives within my heart.” No, No, a thousand times no! We do not believe that Jesus lives because we can somehow detect or feel him in our heart. The only way we can know he lives in our heart is by faith — the Bible telling us so (Eph. 3:17).

Churches of Christ are not emo-

tionless. If we sing in the manner the New Testament teaches, we make music with our mouths, and we make melody in our hearts (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). It is a great thrill to sing about God's “Amazing Grace.” It is in humble awe that we declare, “How Great Thou Art.”

No emotion? We can easily be brought to tears when we commemorate the death of our Lord by keeping his memorial supper every first day of the week (Acts 20:7). In his memory (1 Cor. 11:24-26) we focus our minds on his suffering and the shedding of his blood. When we do this we feel sorrow because we know he was paying the debt for our sins, and we also feel inexpressible joy and gratitude because we know he was paying the debt for our sins.

No emotion? There is the humility of prayer, the sorrowful conviction of sin, the blessed assurance of knowing we have passed from death to life, the burden and urgency of our mission to save lost souls, and the joyful anticipation of heaven.

There is a distinction between true, appropriate emotions and hype. We can jump around and shout and even cut ourselves in wild, uncontrolled excitement, or we can be the still small voice that truly accesses the power of God (cf. 1 Kings 18:25-38; 19:12).

True New Testament worship de-

mands that we are not wild, but controlled, doing all things “*decently and in order*” (1 Cor. 14:40).

TOO NEGATIVE

The people troubling this young member leveled another criticism against the church. In their eyes, the church is too negative. They said, “The last thing I need when I go to church is to have someone tell me how horrible a person I am.”

Someone should have told Peter on the day of Pentecost, “*The last thing those people need to hear is that they were guilty of crucifying the Messiah*” (Acts 2:36). Someone should have told Stephen. “Don't call those Jews stiff-necked or uncircumcised in heart and ears. The last thing they need is to be made to feel like horrible people” (Acts 7:51). Wrong!

This kind of preaching is exactly what people need. They need to be convicted as sinners, to know they are separated from God, to be aware they are bound for a devil's hell for all eternity. How will they escape if they are not warned?

Many in modern religion avoid the very mention of sin. They tell people to follow their own hearts, believe in themselves, and do what seems right to them. Meanwhile, God,

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Criticisms of the Church...



Editorial...

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST IS... #1

Garland M. Robinson

The church/kingdom was not an accident. It was not an after-thought or substitute. It was not an emergency measure that God came up with when Jesus was rejected by the Jews. It is not temporary and set to expire when Jesus comes again. It was and is God's grand scheme (God's purpose) since before the world was formed.

The church of Christ. It belongs to none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the Lord's church. He is the one who built it (Matt. 16:18), dying to purchase it with his own blood (Matt. 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20). Jesus is the Christ, the Savior. The church is not John the Baptist's church. John pointed men to Christ, not himself (John 1:27). John was never a member of the church. He died before it was established. Jesus said of John, "Among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist: but he that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he" (Luke 7:28). The kingdom of God is the church of Christ (Matt. 16:18-19; Col. 1:13; Rev. 1:9). The church of Christ was not founded by man. It was founded by Jesus Christ. It is Christ's church — therefore, the church of Christ. Acts 4:12 says, "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." Paul spake of the churches of Christ in every location when he wrote to the church at Rome, "the **churches of Christ** salute you" (Rom. 16:16). He didn't say all denominations salute you. He said "the churches of Christ salute you."

The eternal purpose of God. "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" (Eph. 3:10-11). Notice the expression, "eternal purpose." The church of Christ was God's intention all along. It was conceived of and planned before the foundation of the world (cf. Matt. 25:34; Eph. 1:4-5; 1 Peter 1:18-20). The church/kingdom was not an accident. It was not an after-thought or substitute. It was not an emergency measure that God came up with when Jesus was rejected by the Jews. It is not temporary and set to expire when Jesus comes again. It was and is God's grand scheme (God's purpose) since before the world was formed. All those who are saved are added to it (Acts 2:47). It is the Lord's body and will be presented to the heavenly Father at Jesus' second coming, at which time this world and the entire universe will come to an end (1 Cor. 15:23-28).

