

Christian's **Expositor** Journal

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Focus: Studying the Life of Paul

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CODES WORTH CRACKING

Carl M. Johnson

Last year while waiting for my connecting flight in the Salt Lake City airport I was browsing in a bookstore and ran across a book that really caught my attention entitled, **The Da Vinci Code**, by Dan Brown. I have been a long-time fan of Leonardo Da Vinci and his famous works of art, including “the Mona Lisa” and “The Last Supper,” so I picked up a copy of the book and began to thumb through it. I soon discovered the book has little to do with the actual works of Da Vinci, but is a work of “historical fiction” claiming Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene, that they had children, and that their lineage is still in existence today. The book claims Da Vinci knew of Jesus’ biological lineage, that he helped protect these descendents during his lifetime, and left codes that would ensure the secret of the Holy lineage would be kept and passed down from generation to generation. The book also claims Mary Magdalene is the true identity of the “Holy Grail.” I thought to myself in irony, “That’s all we need—another Bible code book to titillate the fancy of our post-modern society.” I put the book back on the shelf and caught my flight.

Since that day the book has become a runaway best seller and has clearly struck a nerve with many readers. It has been on the New York Times best-seller list for a year, has been number-one on Amazon.com’s sales list, and has generated numerous online chat groups discussing the book. In view of the book’s success, a movie is certain to follow. But when brethren from around the country began asking me what I think about the book, I figured I ought to get it and read it for myself.

The book is a very well written thriller. It is as good a page-turner as any novel on the market today. The chapters are short and leave you hanging in suspense at the end of each one. I can see why it has such an impact upon its readers and why it might weaken the faith of anyone who is biblically illiterate and ignorant of church history. I agree with the proposition that if you can come up with conspiracy theory, withhold much of the evidence, and implicate a major institution such as the church, you have the makings of a potent mix. This proposition is especially true in a culture already obsessed with conspiracy theories, whether they are about the government, the church or anything else.

Certainly, the book would not be as intriguing if it were presented as a work of pure fiction. It begins, however, with a page entitled, "FACT," claiming that "all descriptions of...documents...in this novel are accurate." This statement, however, is simply not true. For example, Brown's claim that the earliest historical documents portray Jesus as a simple man and that it was not until the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D. that Jesus was finally declared to be divine by the church is laughable. Jesus is called "God" (**Theos**) seven times in the New Testament, and He is called "Lord" in the Divine sense numerous times. The Council of Nicea simply restated, among other things, the belief the church held from its inception—that Jesus is Divine, partaking of the same nature as God the Father.

The book also claims the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Gnostic texts found at Nag Hammadi, Egypt, are the earliest Christian records. Anyone who has ever read a basic introduction to the New Testament can see the outrageousness of that claim. There is nothing Christian about the Dead Sea Scrolls—they are entirely Jewish. Furthermore, there is no evidence that any of the Nag Hammadi documents were written before the late second century A.D., several years after the New Testament canon was completed and circulated among the churches. Such claims, however, give many readers the impression the novel is based upon sound historical research and give the book a veneer of credibility. The truth is the book is closer to pure fiction than it is to fiction based upon historical fact.

In recent months there has been a plethora of books published debunking the claims made on the "FACT" page by author Brown, so I do not feel compelled to refute all of them here. Strangely, though, in the midst of Brown's mishmash of myths and misinformation, there is one statement that

jumps out at me and resonates as being absolutely true. When one of the characters in the story is asked how many drinking glasses are on the table in Da Vinci's painting of "The Last Supper," she replies, "One cup. Jesus passed a single chalice...just as modern Christians do at communion" (p. 236). While the character is mistaken about the number of cups in Da Vinci's painting, she is correct about the number of cups Jesus passed to His disciples as He instituted the Communion—one.

The New Testament says, "And he took the cup..." (Mt. 26:27, Mk. 14:23, Lk. 22:20). Paul exhorts the Corinthians to "keep the ordinances as I delivered them to you" (1 Cor. 11:2), and apparently the earliest Christians did just that. Church leaders such as Ignatius, Justin Martyr, Cyprian, Chrysostom, and Augustine, who lived in the interval between the first and fifth centuries wrote about one cup being used in the Lord's Supper.

One definition of the word "code" is, "a system of symbols, letters, or words given certain arbitrary meanings" (**Webster's II New College Dictionary**, p. 216) Using that definition there are many symbols or codes worth cracking in the Bible. Check into the meaning of such symbols as the rainbow, circumcision, the cross, baptism, unleavened bread, the cup of the Lord, and the fruit of the vine. As thrilling as Brown's book is, it cannot hold a candle to the thrill of discovering the meanings of these symbols because in them you can unravel the secret to the mystery of eternal life.

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HOW TO DISAGREE WITH OUR BRETHREN

Jimmy Vannoy

Perfect agreement between brethren on a biblical topic is desirable if the conclusion reached is in accord with the Scriptures. If brethren study and think for themselves, however, disagreement is likely to occur on a few issues. While it is advisable to study with one another to come to a common understanding of the Scriptures, it is likely that even after such study we will have to learn to live in unity with brethren with whom we do not agree in all points.

There are some points on which we must agree, but God does allow us to have unity while disagreeing with one another on other points. This article will explore which issues we must agree about as well as how to respond to a brother when we do disagree with him.

Ephesians 4:3 command us to work at maintaining “the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (NKJV unless noted otherwise). The context of this verse gives us two necessary ingredients to having and maintaining this unity of the Spirit: (1) the proper attitudes (v. 2) and (2) the proper doctrines (vv. 4-6).

Without the attitudes expressed in verse 2, unity is impossible. Even brethren who agree completely on doctrine cannot have unity without these attitudes, which are based on sincere love for one another. We must be lowly and gentle toward one another, not demanding our own way in matters of preference. We must not consider ourselves better than the other Christians. “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself” (Phil. 2:3). We must realize that God gives us our level of intelligence, talents, and wealth. Therefore, we have no justification for thinking of ourselves as better than others just because we might happen to be superior to another Christian in one or more of these areas. “For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not

received it" (1 Cor. 4:7). One who sincerely places others above himself will always treat his brother with respect and thus will foster unity. On the other hand, a brother with a haughty spirit who places himself above others in his own mind is destructive of unity because such arrogance manifests itself through his actions, leading to resentment in others.

We must learn to tolerate each other by being longsuffering and bearing with each other, especially when we disagree. The key to tolerance is having a sincere love toward one another. We can put up with much from others when we love them, and love should be the glue that binds us together when we disagree with one another. Love will keep us from questioning the intelligence, honesty, and/or motives of those with whom we disagree. When we work closely with brethren, there are going to be times when we become frustrated by their behavior, but we must bear with them for the sake of unity.

Nevertheless, the unity of the Spirit can only be maintained if there is agreement on the basic doctrines listed in Ephesians 4:4-6. We must agree that there is only one body—the church of our Lord Jesus. We must agree that there is only one Spirit—God's Holy Spirit. We do not have to agree on everything about the Spirit, but we do have to agree that there is only one divine Spirit. We have to agree that there is one hope—the hope of the eternal home being prepared for us in heaven. We must believe that there is one Lord—Jesus Christ. We must agree that there is only one faith. That faith is the faith that saves—faith in Jesus as the Son of God. The one faith also includes the one body of faith spoken of in Jude 3, where we are told to “contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.” The faith, as used in this passage, is the body of doctrine that has been once for all times delivered—the New Testament. We must agree that there is only one authority from which we learn the truth. “Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth” (Jn. 17:17). This does not mean that God requires exact agreement on everything the authority teaches but that we must agree that there is only one authority. We must agree that there is only one baptism. It is immersion in water for the forgiveness of sins, which places us into the one body of Christ. We must believe there is only one God.

Unfortunately, there is another matter the church must consider today. Many of our brethren have digressed from the scriptural form of worship and assembly, making it impossible to have unity with them.

If we have in common the proper attitudes of verse 2 and the proper basic doctrines of verses 4-6, we will be able to maintain the unity of the Spirit. Ephesians 4:7-16 indicates that we are to begin from this common point in striving to grow together by teaching one another in love, so that we can become knit together in a better understanding of God's Word. "From whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love" (Eph. 4:16). We become bound together in a common understanding of the truths of God's Word as we study with one another, and our love for one another grows, joining us in wonderful unity.

Nevertheless, in spite of our efforts to come to the truth, disagreements do occur among brethren. What do we do then? If the disagreement concerns one of the seven "ones" of Ephesians 4, we must work hard to teach the truth on these issues to the erring brother. If, however, he will not come to the truth on these matters, unity is impossible. But what do we do if we disagree on other matters? The key to maintaining unity is mutual humility, tolerance, and patience.

The tendency, however, is to think less of the one with whom we disagree. We tend to question his intelligence, his honesty in his approach to the Scriptures, and/or his motives for his position. The Scriptures teach that this attitude of looking down on a brother simply because we disagree with him is a sin. "Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him" (Rom. 14:3). The importance of this verse is not what issues apply to Romans 14 and what do not, but that it is a sin to "despise" (to think less of, to look down on) a brother with whom we disagree. This might be a brother we think is weak, too liberal, or too radical. If we look down on a fellow Christian, he will soon figure it out, and unity will be destroyed or damaged as a result.

It is normal to esteem some brothers above others because of their good lives, but is wrong to look down on the brother who disagrees with us simply because he disagrees with us. We should esteem this brother *just as highly* as the one with whom we agree if all other things are equal.

Some brethren go beyond merely looking down on the brother with whom they disagree. They make the determination that as a result of the position their brother takes, he will be lost eternally if he does not change his position. Judging the condition of souls is condemned in the Scriptures. Notice what Paul said to those who were judging that he was lost:

[BLOCK]But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by a human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. For I know nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this; but He who judges me is the Lord. Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God (1 Cor. 4:3-5).

The judgment being made against Paul was whether or not he was “justified.” There were two things wrong with the judgments made against Paul: (1) The wrong people were doing it. Jesus is the judge. (2) It was not the appropriate time. The time of judging souls is when “the Lord comes.”