The fulfillment of prophecy. Peter said of the events on the day of Pentecost when the first Gospel sermon was preached, "This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel" (Acts 2:16). He was speaking of the events occurring that day. Of Jesus Peter said, "Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear" (Acts 2:33). Years later when Paul entered the city of Thessalonica we read, "Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures, Opening and alleging, that

Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ" (Acts 17:2). At the conclusion of Paul's letter to the church at Rome we read, "Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith" (Rom. 16:25-26).

The called out. The word church means "called out." Those who obey the Gospel have been called out of the world and set apart for God's purpose. Christians still live in the world but they are not "of" the world. They follow Jesus Christ, not the way of the world. Jesus said to his apostles, "If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you" (John 15:19). "I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world" (John 17:14). Jesus said about Peter's confession that Jesus was the Christ, "...upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18). God the Father is the one "Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son" (Col. 1:13). "And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" (Rom. 12:2).

The body of Christ. The church of Christ is the spiritual body of Christ. In Ephesians 1:22-23, Paul wrote that God "hath put all things under his feet [Jesus' feet], and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all" — the church is the body. Colossians 1:18, "And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence" — the body is the church. The Lord's body and his church are one and the same. The church is his body — the body is his church. Jesus is the head

of the body the church and will only save his body, his church (Eph. 5:23).

The bride of Christ. Revelation 21:2,9, “*And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ... And there came unto me one of the seven angels which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb’s wife.*” Revelation 22:17, “*And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.*”

The kingdom of Christ. Jesus said, “*I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven*” (Matt. 16:18-19). In these two verses, Jesus uses the words church and kingdom interchangeably. That is, they speak of the same thing. The word “church” identifies its “called out” nature. The word “kingdom” identifies its “royal, kingly, ruling” nature. Jesus established the church on the day of Pentecost, giving Peter the keys of the kingdom, the church. Peter used the keys in his preaching to show how

and when one enters the church, the kingdom. Peter announced the conditions of entering the kingdom. “*Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins... And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation. Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls*” (Acts 2:38-41). Paul wrote of God when he said, “*Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son*” (Col. 1:13; cf. 1 Cor. 1:2; Acts 28:23).

The house of God. Paul tells Timothy, “*But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth*” (1 Tim. 3:15). Christians are members of the household of God. The church is referred to as the household of faith. “*As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith*” (Gal. 6:10). Paul writes of Christians comparing them to a building, a temple, a house. “*Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself*

being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit” (Eph. 2:19-22).

The pillar and ground of the truth. As the church of Christ is the Lord’s house, 1 Timothy 3:15 also refers to it as “*the pillar and ground of the truth.*” A “pillar” is a support, prop, post, column. “Ground” is a stay, prop, support. To be grounded is to be settled, firm, solid, deep as to not shake, shift or move. Jesus said the wise man builds his house upon a rock (Matt. 7:24-29). That which is firm and cannot be shaken is grounded, firm and deep. Paul desired the church at Ephesus “*...to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love...*” (Eph. 3:16-17). At the end of this world we will be presented to the Father “*...holy and unblameable and unproveable in his sight: If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister*” (Col. 1:22-23).

Many other expressions are used in identifying the church of Christ. They will be examined next month.

Criticisms of the Church...

(Continued from page 49)

though his word, is shouting, “Repent!” (Luke 13:3,5; Acts 2:38; 17:30).

If we are not convicted of sin, how will we ever turn away from it? If the preacher doesn’t preach it, and if Bible class teachers don’t discuss it, how will we know about hell and how to avoid its fiery torment?

Of course, not every sermon need be negative. There is great uplifting, empowering truth, to be taught and learned. But “positive” or “negative” is often just a matter of perspective. When the preacher preaches about some sin that exists in our lives, we don’t have to hear in a negative way. When we are condemned by the word of God, it is not God pushing us away,

it is God calling us near.

We cannot come near to God unless we are willing to put away our sins. First Peter 1:15-16 says: “*But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.*” First Corinthians 6:9-11: “*Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.*”

Are these verses positive or nega-

tive? They contain a warning against living in sin, but they also rejoice in the victory over sin — being washed, sanctified, justified. Is it negative to tell the drunkard he can and must change his life? Is it negative to tell the homosexual that he can and must come out of that sin and such like perversions and live a righteous life? If they will hear it in the right way, it will be the most positive message those people could ever hear.

Note this: Even in our sin God is calling us through the Gospel (2 Thess. 2:14). God loves us even in our sins (Rom. 5:6-8). But he is not calling us to come to him “in” our sins. He is calling us to come “out” of our sins and walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:4). He is calling us to be holy — set apart from sin — just as he is holy.



CHRISTIANITY — BURDEN OR BLESSING

Another criticism that needs to be dealt with is the idea that churches of Christ only see Christianity as a burden. Again Wrong!

The truth is that Christianity is a great burden, a struggle, a difficult, restrictive, narrow path (Matt. 7:13-14). It is not peace, but a sword (Matt. 10:34). It involves a daily cross, denying self and living for the one who died for us (Luke 9:23; 2 Cor. 5:14-15). It means that we will suffer persecution (2 Tim. 3:12). But it is also the greatest blessing any man can ever receive. To deny either of these — the burden or the blessing — is to be mistaken and unbalanced.

Christ offers sinful man the op-

portunity to forsake his sins and become a child of God. Galatians 3:26-27: *“For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.”* Here is the bottom line. We cannot have a relationship with God and his Son Jesus if we are unwilling to bear the burden involved in being a Christian. Luke 14:27: *“And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.”* We cannot have the relationship if we will not bear the burden.

God wants us to be happy, but happiness is the by-product. True happiness comes to those who strive to be holy — set apart from sin, and thereby live in a daily relationship with Jesus

and the Father. God demands that we be holy, because he is holy. *“Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy”* (1 Peter 1:13-16).

We do not find Jesus in our earthly joy. We find our joy in Jesus. *“Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice”* (Phil. 4:4).

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GOD IS JEALOUS

Denver Thomas

We are living in an age where great effort is being exerted to rid God and his influence from the affairs of men. The separation of church and state decision of the high court of the land has enabled many to do much which conflicts with Biblical principles and much of which is an abomination in the sight of the one who created the universe in the first place. No doubt many of the ills that are affecting the world today can be linked to the reckless endeavors of those in charge of peoples of the world. Sadly, world leaders have not learned what is said in Jeremiah 10:23, *“O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.”*

In Exodus 34:12-17, God said, *“Take heed to thyself, lest thou make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land whither thou goest, lest it be for a snare in the midst of thee: But ye shall destroy their altars, break their images, and cut down their groves: For thou shalt worship no other god: for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God: Lest thou make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and they go a whoring after their gods, and do sacrifice unto their gods, and one call thee, and thou eat of his sacrifice; And thou take of his daughters unto thy sons, and their daughters go a whoring after their*

gods, and make thy sons go a whoring after their gods. Thou shalt make thee no molten gods.”

In Matthew 6:24-34 God said, *“No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have*

need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.”

We serve a God who demands that we put him first in our lives and then he will see to our every need. Jesus taught in Matthew 22:37-40, *“...Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”*

The world would become a much better and safer place in which to live if only world leaders could be convinced to abide by those commands. Wars would cease. Hunger and starvation would be taken care of. Honesty, integrity and compassion would characterize the human element. The whole world might look a lot like the Garden of Eden before sin was introduced. Would that not be a delight?

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WHY THERE ARE NO GENUINE MIRACLES TODAY

Roger D. Campbell

In the New Testament, a “miracle” refers to a supernatural act of power that had observable and immediate results/effects. We should not expect God Himself to perform miracles or supply humans with miraculous powers today. Why not?