We are not to be the judge of the condition of our brother's soul because we do not have the capacity to do so. In a prophecy about Jesus in Isaiah 11:3-4, the method by which Jesus will judge the world is set forth: “He shall not judge by the sight of His eyes, nor decide by the hearing of His ears; but with righteousness He shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth.” Jesus will not judge souls by what He sees or hears, but our sight and hearing are all we have by which to make judgment. Jesus will do something we do not have the capacity to do—He will look into the heart of every individual and thus judge whether he is saved or lost. Jesus will judge with righteousness and equity, something we cannot possibly do and are instructed in the Scriptures against even attempting.

The unity of the Spirit can be achieved and maintained by having the proper attitudes, which are based on sincere love for our brother, and the proper doctrines, which are delineated by the “ones” of Ephesians 4:4-6. From that point of agreement, we are to strive to grow together by mutual edification, which comes from speaking the truth in love. If it turns out that through this process we do not come to total agreement on matters not found in the “ones,” we must continue to employ the attitudes of Ephesians 4:2 and not succumb to the temptation to despise our brother or to judge that his soul is lost because of the matter about which we disagree. If a sufficient level of love is applied to the situation, unity will prevail in spite of disagreement.

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LEARNING TO PRAY

Terry Baze

In speaking of the Holy Spirit's intercessory work in prayer on behalf of the Christian, Paul said, "...for we do not know how to pray as we should" (Rom. 8:26, NASU unless noted otherwise). This statement reminds us of the time when Jesus' disciples came to Him and asked that He would teach them to pray (Lk. 11:1). It was not that the disciples had never prayed before, but that upon hearing Jesus pray, they recognized that His prayers and their prayers were vastly different. After listening to Jesus pray, they realized the weakness of their own prayers. Therefore, they asked Him to teach them to pray.

Probably all of us at some time or another in our walk with Christ have struggled with our prayer life. Sometimes we know that we just do not pray enough. At other times we have difficulty knowing what to say and how to say it. Perhaps at times we have doubted the efficacy of our prayers and have become frustrated with the lack of fervency when we pray.

The first step toward learning to pray well is to have the desire and willingness to learn. When Jesus' disciples asked Him to teach them, they showed a disposition to be taught. We should never think that we cannot learn or that we are above growing and improving in our spiritual disciplines and activities.

In Psalm 2:8 God said, "Ask of me." Jesus said, "Ask, and it shall be given to you. God wants His children to talk to Him, to tell Him their requests (Phil. 4:6). As any earthly father desires to have his children communicate with him, so too, does our loving Father in heaven. How sad it must be for a parent whose children will rarely speak to him. Parents in such dreadful situations must long for the sweet communion that once existed with their beloved children. How many times does our Father lament the fact that we rarely talk to Him?

Power in Prayer

Prayer is powerful. It brings about results. Prayer gets the very attention of God and moves Him to action. There are many examples in Scripture of God answering the prayers of His people. Abimelech prayed to God for relief and God answered Him (Gen. 20:17-18). God said He would hear the prayer of Job (Job 42:8). He heard Jonah's cry for deliverance from the belly of the great fish (Jonah 2:1-10). Four times Pharaoh asked Moses, "Intreat the Lord for me." Each time Moses did, and each time his request was answered. When Aaron and the children of Israel had constructed the golden calf during Moses' delayed absence, God declared that He would destroy them, yet Moses prayed an intercessory prayer for forty days, and God decided against His initial response to their idolatry. Hezekiah was told in 2 Kings 20:1-6 to set his house in order for he would die. Hezekiah prayed fervently to God for life, and God granted him another fifteen years. Hannah said in 1 Samuel 1:27, "For this boy I prayed, and the Lord has given me my petition which I asked of Him." James tells us about Elijah praying to God, asking that it not rain for three and a half years and it did not. Then he prayed to God for rain and it rained (5:17-18).

The fact that God asks us to pray and the abundance of evidence that He answers prayers should motivate us to pray.

Of all the things we neglect as Christians, prayer must be near the top of the list. We have incredible power available to us through prayer, yet we often fail to use it. James wrote, "You do not have because you do not ask" (4:2). It is doubtful that any of us truly appreciates or recognizes just how powerful prayer is. We cannot imagine how far reaching our prayers are and the amount of good they have accomplished. We must try to comprehend the awesome power that our God possesses and realize that it is often unleashed because of prayer.

Purpose in Prayer

James 5:16 speaks of prayers that are effective. Effective prayers are prayers that are answered. Prayer is not an end in itself. The purpose of prayer is to find an answer. God is glorified when He answers prayer. Just as an earthly father desires to bless his children, so too, God wants to bless His children, and He often does so through answered prayer.

Effective prayers are prayers that are offered in faith. James 1:6-7 says, "Ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord." Jesus said to ask so that we would receive, to seek in order that we would find, and to knock so that doors would be opened. The asking, seeking, and knocking should be done with the expectation of receiving, finding, and doors being opened, which all imply faith on the part of the one doing the asking, seeking, and knocking. My good friend and brother Dennis Holman is well known in our congregation for praying with someone and then telling them to get in expectation because God is going to work. We must all learn to pray in faith in order for our prayers to be answered.

Prayer looks to an answer. That is the end result of praying. To seek no answer is to take the desire, aim, and heart out of prayer. It is the answer to prayer that gives God glory. If no answer had come to Elijah, God would not have been glorified. If no answer had come to Peter as he prayed over the dead body of Dorcas, God would not have been glorified. In John 11:41-42, after Jesus had brought Lazarus to life, He said, "Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. I knew that You always hear Me; but because of the people standing around I said it, so that they may believe that You sent Me." Verse 46 says that many believed on Him after having seen the resurrection of Lazarus. Answered prayer glorifies God.

Another purpose of prayer is that God's will is done. When Jesus prayed three times in the Garden of Gethsemane that God might let Him avoid the bitter cup of the passion that awaited Him, He always qualified His requests by saying, "Not my will, but Your will be done." James 4:3 says, "You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures." So much of our praying is selfish. One of the things that brought this point to my attention was when I made a study of the prayers that Paul prayed for his fellow believers, as well as the things Paul asked them to pray for him. "We pray for you always" (2 Thess. 1:11). "Brethren, pray for us" (1 Thess. 5:25). Here is a sampling of the kinds of things for which Paul prayed:

- "...this we also pray for, that you be made complete" (2 Cor. 13:9)
- "I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that

you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe” (Eph. 1:18-19)

- “...pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel” (Eph. 6:19)
- “And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ” (Phil. 1:9-10)
- “...we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light” (Col. 1:9-12)
- “To this end also we pray for you always, that our God will count you worthy of your calling, and fulfill every desire for goodness and the work of faith with power, so that the name of our Lord Jesus will be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thess. 1:11-12)
- “Finally, brethren, pray for us that the word of the Lord will spread rapidly and be glorified, just as it did also with you” (2 Thess. 3:1)
- “...and I pray that the fellowship of your faith may become effective through the knowledge of every good thing which is in you for Christ’s sake” (Phm. 6)

We might also look at the prayers of others, like David, and then try incorporating the concepts of these inspired prayers into our own prayers. This is one practical way that we can learn to pray according to God’s will. Praying

that God's will is done rather than praying from selfish motives is another way we can learn to pray better.

Priority of Prayer

When once asked what his plans were for the day, Martin Luther answered, "Work, work, work, from early to late. In fact, I have so much to do that I shall spend the first three hours in prayer." There is little doubt that most of us do not spend enough time in prayer to God. We are creatures of habit, and we sometimes fall into the habit of praying infrequently or not at all.

Jesus spent all night in prayer to God. Jacob wrestled with God all night. Moses, Elijah, Paul, David, and Daniel are all examples of men who spent great amounts of time in prayer to God. Is it any wonder that these also were some of the closest men to God?

Paul told the Colossians, "Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving" (4:2). In 1 Thessalonians 5:17 he wrote, "Pray without ceasing." To the Ephesians he said, "With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit" (6:18). There are many other Scriptures that tell Christians to pray. Prayer is the keynote of every sanctified life. Prayer is the direct line to our Father. The amount of time we spend talking to our Father is usually indicative of the depth and quality of our relationship with Him. How can we maintain a close, meaningful relationship with anyone to whom we rarely talk? Just as a lack of communication can damage or destroy human relationships, so too, our relationship with God will suffer when we do not regularly talk to Him in prayer.

If we would but realize the power of prayer, then surely prayer would become a greater priority in our lives. We would run to God in prayer in every emergency, in every trial, in every decision, in every temptation, in times of confusion and doubt, in times of stress, in times of sorrow or joy, and in times of worship and praise. Knowing that God answers prayer, we believe we will find comfort, help, strength, resolve, peace, wisdom, grace, and mercy when we pray.

When confronted with the problem of the Hellenistic widows being neglected in the church in Acts 6, the apostles told the church to select seven reputable men to resolve the problem. The apostles determined to delegate responsibility to others so they could continue uninterrupted their work of preaching and praying. They understood the necessity of prayer and made it their priority. So, too, should we.

Passion in Prayer

Perhaps the reason we spend so little time in prayer is indicative of our lack of desire for God. Prayer is a matter of desire. The deeper the desire we have for God, the stronger our prayer life will be. James said the “effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much” (Jas. 5:16). For prayers to be effective, they must be fervent. Prayer without desire is a meaningless mumbling of words.

In our modern, western culture, it seems that most Christians pray silently, with their eyes closed. They generally pray lying on their beds, kneeling on their knees, or sitting or standing with their heads bowed. While the posture of the body may indicate things relative to the attitude of the one praying, bodily posture is not the most important facet of prayer. It is interesting, however, to note that the Jews (as well as the early church) in Bible times usually prayed out loud. There is little evidence in Scripture that people prayed silently to God. One notable exception was when Eli saw Hannah’s lips moving but could not hear what she was saying. Many of the Psalms indicate that people generally prayed out loud (Psa. 28:2; 142:1; 3:4; 55:17).

In 1 Timothy 2:8 Paul said, “I want the men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and dissension.” People usually explain that the “lifting up holy hands” is a figure of speech and is not to be taken literally. The “holy hands” actually refers to a man’s works and deeds, i.e., his lifestyle. We might ask, however, where the figure came from and what it means. The truth is that the Jews often prayed to God standing, with their heads up, their eyes open, and looking to the heavens, with their arms outstretched to the sky. Psalms 88:9 says, “I have called upon You every day, O Lord; I have spread out my hands to You.” “Hear the voice of my supplications when I cry to You for help, when I lift up my hands toward Your holy sanctuary” (Psa. 28:2). The figure Paul used in 1 Timothy 2:8 is meaningless unless, of course, the practice and posture of prayer was often literally to lift up one’s hands to God as he prayed.