1) **It is not God’s will there be miracles today.** In God’s plan, signs, including all spiritual, miraculous gifts, were temporary. “*Whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away*” (1 Cor. 13:8). Notice three declarations about these signs (miracles): 1) they will fail, 2) they will cease, 3) they will vanish away. It is clear, the Lord never intended for spiritual gifts (miracles) to last indefinitely.

“Prophecies,” “tongues,” and “knowledge,” are three spiritual gifts which the apostle Paul mentions, both when he lists the miraculous gifts in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10 and when he declares the temporary status of the gifts (1 Cor. 13:8). We must not think these three gifts (prophecies, tongues, knowledge, 13:8) are more important or somehow superior to other spiritual gifts. Instead, we should look at them as *representing/standing for all nine* of the gifts that are listed in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10. That is, what is true about these three gifts (prophecies, tongues, knowledge) is true, in fact, about all nine of the gifts.

Specifically, what Paul says about *the duration* of prophecies, tongues, and knowledge, is true also about *the duration* of all of the spiritual gifts which were supplied by the Holy Spirit in the first century. Here is the conclusion: just as those three gifts were a *temporary* aspect of God’s plan, so each of the other spiritual gifts was *temporary* also.

Looking further in 1 Corinthians 13:9-10, we see a contrast — a contrast between the *partial* (incomplete) and the *perfect* (complete). “*For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away*” (13:9-10). Taking into account the context, Paul is speaking about the temporary nature of the spiritual gifts (in revealing God’s word) and con-

trasts them to the permanent nature of God’s word (the completed New Testament). Note that the three gifts which Paul mentions in 13:8 (prophecies, tongues, miraculous knowledge) all are related to *receiving revelation* from God — revelation that was for the benefit of both the church and those who were still lost outside of the Christ. Those three spiritual gifts (prophecies, tongues, miraculous knowledge) represented a temporary aspect of God’s revealing His will to mankind. In contrast to the “*in part*” (partial revelation of God, 13:9). The expression “*that which is perfect*” (13:10) has reference to the perfect/complete revelation (word) of God; not Jesus himself as a person.

2) **We do not need miracles today.** Why? Because we have “*that which is perfect*” — the completed word of God (the New Testament). The role of miraculous activity has been fulfilled. Tongues were for a sign (1 Cor. 14:22). Signs were used to confirm the word of God that Jesus’ disciples preached, as it is written, “*And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following*” (Mark 16:20). “Signs following” were the miracles performed that validated (proved) the words they were teaching. Miracles came after the preaching/words. Once that word was confirmed (in the first century), there was (and is) no need to confirm it again.

Jesus’ promise to His apostles was

that, “*when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth...*” (John 16:13). That promise was fulfilled — “*all truth*” came from the Holy Spirit during the lifetime of the apostles (cf. 1 Peter 1:3). Since the Spirit revealed all truth in the first century during the days of the apostles, there is no new revelation from God being given today. Because there are no new revelations from the Lord that need to be confirmed, there are no new signs/miracles.

Spiritual gifts were for the edification of the church (1 Cor. 14:12,26,31). But today, the word of God is sufficient for the edification of the church, as it can build us up and give us an inheritance among the saved (Acts 20:32). Thus, the spiritual gifts/miracles are not needed today.

3) **God no longer is making available the power to do miracles.** Holy Spirit baptism was a first-century-only phenomenon, so it is not taking place today. Miracles are no longer needed. In addition, there are no true apostles alive who can lay hands on other Christians to pass along miraculous powers to them as is shown in Acts 8:14-20.

No genuine miracles are taking place today. God is still all-powerful, but the age of miracles has passed. They are not needed. We have the New Testament.

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WITNESSING

“**W**itnessing for Christ” is an expression heard in the religious world in an erroneous way. Nobody can “witness for Christ” today in the Biblical sense of the phrase. Witnessing requires giving testimony of that which has been seen. In Scripture, the term refers to eye-witness accounts or revelation by inspired men. It means more than simply telling what one knows. The apostles and some others were witnesses, but we are not, nor can we be. We should learn to use the phrase so that we will “speak as the oracles of God” (1 Peter 4:11).

What difference does it make? First, it may reflect that you do not understand what the Bible teaches about who is and who is not a witness. Second, inasmuch as some who say they are “witnessing for Christ” believe they are directly guided by the Holy Spirit, do not become offended if someone thinks you believe that way also. This phrase is heard among brethren who mean nothing more than preaching and teaching the Word, but their terminology is faulty and sounds more like a denominational imitation than a Biblical presentation. “Sound words” are in order (2 Tim. 1:13).

— James W. Boyd, seektheoldpaths.com/abf

“THE MOST IMPORTANT PART OF WORSHIP”

Gary Colley

OUR SHUT-INS

Many times we have heard someone say there is one action of worship which is “the most important part.” Please know that this article proclaims the great importance of this part and every part of our worship, and we always seek to uphold reverence for it.

The only way we can know if we are pleasing to God is to hear His word and follow it (Heb. 11:6; 1 Peter 3:15). But, are these individuals actually saying this is the only part “we just cannot miss...the rest is unimportant?” Is the Lord’s Supper the most important part of worship? Well, at least this is what seemingly is thought and shown by their words and actions!

We have heard of some families in Missouri who, a few years ago, would stop just long enough at the church building to partake of the Lord’s Supper at the beginning of the services and then immediately leave for their fishing trip. The preacher arose one Sunday to say, “If you people who only want to partake of the Lord’s Supper, and not participate in the other important parts of this worship service will just line up outside, stop at the curb and blow your horn, we will give you curb service!” By this means, he began to help these souls to think of their ways being wrong, and he stopped this ungodly practice!

PRAYERS AT THE TABLE

When prayer is offered at the Lord’s table some say, “Now we come to the most important part of our worship service.” Hence our question, “Is this the most important part of our worship?” This is especially true and of importance for our thinking when one considers the Lord’s Supper. None should ever suggest, or in any way deny, that the partaking of this memorial meal, commanded by our Lord and observed by Christians since the beginning of the church of Christ (Acts 2:42), is of any little or less importance than any other part of worship! But our question is, “Is this the most, or even the only, really important part of our worship?”

We realize that our shut-ins are in special need of our attention and help. Our love for them needs to be expressed. We are aware that some congregations take the communion to people who are shut-ins, in the hospitals, or confined in other places every Lord’s Day. Though we do not suggest that this is completely a wrong practice, we do have questions as to why all acts of worship prescribed on the Lord’s Day are not obeyed or carried out. We do not hear of a “singing service only” for our shut-ins on the Lord’s Day; or “a giving service only” on the Lord’s Day for the shut-ins, but rather it seems evident that we should have all five acts prescribed by the Lord on His Day, the first day of the week (Acts 2:42). The Lord’s Supper and prayer is, most of the time, the only acts of the five acts of worship commanded by the Scriptures for the participants that are carried out. And, though we have no example of the Lord’s Supper being taken outside the assembly of the church, some have seemingly “demoted” it to a separate room on Sunday evening for those who missed the assembly in the morning to partake. One college advocated taking the Lord’s supper on Thursday evening “before the test on Friday.” Since the pandemic, when many of us partook “virtually” and yet through the wonders of technology within an assembly of worshippers, we were not “forsaking” or “abandoning” the assembling of the saints on the Lord’s Day (Heb. 10:23-25). Let us not, in the least, lessen the importance of any ordinance, teaching, or command given to us of what pleases God in worship. These all should be considered of equal importance and have our utmost respect in their observance.

WHAT ABOUT SINGING?

What could be more important than uniting our voices in the cadence of singing “spiritual songs” (songs containing the Holy Spirit’s teaching), bringing our hearts together in worship with the many voices singing as one voice given by God, coupled with

our affection or hearts? (Eph. 5:19-20; Col. 3:16-17). This is certainly another important part of every true worship service. But it is not “the most important” part since the Bible does not speak of the “most important part” of our worship service. Some failed in the past to see the singing as an important part of worship, saying as they remained outside the assembly, “Well, the singing is about over; it is time for the worship to begin.”