Why might someone lift his hands to God in prayer, and what does it mean to do so? When a little child is afraid, or is hurt or in trouble, he very likely will run to his parents and, while crying out for help, reach out to them. That is the picture of a child of God crying out to His Father and reaching out to Him. Such crying and reaching indicates passion of spirit and desperation for the Father’s intervention.

Sometimes our praying is mere rote. We pray listlessly, without any passion or fervency. If we are not careful we may fall into the habit of praying the same

prayers over and over again, using the exact same words and phrases, so that our prayers are just memorized words without the passion of a soul for God.

When you are in your “prayer closet,” try praying to God out loud. Cry out to Him with your arms outstretched and your eyes looking to the heavens. Call on Him to hear you (Psa. 28:1-2; 119:145; 88:2). Cry out to Him with all your heart (Psa. 119:145). Cry for help (Psa. 88:13). Cry “Abba! Father!” (Gal. 4:6).

Prayer Partners

There is quite a bit of evidence that it was a regular practice among early Christians to pray with one another:

- “they all continued praying together” (Acts 1:14)
- “they spent their time...praying together” (2:42)
- “then we can continue to pray” (6:4)
- “the church prayed earnestly to God” (12:5)
- “many people were gathered there, praying (12:12)

There are times when it is fitting for the church to come together for prayer. What a wonderful idea to invite some Christians into your home to pray! Try asking a brother or sister to meet with you once a week for prayer. Praying together can often increase our love, respect, and admiration for each other, besides the blessing to be found in prayer itself. Several brothers might go to the bedside of a brother who is sick and pray for him. Get together and pray for the lost in your community before a gospel meeting. There are all kinds of reasons why Christians should come together for prayer.

Let us be a praying people. Determine that you will pray more than you ever have. Decide that you will regularly pray with your brethren. Make it a point to pray with someone every day. Pray without ceasing! Devote yourselves to prayer! Pray always!

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2000 PREACHERS' STUDY NOTES

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Theme: Difficult Passages of the Bible • Modest Apparel & The Role of Women *Melvin Blalock* • Commonly Misapplied Passages *Allen Bailey* • Angels and the Gospel *Glen Osburn* • Questions About Evangelists and Preachers *Dennis Smith* • Difficult Passages on the Kingdom *Doug Edwards* • Jesus and the Holy Spirit *Jimmy Smith* • God's Foreknowledge and Control *Alan Bonifay* • The Head and Its Covering *George Battey* • Because of the Angels *David Stands* • Imputed Righteousness *Johnny Elmore* • Is It Ever Right to Do Wrong? *Richard Bunner* • Warnings Against Immaturity and Apostasy *Jim Crouch* • Congregational Autonomy *Bennie Cryer* • Christian Liberties *Raymond Fox* • The Christian and the End of Time *Ronny Wade* • Domestic Qualifications of Elders *Glenn Ballard* • Christians and Their Use of Money *Art Lynch*

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Old Testament 2 (The Prophets & Poets, History of Israel From Captivity to the Messiah) • Amos *James D. Orten* • Hosea *Greg Gay* • Jonah *Alan Bonifay* • Obadiah *Richard Bunner* • Joel *Melvin Blalock* • Isaiah: The Messianic Prophecies *Doug Edwards* • Isaiah: Contemporary Prophecies *Duane Permenter* • Micah *Bennie Cryer* • Nahum *Charles McConnell* • Zephaniah *Allen Bailey* • Habakkuk *Michael Fox* • Jeremiah and Lamentations *Carl Johnson* • Daniel: Setting, Structure *Ron Courter* • Daniel: Prophecies *Terry Baze* • Ezekiel *Johnny Elmore* • Haggai *Ryan Conner* • Zechariah *Art Lynch* • Malachi *Wayne McKamie* • Nehemiah *Mike Criswell* • Ezra: Restoration of Israel *Ronny Wade* • Esther *Jerry Dickinson* • Introduction to Hebrew Poetry *Smith Bibens* • Job *Raymond Fox* • Psalms *L. G. Butler* • Proverbs *Taylor Joyce* • Song of Solomon *Glen Osburn* • Ecclesiastes *Wayne Fussell* • The Silent Years: Between the Testaments *Jim Crouch*

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(Old Testament 1: Genesis through the Captivity) • The Old Testament World *James D. Orten* • Critical Theories in Old Testament Literature *Raymond Fox* • The Creation, The Temptation, and The Fall *Smith Bibens* • The Genesis Flood *Johnny Elmore* • The Hebrew Patriarchs *Mike Criswell* • "Let My People Go!" (A Survey of Exodus) *Doug Edwards* • A Survey of Leviticus *Alan Bonifay* • A Survey of Numbers *Alan Bonifay* • A Survey of Deuteronomy *Duane Permenter* • Joshua *J. Wayne McKamie* • The Work of the Judges *Michael Fox* • Ruth *Wayne Fussell* • Social Life in Israel *Richard Bunner* • The Reign of Saul *Bennie Cryer* • The Reign of David *Ron Courter* • The Reign of Solomon *Carl Johnson* • An Introduction to the Divided Kingdom *Jim Crouch* • The Northern Kingdom, Jeroboam to Jehoram *Jim Crouch* • The Northern Kingdom, Jehu to the Exile *Bill Davis* • The Southern Kingdom, Rehoboam to Hezekiah *Taylor Joyce* • The Southern Kingdom, Manasseh to the Exile *Jim Crouch* • Israel and Judah in Captivity *Ronny Wade*

GOD'S PLAN FOR PERSONAL FINANCES

John Pruitt

The Apostle Paul clearly instructed Timothy to be an example of the believers in word, in conversation (manner of life), in charity, in spirit, in faith, and in purity (1 Tim. 4:12). One of the most important areas of our lives in which we demonstrate a positive Christian example is in our personal finances. We are daily faced with making financial decisions, and all of those choices have consequences: some good, some bad, and some eternal. Occasionally, those choices affect only us individually, but most frequently our choices affect everyone around us. Fortunately, many of those decisions can be made on the basis of God's principles that we find in His Word.

God's desire is to bless His people with the things they need to accomplish His work. The prerequisite to such blessings is obedience to His principles. For too long now, Christians have yielded the responsibility of financial management to the secular world, and the result has been debt, depression, and disaster.

You may be surprised to know that there are more than one thousand direct references in the Bible to money and literally hundreds more indirect references and that this one subject is second only to the subject of love. Nearly two-thirds of all the parables that Jesus left us deal with the use of money, and yet many of us fail to grasp the concepts of His teachings in this regard. Oh, what peace we often forfeit, oh what needless pain we bear, all because we do not obey the instruction, ignore God's financial principles, and don't understand how we are to use the financial resources with which He has blessed us.

Interestingly, Jesus, who said so many important things during His personal ministry, spoke more about money than any other subject. Most of His pronouncements included warnings about its use and misuse. You will remember, no doubt, that dramatic encounter He had one day with a rich young ruler and His disturbing parables about Lazarus and the rich man and about the rich fool.

During these discourses Jesus asked a question that has echoed down through the corridor of time: "For what is a man profited, if he should gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Mt. 16:26). Twenty centuries later, we still have to deal with that eternal question.

The intervening years have made it clear why Jesus emphasized the dangers of money. Men have lusted for it, killed for it, died for it, and have gone to hell for it. Money has come between the best of friends and has brought down the proud and the mighty. Materialism and debt have devastated more families than perhaps any other factor. Money can destroy your marriage and your home, alienate your children, and separate the closest of friends and relatives.

There are difficulties involved in any discussion about our personal finances. First, finances is "personal" so we tend to feel that it is no one else's business. Secondly, any discussion regarding finances gets close to the heart. Jesus said, "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Mt. 6:21). Preachers do not like to talk about it because brethren would surely think they were preaching for money. As parents, we do not talk to our children about finances often because we are keenly aware of our own inadequacies and thus excuse ourselves from the obligation to teach them what God's will is for them in this matter.

Young people often enter into marriage without the slightest clue about what a budget is or how to live within one. Consequently, they are forced to deal with some very stressful situations in their marriage because they fail to understand what God's purpose is for their personal finances.

The key to understanding God's will for our personal finances is to have a proper understanding of stewardship. A steward is someone who manages another's property. David said in Psalm 24:1, "The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof; the world and they that dwell therein." The things that we call our own are not really ours but actually belong to the Lord; we are merely stewards of the things we possess while we are here on earth. He is sovereign and can choose to entrust us with as much or as little as He desires.

Now, if we can accept the role of stewards and managers of God's resources according to His direction, then I believe that God will entrust us with even greater resources. That clearly is the precept found in the Lord's parable of the talents in Matthew 25. The point of the parable is not how many talents but how well we do with what He has entrusted us. Until we acknowledge God's total ownership, we will never experience God's direction in the management of our personal finances. The Apostle Paul reminded Timothy that "we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out" (1 Tim. 6:7).

Our relationship with God is determined largely by the attitudes we demonstrate in our daily lives. Jesus made this very point in the parable of the Pharisee and the publican in Luke 18. God is concerned with our attitude! Having right attitudes does not mean just learning to live on a budget and cheerfully contributing to the work of the Lord, it includes dealing fairly and honestly with others, forgiving others of debts, and being humble and thankful. I fear that our attitudes are often wrong because we have not taken to heart Paul's instruction to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20, where he called them "to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, 'It is more blessed to give, than to receive.'" For many, it appears that the opposite is true by the attitude they demonstrate. Malachi raised this pointed question in 3:8, "Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say 'Wherein have we robbed thee?' In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation...." The question we must ask ourselves is this: "Am I robbing God? Is God getting His fair share?" Paul gave this instruction in Romans 13:14—"But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lust thereof." J.W. McGarvey, in his commentary on Romans, aptly says of our fleshly life, "Sustain it we may, but pamper it we may not!"

Now, let us apply the principles that we have just noticed.