“PREACH THE WORD” (?)

A highly important part of our worship is seen in faithfully preaching the Gospel (2 Tim. 4:1-4). Its importance is mentioned by the Lord in every account of the Great Commission, and by every inspired writer of the New Testament (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:46-47; John 20:21-23). Yet we never notice any one of them saying that this is “the most important part” of our worship services.

BLESSED HOUR OF PRAYER (?)

We should never overlook the great importance of prayer! No worship service is complete without speaking to our Heavenly Father through His Son Jesus in prayer. Prayer was commanded on Pentecost (Acts 2:42), commanded and practiced by Paul (1 Thess. 5:17; Rom. 10:1-3); and employed by Peter (1 Peter 2:17-19). Yet, again, we do not find these inspired men saying, “Prayer is the most important part of our worship service.”

THE GREAT PRIVILEGE OF GIVING

This is the place where some think preachers stop preaching and start meddling! Some do not view the privilege of giving in worship as a spiritual blessing (Eph. 1:3). We suggest that all read Job 38-42 often when they think for a moment that they know more than God. We need to ask ourselves some serious questions! Who created all things? How much did we bring into the world at birth? Where do all of our blessings come from for our existence in this life? Who

is the one to which we look for life, breath, strength, health, and the blessing of our money? How many of these blessings will we be able to take into the next life or eternal life? Ah yes! The answer is very clear, *“We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain that we will carry nothing out”* (1 Tim. 6:7-10). Is this not just as much “a most important part” as any other part of the five actions Jehovah has asked of us to render in today’s worship?

Come now, let us reason together.
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ACCOUNTABILITY

Anthony Crowell

In light of events in recent weeks, we have heard theories on mental health and more gun control. After much contemplation, I believe I have found the root of all of this evil. It all starts at home. Parents have to accept most of the responsibility for these events.

We as a country and society have taken God out of our homes, schools and government. We have allowed humanists to indoctrinate us and our children to the point that human life is nothing. Jeremiah 10:23 says, *“Oh Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.”*

After the birth of a child and the end of the paternity, we turn the raising of our children over to a day-care provider. As the child ages, we then turn the responsibility over to the school.

As a society, our families have become two-income based. We have been accustomed to buying whatever catches our eye. The latest and greatest gadgets, a new car every three years, a bigger house and the accumulation of as much material things as we can acquire. Parents drop the children off at day-care (school), go to work, get off work, retrieve the children, go home, feed the family and then it’s time for bed. On average, a parent interacts with their children less than four hours a day. Due to the increased availability of electronic devices, children as young as 3 or 4 are given tablets to entertain themselves while mom and dad surf the net, answer emails, check their Face Book, Instagram, Tik tok, Twitter or whatever the latest social media craze is at the moment. When the child gets a little older, the parents buy Game Boys, Play Stations or X-Boxes to keep them entertained. And then parents give them computers so the children start their own social media addiction.

Some of the games children play on-line or on their gaming platforms, teaches them military tactics, to shoot and kill the on-line enemy in very realistic and graphic detail. Children and adults spend more time on social media than they do actually being social with each other face to face.

If you think I am exaggerating, the next time you go to a restaurant, just look around and see how many people are actually socializing. Most will be looking at their phones.

Discipline has been taken out of homes and schools. Parents are afraid to discipline their children for fear of being reported to the police or hurting the child’s feelings. There is a difference between discipline and abuse. Discipline is necessary in order for our children to grow into responsible adults. Instead of parents trying to be their children’s best friend, they need to be parents.

- Teach your children to have respect for other people, especially their elders and people in authority (law enforcement).
- Teach them they cannot have everything they want.
- Teach them to be responsible for their actions.
- Teach them that life is precious.

Proverbs 22:6, *“Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it.”*

Unfortunately we have allowed other people to teach our children humanistic things such as: 1) only the individual is important, 2) whatever satisfies our wants and needs are important, 3) no one else matters.

We need to put God and His principles back into the home and our lives.

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PRECIOUS TRUTH: GOD'S WORD

We often speak of precious promises (2 Peter 1:4), precious blood (1 Peter 1:19), precious saviour (1 Peter 2:6-7). The soul is precious (Psalm 49:8), a virtuous woman is precious (Prov. 3:15), the death of a child of God is precious (Psalm 116:15); and, there is precious faith (2 Peter 1:1).

The word precious means: *of great value or high price, highly esteemed or cherished, costly*. All of the above: the soul, our Saviour, his blood, his word, could be spoken of as of great value, high price, cherished, costly.

The Word of God is just as precious as the blood of Christ; just as precious as our Saviour; just as precious as our soul. May we all learn to highly esteem and cherish the Word of God. The word of God was precious in Samuel's day (1 Sam. 3:1).

The way to determine how we value a thing is by our attitude toward that thing. For example, most people do not value Jesus very highly because he makes no difference in their lives. He does not mean much to them because of the way they live. They do not esteem him, they do not highly cherish him, because they do not let Jesus have his way in their life. You cannot separate Jesus from His commands and demands upon our life. Many people want Jesus as their Saviour, but they do not want his words to tell them how to live. Jesus even said, *"And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say"* (Luke 6:46)? When you fail to follow His commands, He is not your Lord and Saviour. Jesus said, *"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. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity"* (Matt. 7:21-23).

The Word of God should be very precious to every Christian. God's Word ought to be the greatest value in our hearts. We should highly esteem and cherish His Word. We should be willing to pay any price to hold to and keep the Word of God. As Solomon said, *"Buy the Truth and sell it not"* (Prov. 23:23). God's Word is so valuable that it will abide forever, even when heaven and earth passes away (Matt. 24:35; 1 Peter 1:23). God's Word is so valuable that it saves the soul (James 1:21). God's Word is so valuable because by it, faith is produced (Rom. 10:17). God's Word is so valuable, it is the Word of Truth (2 Cor. 6:7; Eph. 1:13; Col. 1:5). Through the Word we are sanctified (1 Tim. 4:5). The Word of God is so valuable and precious because God gave the Word (Psalm 68:11). The Word of God is valuable and precious because it is true from the beginning (Psalm 119:160).

Consider how we should value, cherish and highly esteem God's Word of precious Truth:

- 1. The Bible is right.** *"For the Word of the Lord is right..."* (Psalm 33:4; 19:8).
- 2. The Bible should be praised.** *"In God I will praise his Word..."* (Psalm 56:4, 10).
- 3. The Bible should be magnified.** *"...for thou hast magnified thy Word above all thy name"* (Psalm 138:2).

4. The Bible should be esteemed. *"Therefore I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right: and I hate every false way"* (Psalm 119:128).

5. The Bible should be respected. *"...I will have respect unto thy statutes continually"* (Psalm 119:116, 6).

6. The Bible should be loved. *"O how love I thy Law! it is my meditation all the day"* (Psalm 119:97). *"Therefore I love thy commandments above gold; yea, above fine gold"* (Psalm 119:127). *"...Thy Law do I love"* (Psalm 119:163).

7. The Bible should be kept. *"...for I will keep the commandments of my God"* (Psalm 119:115). *"I cried with my whole heart, hear me, O Lord; I will keep thy statutes"* (Psalm 119:145). *"Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently"* (Psalm 119:4).

8. The Bible should be hidden in the heart. *"Thy Word have I hid in mine heart"* (Psalm 119:11).

If every person respected, esteemed, and highly valued God's Word, denominationalism would cease to exist! Everybody would be members of the church of Christ — the church you read about in the Bible. We would be Christians and Christians only! You say that's impossible. No, it's not! It is possible only if everybody respected, highly esteemed, cherished, highly valued and loved the Word of God more than anything else!!

What is your attitude toward God's Word, his precious Truth?

Gus Munden

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