1. Credit. Many people today, Christians included, have been duped into adopting a get-it-now philosophy that encourages the use of credit. This philosophy affects the way we buy our homes, cars, clothes, and food. Today, there are over 550 million active credit cards with each having an average balance of over \$3,000.00. Many young couples are products of families with a nice home, two or more cars, and a variety of credit sources. The parents do not operate on a budget, and the children are not trained to do so either. Credit is used readily, and purchasing decisions are based on monthly payments rather than the actual cost of the item. As debt grows, these young couples are often unable to pay monthly bills. Instead of cutting back on discretionary spending, they go on vacations and purchase new items in an attempt to escape from their problems. Eventually, they sometimes go bankrupt and/or get a divorce because of the pressure it brings on the marriage. We must learn to use credit sparingly. Before purchasing something on credit, we should ask ourselves if we really need it or if it is just a desire to pamper ourselves. Generally speaking, we should not purchase anything on credit for which we do not have cash to pay. If you use credit cards, pay off the balance each month and thus avoid finance charges.

2. Borrowing. The Bible clearly indicates that borrowing is not normal for God's people and never was intended to be used as a routine part of financial planning. Furthermore, anything borrowed is to be paid back. "The rich rules over the poor, and the borrower becomes the lender's slave" (Prov. 22:7). We need to encourage our children and young people to save for needs, not borrow to get them. Unfortunately, parental examples of trusting God to provide without borrowing are woefully lacking today.

3. Saving. In today's economy, spending and borrowing are promoted and saving is discouraged. "There is precious treasure and oil in the dwelling of the wise, but a foolish man swallows it up" (Prov. 21:20). Children should be taught that it is more sound biblically and financially to save for future needs than to rely on creditors.

4. Hasty decisions. Patience and consistency are the paths to financial security, not quick decisions and instant success. "The plans of the diligent lead surely to advantage, but everyone who is hasty comes surely to poverty" (Prov. 21:15). One of the things we can do for our children is to allow them to work to reach their goals. Too often, everything is given to them without requiring any effort on their part. This method of acquisition can easily develop into a lifelong habit.

5. Budgeting. Every child should be taught to live on a reasonable budget. "Poverty and shame will come to him who neglects discipline, but he who regards reproof will be honored" (Prov. 22:7). Parents should set the example by living on budgets themselves.

In conclusion, there are many additional principles found in God's Word that give us direction regarding our personal finances. I would encourage every couple to begin a study of God's financial principles and to implement them in their own lives. Young people should not hesitate to talk to their parents about anything—especially money matters, budgeting, and how to live debt free. Preachers and church leaders should make sure that young couples who are planning their marriage obtain some premarital counseling on the biblical principles of finance and budgeting in order to be able to deal with the issues that will confront them in their married life. Then, and only then, will we begin to understand and comply with God's plan for our personal finances.

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ENDEAVORING TO KEEP THE UNITY

J. Wayne McKamie

We have no greater privilege than taking our families to worship at a congregation of peace, love, and truth. Such is one of those rare things that is “both good and pleasant” (Ps. 133:1). It is so good and so pleasant that we are under a divine mandate to “keep the unity” (Eph. 4:3). Sadly, we discover that from our areas of greatest joy can also come some of our greatest heartaches and problems.

We live in a world that is divided socially, racially, politically, and economically. The greatest division of all is worldwide religious division. The saddest division is that which exists in the Lord’s Church.

Strife and division strike against the plan of God to “reconcile in one body” (Eph. 2:16) and totally disregard the prayer of the Prince of Peace “that all may be one” (Jn. 17:21). Satan, not God, is the author of confusion, strife, and division.. Satan creates conflict and division but not in his house. Our Lord says, “Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand: And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall then his kingdom stand?” (Mt. 12:25-26). Satan is a devil but not a fool. He works in the Lord’s house; the Church is his favorite theater of operation. Satan is behind all envy, strife, confusion and division.

God is the author of peace in all the congregations of the saints. (1 Cor. 14:33). His Word is the source of all genuine peace and unity. Without a biblical foundation there can be only a fragile union—not unity. Unity without divine principle is a unity without a purpose. Acts 2:42 reveals the simple fact that fellowship depends on continuing in the apostles’ doctrine.

We know that peace and unity cannot be bought at the expense of truth. We know that a unity of the Spirit is the only unity that pleases God. But do we know that unity is an individual obligation? Is it not true that we have a common

salvation, a common faith (Jude 3)? Ultimately, unity is a matter of the local church and of each individual member. Listen to these statements:

- “there be no divisions among you” (1 Cor. 1:10)
- “speak the same thing” (1 Cor. 1:10)
- “be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Cor. 1:10)
- “have the same care one for another” (1 Cor. 12:25)
- “Be like-minded, having the same love, being of *one* accord, of one mind” (Phil. 2:2)
- Let nothing be done through strife or vain glory (Phil. 2:3)
- “in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves” (Phil. 2:3)

These passages fairly shout individual responsibility and obligation. It is a sad day when we no longer accept our personal responsibility to maintain the unity of the Spirit. It is a sad day when Satan deceives us into pursuing a personal agenda that leads to division.

Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit bespeaks the fact that unity can be lost. Heresies and heretics will come (1 Cor. 11:19). What is our responsibility then? How do we deal with the problem? First, we acknowledge the problem. We must face it as it is, not as it once was, not as we wish it were, but as it is. Both the cause and the cure are outlined for us in the Scriptures.

Paul's letter to the church of Christ in Corinth, established by Paul himself about A.D. 51 or 52, is a veritable case history of what can go wrong in the house of God. The epistle deals with division, problems, heresies, immorality, lack of discipline, chaos in the assembly, and various doctrinal deviations. Some of our brethren in Corinth smirked at immorality, argued over their preachers, despised the gift of the Holy Spirit, used their gifts to humiliate their brothers, sued each other in pagan courts, and were allowing a case of definitive fornication. After reading the epistle, one must wonder how Paul could address them as the church of God and as saints at Corinth (1 Cor. 1:1)! Indeed one must wonder why Paul put up with them. Why did he not just write them off? Because Paul had a deep commitment to the church. It was not a casual view of sin, and it was not indifference to moral behavior. It was the love of a man

standing in the center of it all, determined to save them. What is the message? Beware the person who wants to bury a congregation too quickly!

What were the underlying problems in Corinth? A sectarian, partisan spirit had invaded the church—a childish, sectarian spirit that had to have its own group, its own preacher, or someone who belonged exclusively to them. “I am of Paul, I am of Apollos...” They had descended to a new low where they were impressed by the status of the speaker more than the message of the speaker. (Sound like anything you have heard about?) How does Paul deal with that? He takes them back to the message.

Moreover, brethren I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures (1 Cor. 15:1-4).

The message was, and is, that Christ alone was crucified for them, that Christ was the One into whom they were baptized. Paul then turns to the Paulites asking, “Is Christ divided?” Has Christ been parceled out to you? What is the message? The exalted status of a speaker (then or now) has nothing to do with the truth or error of his message! To align ourselves with a certain speaker or speakers is a strike against the unity of the body. *What* is right must always take precedence over *who* is right!

Also, error and falsehood are not the only things that destroy the church.

Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God (Gal. 5:19-21).

Please note that there is a direct connection between verses 19-21 and verses 15-16. According to Romans 8:5, these sad times come because someone is living according to the flesh. Living according to the flesh is a mental attitude. The mind is set on things of the flesh. Living becomes self-centered rather than

Christ-centered. When we are hung up on the dead center of self, and when the flesh is in control, we can fall to a new low. Spiritual cannibalism is deplorable, alienates the Lord's people, and eventually leaves in its wake a carnage that is worthy of divine condemnation. What is the cure? The cure is death of self by crucifixion. In Galatians 2:20, Paul explains, "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life that I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." "And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts" (Gal. 5:24).

Self does not die easily. The desire for recognition does not die easily (Acts 8:9-10). So long as we have a feeling of displeasure when we hear of the prosperity of another, so long as jealousy rears its ugly head among us, so long as we are worried about who gets the credit, so long as we are suspicious of one another, discrediting one another, provoking one another, and envying one another, crucifixion of self has not happened.

All of the ruins of former civilizations are not in the old country. Some of us could take you on a sad tour, a tour of ruined temples of the living God—churches that once rang with the songs of Zion and churches that were once pillars and supports of truth and right. These ruins once heard the best that the brotherhood afforded. On this tour we could pause along the way to point out that it was not atheism or evolutionary thought that brought them down. It was division.

Divisions are monuments to tragic failures. These sad ruins bear mute testimony to spiritual immaturity. These ghosts of the past proclaim to the world that we are yet babes, that we are yet carnal and walk as men. In 1 Corinthians 3:1-3, Paul assails this fault in the church in Corinth and "to all those in every place that call upon the name of the Lord" (1 Cor. 1:2). In the beginning of the Corinthian church they were immature by reason of infancy. Infants are not responsible for infancy but adult babes are grotesque, abnormal, and undesirable. "Such were some of you," Paul said and some still were.

First Corinthians 3 is an implicit call for all of us to grow up, to rise above our selfishness and littleness, to set our feet on higher ground, and do all within our power to fulfill the petition of the Prince of Peace:

"That they all may be one: as thou, Father art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe..." (Jn.. 17:20-21).

BREAKING THE ALABASTER VIAL

Terry Baze

Introduction and Background

Your reading this article is actually a fulfillment of a prophecy of Jesus, “Truly I say to you, wherever the gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be spoken of in memory of her” (Mk. 14:9, NASU throughout unless noted otherwise). We find the account of Mary anointing the feet of Jesus at Bethany in Matthew 26:6-13, Mark 14:3-9, and John 12:1-8.

There are several differences among the accounts. While John informs us that Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, anointed Jesus’ feet, Matthew and Mark do not mention her name. John fails to name the host of the dinner party, while according to Matthew and Mark, Jesus was a guest in the house of Simon the leper. In fact, one might assume from a casual reading of John’s account that Lazarus hosted the dinner at his home. Some have attempted to reconcile the accounts by claiming Simon was Lazarus’ father, but such is only conjecture. It is likely that this Simon was cured of his leprosy but still retained the name of “the leper” or else he would not have been able to stay at home and entertain guests. Another difference in the accounts is that, according to John, it is Judas Iscariot who makes the comment concerning the waste of the perfume while in Matthew it is “the disciples” and in Mark it is simply “some of the people there.”

Luke does not record this account, but in 7:36-50 he tells a similar story of a sinful woman anointing Jesus in the house of Simon the Pharisee. The details and focus of the story in Luke are very different from that of Mary

anointing Jesus' feet recorded in the other gospel accounts. Luke's story appears in a completely different setting (7:36-50), where its purpose is to teach a lesson on forgiveness.

It seems evident that the presence of Lazarus at the feast caused a great stir among the people. As a result, the Jewish leaders decided to kill not only Jesus, but Lazarus as well. The dinner at Simon the leper's house occurred in Bethany, the home to Lazarus and his sisters (Lk. 10:38-42; Jn. 11:1), six days before the Passover and immediately before Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem.

Mary's Love for Her Lord

What Mary did in anointing the head and feet of Jesus in order to prepare Him for His impending burial was an act of selfless devotion. Mary was overcome with her feelings of love and appreciation for her Lord and Savior, and she wanted desperately to convey her love to Him in a special way. Perhaps, you too, have occasionally wanted to express your love to someone so much that you decided on an act or a gift that others felt was far too exorbitant and lavish. People may have even regarded you as somewhat immature or foolish as a result of your outlandish display. That is precisely what happened to Mary.

There were, no doubt, many reasons why Mary felt the way she did about Jesus. Most obvious might be the fact that He had recently resurrected her beloved brother, Lazarus, from the dead. How could she possibly thank Him for that? But even before that great miracle, when Jesus arrived at Bethany, after hearing of Lazarus' sickness, Mary greeted Jesus by falling at His feet and calling Him "Lord" (Jn. 11:32). Mary also showed her great faith in Jesus saying, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died." Jesus and Mary had clearly become close friends for when He saw her weeping over the death of her brother "He was deeply moved in spirit and was troubled" (Jn. 11:33). In fact, John states that Jesus loved Martha, Mary, and Lazarus (Jn. 11:5). Mary was deeply interested in Jesus' teachings and spiritual matters (Lk. 10:38-42). She had already shown a disposition to break with tradition and the expectations of others by choosing to listen to Jesus rather than assisting her sister in serving guests in their home. It seems, therefore, that Mary was one of the few of Jesus' disciples who really understood who He was and why He had come. Of all His followers, it seems that perhaps Mary was one of the

only ones to recognize and accept that Jesus was soon to die for her sins. While the apostles had concerns about places of honor, swords, money, and made great boasts regarding their loyalty to Jesus, they did not understand Jesus purpose or the nature of His coming kingdom. Mary did, and consequently she was overcome with emotion at the prospect of Jesus' impending crucifixion. She loved Him and she was determined to show Him.

Anointing Jesus

Mary took "an alabaster vial of very costly perfume of pure nard" (Mk. 14:3-4). John informs us that she "took a pound" (Jn. 12:3-4) of this ointment. The word here for "pound" is *litre*, a Roman pound, which was three-fourths of a modern pound or twelve ounces. The point is that there was a large amount of very expensive perfume involved. The New International Version of Mark 14:5 reads, "It could have been sold for more than a year's wages and the money given to the poor."

"Alabaster" is a species of marble, having a light cream or white color that is almost transparent. To preserve various kinds of ointments or perfumes, the ancients often used alabaster. This vial or flask was likely "a vessel with a rather long neck which was broken off when the contents were used" (Bauer, Danker, Arndt & Gingrich, p. 40). Alabaster was imported from Egypt, and archaeologists in Palestine have excavated thousands of small alabaster perfume flasks.

The "perfume" or "ointment" was simply oil for the skin that smelled good. The word "ointment" that we use today is more like a cream than an oil, and it cannot be poured. "Nard" describes the kind of ointment that was in the flask. The oil was extracted from the root of the nard plant, which grows in the mountains of northern India. The fragrant oil was used to make perfumes and ointments.

Mark tells us that this perfume was "pure," genuine, or unadulterated. The meaning of this word has been a source of speculation and disagreement. Most commentators take it to mean pure or genuine, while others take it to refer to a plant whose name was simply transliterated into Greek, surmising that it was the oil of the pistachio nut, which in Aramaic would have been *pistaka*.

Metonymy

We can learn an important lesson from this account as a side note. Mary “broke the vial and poured it over His head.” The pronoun “it” has the word “vial” as its antecedent. Yet Mary did not pour the vial on Jesus’ head but the perfume that was in the vial. “It” must refer to the liquid, not the vial, e.g. “poured the liquid on his head” or “poured the perfume onto his head.” This common use of language is called “metonymy.” The container (“vial”) is specifically mentioned, yet it refers to the contents in the vial. This is the same language used in the Lord’s Supper. When Paul said, “drink the cup” in 1 Corinthians 11:26, he mentioned the container (“cup”), yet was actually referring to what was in the cup: the fruit of the vine. It is interesting how no one envisions Mary pouring perfume out of many vials on Jesus’ head. In the same way, we understand the phrase “drink the cup” does not somehow allow us to use more than one container in distributing the fruit of the vine in the Lord’s Supper.

Breaking the Vial and Breaking Tradition

The custom of first century Palestinians was to anoint the head or hair with oil. Mary presumably broke the neck of the flask and poured the ointment on the head and feet of Jesus. To pour ointment on the head was common. To anoint the feet was not. To pour the perfume on Jesus’ feet was an act of great humility and devotion to the Savior and therefore deserved to be particularly recorded. Mary anointing Jesus’ feet with the fragrant perfume transcended the customs of the day. People in first century Palestine did not sit at their meals, but “reclined” at length on pillows or couches. She came up behind Him as He lay reclined at the table and poured the ointment on His head and His feet. Then, very likely kneeling at His feet, she wiped them with her hair. What an incredible display of reverence and humility toward her Lord. Mary bowed at His feet and wiped them with her long hair: her glory (1 Cor. 11:15). If you were present on that occasion, dear sisters, would you, or could you have done the same?

Mary is Criticized for Her Devotion

As Mary was anointing Jesus’ head and feet for burial, the disciples became indignant and angry toward her as they talked among themselves about what

she was doing. Mark states that they scolded her (Mk. 14:5). The disciples asked, "For what purpose did this waste of the ointment occur?" Phillips' paraphrase reads, "Couldn't this perfume have been sold for a lot of money which could be given to the poor?"

John specifically indicts Judas Iscariot:

But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, "Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages." He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it (12:4-6).

Judas carried the moneybag, suggesting that he was treasurer of the group. It seems as if he was in the habit of helping himself to the contributions given to the disciples to be dispersed among the poor.

Jesus rebuked the disciples saying, "Leave her alone. Why are you causing her trouble?" He then described what she had done as a beautiful, noble, and good work. He then stated, "She has done what she could" (Mk. 14:8). Mary was able to do what she did, and they should leave her alone. Since her deed was an expression of spontaneous love, it seems probable that Jesus was actually praising the motive behind what Mary did rather than the deed itself.

Notice the difference in Mary's attitude and that of the disciples. While Mary lavishly gives, they are stingy. While Mary worships, they are indignant. While she thinks of Jesus, they think of themselves. While she expresses love, they express anger. What Jesus calls good and beautiful, they call wasteful. The disciples scold Mary, yet Jesus praises her.

Mary was scorned because she displayed love for her Lord in a way that the disciples had not. The disciples criticized her actions as wasteful, and they accused her of not caring for the poor. In their minds she was out of line, out of control, over-emotional, and foolish and they must stop her. The truth is that Mary's love and devotion made the disciples look bad, so to justify their lack of devotion to Jesus, they condemned her actions.

Brethren often are guilty of the same things the disciples were guilty of in this story. If someone shows more emotion in worship or praises God in a way that they do not, they condemn that person. If someone gets excited about serving the Lord or goes beyond the status quo in working for His

Cause, brethren often become angry and shout “liberal,” “digressive,” or “denominational.” Enthusiasm is sometimes met with sarcasm and cynicism. Love is sometimes mocked and derided.

There are other examples in Scripture where some criticized the exuberance of others. Michal criticized David as he danced at the return of the Ark of the Covenant in 2 Samuel 6:12-23. David's heart was filled “with gladness” at the prospect of the Ark of the Covenant returning to its rightful place. Every six paces the Ark was carried, they stopped and “sacrificed an ox and a fatling.” During this time, David danced before the LORD with all his might wearing a linen ephod. He and others were celebrating “with shouting and the sound of the trumpet.”

Michal, however, “despised him in her heart.” She sarcastically said, “How the king of Israel distinguished himself today! He uncovered himself today in the eyes of his servants' maids as one of the foolish ones shamelessly uncovers himself!” Michal thought that David had lowered himself to the level of a common servant by his actions, rather than acting as a king. She thought a king should be above such exuberance. In her opinion, David's conduct was foolish, shameful, and immodest.

David responded to her by saying,

It was before the LORD, who chose me above your father and above all his house, to appoint me ruler over the people of the LORD, over Israel; therefore I will celebrate before the LORD. I will be more lightly esteemed than this and will be humble in my own eyes, but with the maids of whom you have spoken, with them I will be distinguished.

It was from pure joy and excitement that David celebrated as he did. He was thankful for all the Lord had done for him. He told Michal that he would be even more undignified than this. And rather than the maids looking down on him, David felt that his actions actually caused them to appreciate him more.

Emotional Responses to Christ

Sometimes, if we are not careful, we can get so worried about formality, etiquette, and tradition that we fail to grasp the fact that Christianity and salvation should excite our emotions. Christianity is not a cold, lifeless, unemo-

tional experience. Christianity is more than a logical, intellectual response to laws and commands. While our faith is based on the Word of God, the message is soul stirring. The audience on Pentecost in Acts 2 were “cut to the heart” when they heard the gospel. The Word leads us to The Word. Jesus is the living manifestation of the Word of God: He is the Word become flesh. As God’s Word penetrates our hearts, it involves the intellect, the emotions, the body, and the whole of man. As we understand more of God’s love and grace and of Christ’s redemptive work, we are compelled to love Him. We are drawn to Him. We desire Him. We long to be like Him, to be with Him, to worship Him, to obey Him, to seek Him, to honor Him, to emulate Him, to follow Him, to learn of Him, and to serve Him. Let us remember that the Word’s objective is to lead us into a relationship with Jesus (Jn. 17:3).

Luke records that as Jesus entered Jerusalem before His Passion,

As He was going, they were spreading their coats on the road. As soon as He was approaching, near the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the miracles which they had seen, shouting: “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord; Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!” Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Him, “Teacher, rebuke Your disciples.” But Jesus answered, “I tell you, if these become silent, the stones will cry out!” (Lk. 19:36-40)

Matthew says that they shouted, “Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest” (21:9). Luke tells us that those in the crowd were “disciples” and that they “began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice.” He tells us they were “shouting” praises to God. Should we see and hear some Christian today shouting praise to God, how would we react? What would we think? What would we say? Would we be like the Pharisees and insist that he be rebuked? Would we try to put a stop to it? Would we think the person is weird or unbalanced? Jesus refused the Pharisee’s request to silence the crowd and insisted that even if He were to do so, the stones would cry out.

The Christian life is a life of joy. Christians ought to celebrate Jesus. There is nothing wrong with being emotional about Jesus. If babies, spouses, love songs, weddings, funerals, promotions, new cars, raises, good news from the

doctor, good report cards, pets, victories, and so many other events in life cause us to get emotional and excited, then why should we not get excited about Jesus? Emotions, in and of themselves, are often misleading and cannot be relied upon. Emotions often change with the wind. Our faith is not based on blind emotion. Emotional responses based on the Word of God are acceptable, however, so long as they do not violate some biblical principle or command.

Sometimes showing love involves more than obeying commands. Often brethren quote John 14:15 to define love. Love is keeping Jesus' commands. Certainly that is one way of expressing love to God, but is our love confined to that? In Mary's case, where is the command, example, or necessary inference that she should perform such an act? Did Jesus command Mary to anoint His head and feet for burial? Did Mary obey a command by anointing Jesus with expensive perfume? Did He command her to wipe His feet with her hair? Did He tell her what kind of perfume to anoint Him with and how much to use? Did He tell her the precise moment to anoint Him? Mary was not obeying a command, but she was expressing principles of love, praise, commitment, service, and devotion. Jesus said, "She has done what she could." Some today would likely condemn Mary by questioning where she got the authority to do such a thing. The "silence of the Scriptures" did not forbid Mary's anointing Jesus. Paul says regarding the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5, "Against such, there is no law." When we get to the point that we demand everyone expresses his love for Christ in the exact same ways and degrees, we have become Pharisaical. May we never attempt to make and bind laws on Christians that would discourage, disable, or deter them from pouring out their hearts in love to their Lord and Master.

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THE BLASPHEMY AGAINST THE HOLY SPIRIT (MT. 12:22-32)

John M. Criswell

The picture that typically comes to mind when one thinks of Jesus is one of gentleness, meekness, and mildness. Artists' conceptions of our Lord often portray pastoral hillsides with multitudes sitting quietly at His feet soaking up His every word. While it is true that Jesus came to seek and save the lost (Mt. 18:11), and while it is true that He did not come to condemn the world (Jn. 3:17), the passive portrayal is only part of the real Jesus. With the masses who misunderstood Him, Jesus showed amazing patience and restraint even in the face of their unbelief. However, with the hypocritical religious leaders who rejected Him, our Master had little patience. Jesus reserved His harshest criticism for those who rejected Him in spite of the irrefutable evidence that demonstrated He was God's Son.

One example of such an occurrence is found in Matthew 12:22-37. After casting out a demon Jesus is accused of performing the miracle by the power of Satan himself. To this Jesus responded with a series of rebuttals culminating in a rebuke that the Pharisees were on the verge of committing the "unpardonable sin." Mark 3:22-30 and Luke 11:14-16 provide parallel accounts of this event.

The Accusation

There are many details about Matthew's account that are interesting. First, there is evidence that at the time of the controversy Jesus' accusers had come down from Jerusalem for the specific purpose of spying on

Him in hopes of collecting evidence against Him (Mk. 3:22). When these wicked leaders arrived and saw Him casting out demons they seized the opportunity to discredit Him. Their sudden hostility and concern probably arose from the fact that Jesus' miracles were beginning to have an impact on the crowds. Matthew 12:23 says, "And all the people were amazed, and said, 'Is not this the Son of David?'" The term "Son of David" is a Messianic title emphasizing the humanity and Davidic lineage of the Messiah. Thus, the masses were apparently beginning to consider at least the possibility that Jesus was Israel's long awaited Deliverer—something the religious leaders were not about to let happen. In response to the crowds' fledgling faith the Pharisees made the most blasphemous of all accusations! They accused Jesus of being in league with Satan himself.

The charge is patently ridiculous, and were it not so serious, might even be laughable. But Jesus cannot let such an accusation go unchallenged. If first century eyewitnesses of the Holy Spirit's work were allowed to falsely attribute it to Satan, then what of future generations who relied on their testimony? Thus, in at least once sense, the very credibility of Jesus' ministry was at stake.

Arguments Against the False Accusation

To prove that the Pharisees were wrong Jesus gives a series of logical arguments proving His work is from God. Argument one is found in Matthew 12:25 and stems from the fact that a kingdom (or a household) at war with itself will not stand. History bears out that a nation may be destroyed faster from civil war than from an external threat. In the latter case a nation binds together and musters its forces against the enemy; in the former the nation is its own enemy. The argument is clear. If Jesus casts out demons by Satan's power, then Satan is divided against himself and is fighting a civil war.

The second argument is found in Matthew 12: 27 and is based on the practice of the Pharisees' themselves. Apparently, during this time period the Pharisees, or at least their students, claimed the ability to cast out demons. The term "sons" refers to the Pharisees' students. In a jab at their hypocrisy, Jesus asks why the Pharisees condemn Him for something they condoned in their own kind.

This particular argument has given rise to various difficulties. First, did the Pharisees' students really have the power to cast out demons? Broadus notes that it was common during this time period for Jews to claim such an ability (**Commentary on Matthew**, p. 269). Josephus makes the same observation and lists some of the incantations that accompanied them (**Antiquities** 8,2,5; **Wars** 7,6,3), as does the apocryphal book of Tobit (6:16, 8:1-4). Luke also mentions itinerant exorcists (Acts 19:13-14). However, whether or not the exorcisms were real remains a question. McGarvey, Barnes, Plummer, Alexander and others believe that Jesus uses this example primarily for the sake of argument. It is an ad hominem argument and is advanced on the basis of Pharisaic inconsistency. Thus, Jesus is not necessarily affirming that demons were actually expelled, but that the Pharisees were unfair in accepting their own "exorcisms" while rejecting Jesus'.

Argument three (Mt. 12:28) demonstrates the seriousness of rejecting that which is unmistakably of divine origin. The argument beginning here culminates in the warning about the "blasphemy of the Holy Spirit" (vv. 31-32). For now, however, the idea is that Jesus' miracles proved that the "kingdom of God" was in their midst. The term "kingdom" in the New Testament Scriptures has a variety of meanings and nuances. Here "kingdom" does not have direct reference to the "church" but to the reign or power of God as demonstrated in the ministry of Jesus.

Jesus' final argument is presented in the form of a parable (12:29-30). He says that before one can enter a "strongman's house" and spoil his "goods" He must first "bind" the "strongman." The metaphor is a description of Jesus entering the domain of Satan (the strongman), and reeking havoc with Satan's "goods" (demons) by casting them out. The point of the illustration is that Jesus' action proves that He is stronger than Satan.

The Impossibility of Neutrality

After giving His final argument regarding His power over the devil, Jesus begins to focus on the unbelief of the Pharisees. He warns that those who were not with Him were against Him and those who did not gather with Him scattered abroad (12:30). The point of this is that there is no neutral ground when it comes to Jesus. When one rejects Jesus' word and

His miracles he aligns himself against Jesus. In so doing he becomes the enemy of God. The metaphor of “gathering and scattering” is that of a shepherd and his sheep. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, came to gather the flock of Israel. The Pharisees, who were false shepherds, did everything to divide the people against Jesus. They scattered the flock of God. For these false shepherds, Jesus reserved the harshest criticism.

Blasphemy Defined

Before we look at the specific type of “blasphemy” (i.e., against the Holy Spirit), the general sin of “blasphemy” must be defined. In general “blasphemy” is irreverent speech or action against anything God-approved or holy. The implications of the act are far reaching. It can refer to mocking sacred things such as God, heaven, Christ, the church, and the Bible. Or it may even include the intentional defamation of another’s character or name. Recall that Jesus condemned calling one’s fellow man “fool”—a characterization that ultimately defames the One who made man in His image (Mt. 5:22). In any event “blasphemy” of any type is a serious offense. In the Old Testament it brought the death penalty (Lev. 24:16). Under the “new law” it is forgivable but is no less serious. Paul, for example, confessed that he was formerly a blasphemer, persecutor, and violent aggressor but obtained mercy because he did it in ignorance and unbelief (1 Tim. 1:12-13). Likewise, Peter blasphemed the name of Christ with curses (Mk. 14:71) but was afterwards restored. John assures us that if we confess our sins God is faithful and just to forgive our sins (1 Jn. 1:9).

Because we live in such an irreverent society today Christians must constantly guard against the sin of “blasphemy.” In the modern world God’s name is flippantly used in oath taking, obscene speech, and casual expletives. All of these are forms of “blasphemy.” Likewise God’s Word is mocked, His people are ridiculed, and there is little respect for principles of morality. Again, these all fall under the general category of “blasphemy.” But the danger goes even farther. When the Christian lightly regards his religious duties, when he trivializes church attendance, when he takes God’s name in vain by using euphemistic speech (“gosh,” “golly,” “gee,” “darn”), or when he casually approaches God in worship, he is guilty of a type of “blasphemy.” Care must be taken by the

Christian to keep that which is divine on a divine level. Furthermore, while this writer does not necessarily have a contention with “religious wearable art,” one should be careful not to bring God down to the level of “pop culture.” God is not man’s “buddy.” He is to be revered by His saints. “Reverend is His name” (Ps. 111:9, KJV). Obviously, no matter how the reader feels about this issue, some “religious wearable art” is not appropriate for those professing the spirit of Christ. Christianity should never be “in your face” either in word or in what we wear. Neither should it trivialize the sacrifice of Jesus or the nature and divinity of God.

Blasphemy Against the Spirit

But let us return to the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit? Under what conditions was it committed in Matthew 12 and is it possible to commit such a sin today? The first step in interpreting any passage of Scripture is to study its context. Even if a passage seems to support a particular doctrine (even a true doctrine), one is unjustified in using that text if in its original context it does not teach the conclusion we wish to draw from it. In other words, it is never appropriate to use a verse to prove a point unless that is the point the original writer had in mind. For example, 1 Peter 4:7 is sometimes used to warn people that the coming of Christ is near! This may be true, but 1 Peter 4:7 is not an appropriate proof text. Peter is addressing the end of the Jewish state and the subsequent persecution of Christians, not the end of time.

Likewise, Matthew 12:31 is addressing a specific situation that cannot be replicated today. As we have noted, the context of Jesus’ condemnation of the Pharisees is their rejection of His “miraculous works” and the attribution of casting out demons to Satan. Because miracles have ceased (1 Cor. 13:8-13, et. al.), and because demons no longer directly possess men today, the sin of which the Pharisees were guilty is not repeatable. Some may balk at this assessment of Matthew 12, but notice Mark’s account in 3:30. Mark specifically says that Jesus pronounced His condemnation “because they said, He hath an unclean spirit.” Unless it is possible to witness Jesus’ miracles today and make the same assessment, the sin under consideration does not exist today. This should put to rest the fears of those who worry they are guilty of having commit-

ted this sin. In fact, as we shall notice, the very fear that one is worried about this sin is proof that he has not committed it. The attitude that led the Pharisees to make such a charge was a hard-heartedness that prevented them from worrying about their actions.

Attitude versus Action

While we have maintained that the specific sin of “blasphemy against the Holy Spirit” cannot be committed today, it is possible to replicate the attitude that led the Pharisees to commit this sin. Herein is the lesson that modern Christians must learn from Matthew 12. Likewise, herein is the importance of any passage, whether directly applicable to us today or not.

The attitude that eventually led the Pharisees to condemn Jesus as being in league with the devil was that of “disrespect.” They did not really care for God, His Word, or His ways. In fact, Jesus accused them of persecuting and even killing the prophets that God sent to them (Mt. 21:33ff., 23:34). Any time a person grows hardened to God’s overtures he is in danger of replicating the attitude of the Pharisees. The conscience is a tender tool, placed in our minds by God. When it is repeatedly violated it becomes callused and hard. Over time one sin leads to another until it is possible to commit the grossest of sins with no pain of conscience (1 Tim. 4:2).

Thus, the point to be drawn from Matthew 12 applies not to one’s action but to one’s attitude. Today, it is impossible to witness Jesus’ miracles and attribute them to Satan. It is, however, undeniably possible to reject God’s Word, attribute the Bible to man, denounce the church as a fraud, reject God’s messengers, spurn the gospel—and the list goes on and on. If one persists in these sins because they have rejected the evidence and the truth, they ultimately have the same damnation as the Pharisees.

No Forgiveness in This World or The World to Come

Before closing our discussion of Matthew 12 the final words of Jesus need to be considered. Verse 32 says, “And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh

against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come.” To speak a word against the “Son of man” is to misunderstand the humanity of Jesus. It was understandable in that day for one to look at the lowly birth of Jesus, His childhood in the despised city of Nazareth, and His lack of secular training as a Rabbi, and walk away with a misunderstanding of who He was. Some of the Lord’s own family fell into this category. James, who at first did not follow Jesus, later became one of the strongest leaders of our Lord’s church (Jn. 7:2-5; Gal. 2:9; Acts 21:18; Acts 15:13; Jas. 1:1). In fact, Jesus seems to sympathize with a person who struggled with His human persona. However, Christ would not tolerate those who saw His miracles and the unmistakable power which came via the Holy Spirit, and yet were callused enough to attribute them to the Devil. In this case there could be no forgiveness—not because God was unable or unwilling to forgive such a sin but because the accusation came from hearts that willfully refused to change. Even God cannot forgive a heart that refuses to repent.

The seriousness of such an attitude is demonstrated in Jesus final words, “neither in this world or the world to come.” Two major view points exist regarding this phrase. Some believe that “this world” (or “this age” as it sometimes translated) refers to the Mosaic period under which Christ lived and conducted His ministry. According this view the “age to come” would then be the “Christian Age” or “church age.” This view is not without merit because those who deliberately refused Jesus during His ministry were unlikely to accept Him during the apostolic period. If Jesus’ miracles had not created faith in their hearts then the apostles’ miracles would not either.

A second view, however, is “this age” refers to the “lifetime” of the individual blasphemer and “the age to come” refers to “eternity” where the sinner’s fate is forever sealed. This view is preferred because it seems to accord with Mark’s gospel record. Jesus adds in Mark 3:30 that the blasphemer “is subject to eternal condemnation.” Allowing Mark to interpret Matthew’s account, it appears Jesus is contrasting the “here” with the “hereafter.” Of course, Jesus is not inferring that lesser sins than blaspheming the Holy Spirit will possibly receive forgiveness in the afterlife. Obviously, Scripture does not support this conclusion. Rather,

by a stark contrast, Jesus demonstrates the seriousness of the sin and the inability for forgiveness. In other words before one allows himself to get in such a terrible spiritual condition he had better stop and think twice!

Conclusion

Various views abound on the passage we have discussed. Faithful bible students and even preachers within our brotherhood have seen other possibilities than the interpretation presented here. Perhaps others are right in their conclusions. Contextually, however, the view presented in this article seems to be the correct one. To sum up, while the specific sin cannot be replicated today, the attitude that led to Jesus' rebuke can be replicated. May we consider our hearts so that they are not hardened by unbelief (Heb. 3:12).

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DOCTRINAL PREACHING

Smith Bibens

Doctrinal preaching is not popular these days. These days much of what passes for preaching in the denominations is worse than a waste of time. The lack of Divine doctrine and the substitution of human doctrines in the preaching insures those who may be hungering and thirsting for truth go away starving and thirsting still. Those who only want their ears tickled go away sated and happy, unwarned and unaware of their doleful spiritual condition. From many pulpits across the land one will hear the sound doctrine of Scripture sugar-coated with the opinions of men, until the Word is made palatable to the sensitive ears of those who have turned aside unto fables. The “nice talks” one hears are aimed at making men happy with themselves, rather than making them acceptable to God and prepared for the Day.

Even the Lord’s church is not immune to the growing disaffection with strong, doctrinal preaching. Some people are more interested in “pep talks,” than in the soul-testing exposition of Scripture that is the hallmark of gospel preaching. The Apostle Paul knew things would take this turn, so he warned his young compatriot Timothy,

I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables (2 Tim. 4:1-4).

An Unreasonable Complaint

One complaint is that *doctrinal preaching is divisive*. If you teach the plain truth of God's Word, exposing sin and the sham of man-made religion, you will upset people! So, should we speak only those things that offend no one? Never! If the church is afraid that strong, doctrinal preaching will offend someone, the gospel will be soft-soaped and men will continue to be lost in ignorance.

Have we forgotten the lessons of Jesus' life? If people took offense *at the truth*, then Jesus was not above offending people. Naturally, Jesus never offended anyone with a bad attitude, tactlessness, or churlish behavior on His part. When people took offense at His teaching it was because of their bad attitude toward the truth (Mt. 13:21, 53-57; Lk. 11:37-54; Jn. 6:60-66).

Jesus knew His doctrine would be divisive. "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword" (Mt. 10:34; cf. 10:34-36). Mind you, Jesus was not sanctioning religious division. He prayed for it fervently. "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me" (Jn. 17:20-21). Jesus simply acknowledges that men often divide over the truth. Some receive it and some do not. Regretfully, most do not (Mt. 7:13-14).

Doctrinal Preaching is Commanded

There are at least five compelling reasons why the church must never abandon doctrinal preaching. In the first place, doctrinal preaching is really not an option for a preacher or teacher in the Lord's church. It is an obligation. It is commanded.

When folks criticized Jesus' doctrine, He made it clear that He simply taught what God commanded. "For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak . . . whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak" (Jn. 12:49-50; cf. Jn. 14:31).

In turn, Jesus delivered His doctrine to His apostles, and commanded them to preach it to the world. “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations ... teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you” (Mt. 28:19-20). Whoever refuses the teaching of the apostles, refuses the teaching of Jesus and His Father. “He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me; and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me” (Lk. 10:16).

The commission that Jesus gave the apostles is still binding on the church today. Naturally, no one living today enjoys the promise of the immediate inspiration of the Holy Spirit. That was a promise to the apostles (Jn. 16:13; 14:26). God has not left His people without a Guide, however. He has given the church of the twenty-first century every advantage allowed by the work of the Holy Spirit, apostles, and prophets; every advantage and more that the first century church enjoyed. That gift is the written Word which preserves for all time the work of the Holy Spirit, apostles and prophets of the first century (Eph. 3:3-5; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; 1 Cor. 14:37). Using this Divine resource, the church is to be “the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim. 3:15). We cannot aid and abet the cause of truth by ignoring the Lord’s command to teach men “all things whatsoever I have commanded you.” We do not obey this command by teaching “some things” or “a few things.”

Preaching All the Counsel of God Requires Doctrinal Preaching

Secondly, doctrinal preaching is required if we are going to preach “all the counsel of God.” Before the elders of Ephesus, Paul claimed, “I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God” (Acts 20:27). Many modern preachers could not make this claim with the confidence of Paul, for fear of exposing themselves to contradiction. As Paul moved from place to place in his work, he did not sit down and figure out what topics were “taboo” in this or that congregation. He taught the same thing in every place (1 Cor. 4:17). Even though he was whipped, stoned, persecuted, and reviled for his trouble, Paul was not ashamed of the gospel of Christ (Rom. 1:16).

These days, however, some act like they are ashamed of God’s Word. He who is ashamed of the gospel today is on shaky ground. 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" (Mk. 8:38). In this "adulterous and sinful generation" we live in, condemning immorality, iniquity, and the sham of man-made religion will not make us popular, but it will make us right.

Doctrinal Preaching Prepares Men for Judgment

Thirdly, the church must preach on doctrinal issues, because men are going to be judged according to the doctrine of Jesus Christ. "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" (Jn. 12:48). When Paul charged Timothy to "Preach the Word!," he provided a compelling reason for doing so. The Lord Jesus Christ "shall judge the quick and the dead" (2 Tim. 4:1; Acts 17:31). Men need to be taught the Lord's doctrine so they can prepare themselves and escape condemnation. "Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men" (2 Cor. 5:11).

If we fail to teach men what they must do to escape condemnation, we place our souls in jeopardy. Take a close look at the Lord's message to Ezekiel in Ezekiel 3 and compare it with what Paul said in Acts 20:20-31. Paul said, "I am free from the blood of all men" (v. 26). How so Paul? "For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God" (v. 27). Timothy was admonished, "Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee" (1 Tim. 4:16).

Doctrinal Preaching Strengthens the Church

Our fourth point is a critical one these days: Christians who are constantly fed a diet of "spiritual pabulum" will always be infants in understanding. They will be spiritually weak. Remaining in spiritual infancy is carnal (1 Cor. 3:1). The Lord wants us to grow up (Eph. 4:14-15). The Hebrew brethren were rebuked for their failure to mature and they were admonished to get busy growing out of their spiritual immaturity (Heb. 5:12-6:3).

When a congregation is weak and infantile, it often proves that there has been a lack of strong, doctrinal preaching. When a congregation's leadership

places a higher priority on numbers, rather than on spiritual strength, doctrinal preaching becomes conspicuous by its absence. For fear of “driving someone away,” strong doctrinal preaching is discouraged. On the other hand, if a congregation’s leadership is keen to enhance their spiritual strength, doctrinal preaching is of first importance. Expository teaching through the New Testament, and on scriptural issues, will be the norm. Doctrinal themes will be the rule, not the exception in their pulpit. Yes, some will not tolerate this kind of teaching. It is wrong, however, to think of these as “driven off” by the preaching. They simply “. . . went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us” (1 Jn. 2:19). The result is invariably a healthier congregation, when viewed from a spiritual aspect (cf. Jn. 15:1-5).

Doctrinal Preaching is a Safeguard Against Error

Church members who are uneducated in the doctrines of Scripture are easy prey for false teachers. An example of this may be seen among the brethren who use cups and classes. As Jimmy Jividen observes in his book **Worship in Song**, a generation ago they had little to fear from the advocates of instrumental music. Preachers and teachers regularly taught on the subject from their pulpits. **A cappella** music was set forth as the pattern of Scripture. But over the years, a great silence enveloped the subject. The result? Within the last decade these brethren have seen division and discord break out in many of their congregations, because untaught members did not understand the importance of the issue and desired to embrace in fellowship those who use instrumental music. If we leave our members untaught on the issues, similar consequences will result.

The apostles warned that false teachers would arise, teaching perverse things, drawing away disciples to themselves (Acts 20:28-31; 2 Thess. 2:1-4; 2 Pet. 2:1-3; 2 Tim. 4:3-4). How shall we protect ourselves, our families, our people from such? “Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them” (Rom. 16:17; cf. Gal. 1:6-9; Rev. 22:18-19; 1 Tim. 6:3-5). The heretic cannot be properly identified and “marked” if church members have not learned the doctrine of Christ. This requires preachers, teachers, and elders to address doctrinal subjects. The church’s first line of defense is a

taught membership and a teaching pulpit. An elder in the Lord's church must "be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and convince the gainsayers" (Tit. 1:9). He does not come into possession of such a skill by ordination, but by a long period of learning and teaching before he is ordained an elder.

Conclusion

Finally, Paul said, "The things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also" (2 Tim. 2:2). If these words of Paul would be obeyed several benefits would befall the church. She would be strong for the execution of her God-given tasks. She would have men to send out into the fields to preach the gospel to the lost. She would have the resources, in preachers, teachers and elders, to edify the church and defend it from false teachers.

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BOOK REVIEWS

FOCUS: STUDYING THE LIFE OF PAUL

Everyone loves a story with a happy ending, and the happiest endings are stories where a bad person is transformed into a good person—redeemed, as it were, from their evil and turned into something good. The story of the transformation of Saul of Tarsus into the Apostle Paul is just such a story. No other name is more closely associated with the foundations of Christianity except the name of Jesus. And yet, when we first meet Saul of Tarsus in Acts, he is a fierce persecutor of the church. In his own words, he was “...formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man” (1 Tim. 1:13). We know the rest of the story. Alongside the study of the life of Christ, the study of the life of Paul is essential to grasping the New Testament. Studying Paul’s life is an vital part of the introductory work one must do when studying Acts or one of Paul’s epistles.

Just as Jesus is misrepresented and distorted in “the quest for the historical Jesus,” so too, the Paul has been slandered by modernists. Care must be employed in choosing sources of study on Paul, and this review is an attempt to give some guidance in this area. It is not exhaustive, for there are surely other excellent volumes that are beyond this reviewer’s experience. I have also kept the average reader and congregational teacher in mind as I have limited the selection for review. Some of these works have stood the test of time and are frequently reprinted. Now, to the task at hand...

The Life of St. Paul, James Stalker

If you only read one volume on Paul, make it James Stalker’s concise and well written work. It is excellent for students, young people and anyone launching into a study of Paul’s life and work. This volume is the third in James Stalker’s trilogy—**The Life of Jesus Christ, The Trial and Death of Jesus Christ**, and

The Life of St. Paul. Stalker was a renowned Scottish Presbyterian preacher whose sermons won fame for himself on both sides of the Atlantic. Stalker writes with a warmth of feeling absent in more academic works. Originally published by Fleming H. Revell early in the twentieth century, the book has been through several reprints. It is easily found in most used religious book stores and is currently published by Zondervan (ISBN 0310441811, \$13.99 paper, 160 pp.) and Kessinger Publishing (ISBN 0766106551, \$15.61 paper, 181 pp.). Since the original is out of copyright, it is also available on the Internet in both HTML and PDF formats at http://www.shilohonline.org/articles/stalker/life_of_paul.htm. The book closes with a valuable “Hints and Questions” for further study.

The Life and Epistles of St. Paul, W. J. Conybeare and J. S. Howson

Stalker says of this work, “Conybeare and Howson’s **Life and Epistles of St. Paul** will probably always keep the foremost place; in many respects it is nearly perfect; and a teacher who has mastered it will be sufficiently equipped for his work and require no further help.” Conybeare translated Paul’s epistles and speeches, and Howson wrote the historical and geographical portions. A large work, it is rich in background and “preaching” material. It is indispensable to anyone doing work on Acts or Paul’s epistles. Since 1949 the book is available from Eerdman’s in reprint (\$28 paper, 848 pp.). CenturyOne bookstore sells the Eerdman’s edition from 1987 for \$19.60 plus shipping (see web address at end of this article). This volume is easily found in used religious book stores. Some abridged and “popular” editions omit the translations and the greater part of the very extensive footnotes, but I prefer the unabridged.

Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free, F. F. Bruce (Eerdman’s, 1977)

A prolific writer, Bruce authored several commentaries, including a celebrated one on Acts, and other works that have been used as text books in college courses. His work on Paul’s life is academic and more theological and doctrinal than the foregoing. From a review in **Restoration Quarterly**: “This work shows depth of study, a familiarity with the important bibliographical material and a fairness in approach, and it provides a wealth of materials not only on Paul and his letters but also on the world of the apostle...A valuable addition to any Bible student’s library.” A chronology of Paul’s life, select bibliography, subject index and scripture index make the book useful as a reference work. The book’s dedication is a gem:

TO MY GRAND-DAUGHTERS
HELEN, ANNA, ESTHER AND WINONA MARY
AND MY GRAND-SONS

PETER, FREDERICK, ALAN AND PAUL

*bearing in mind T. R. Glover's comment on a Roman Emperor's
condemnation of the Apostle to the Gentiles—that the day was to come when
men would call their dogs Nero and their sons PAUL.*

Currently available in paperback (ISBN 0802847781, 522 pp.), CenturyOne retails for \$16.80. It is readily available used.

St. Paul the Traveller and Roman Citizen, William Ramsay

Educated at Tübingen in Germany in the modern critical approach to the Bible, Ramsay set out as a young man to demonstrate the unreliability of Luke's history in the Gospel and Acts. Before long Ramsay became an expert on Luke's writings and the life of Paul, and he was a thoroughly convinced believer in Luke's veracity as a historian. Hear Ramsay's testimony:

I may fairly claim to have entered on this investigation without any prejudice in favour of the conclusion which I shall now attempt to justify to the reader. On the contrary, I began with a mind unfavourable to it, for the ingenuity and apparent completeness of the Tübingen theory had at one time quite convinced me ... I found myself often brought in contact with the book of Acts as an authority for the topography, antiquities, and society of Asia Minor. It was gradually borne in upon me that in various details the narrative showed marvellous truth.

Ramsay authored several other works including **The Cities of St. Paul** and **The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia**. Reprinted many times over, the most recent is an edition from Kregel (2001) edited by Mark Wilson. It has over 100 color photos of the scenes of Paul's life and travels. Also readily available used, it can also be found online in HTML and PDF formats at http://www.ccel.org/ccel/ramsay/paul_roman.html.

A Harmony of the Life of St. Paul, Frank J. Goodwin (Baker, 1951)

This helpful little volume adds much to a collection of books on Paul's life. The text of Scripture (KJV) is arranged in chronological order with outlines

and a concise commentary that highlights the essential facts. Good maps, helpful outlines, several appendices giving more detail on a variety of subjects relating to Paul's work, a scripture index, an "Index of Places Visited by Paul," and "Index of Persons Connected With Paul's Life" enhance the usefulness of this excellent volume. Originally printed by the American Tract Society in 1895, the book has been reprinted numerous times by Baker Books. Easy to find in used religious bookstores, it is also available from Baker Used Books (see web address below).

Paul the Apostle, Robert E. Picirilli (Moody, 1986, 247 pp., paper)

This volume turns up frequently on the shelves of used book stores in Springfield, Missouri, because some local Bible colleges use it as a textbook. Picirilli is a professor at Free Will Baptist Bible College in Nashville, Tennessee. It is well-written, succinct and a much easier read than either Conybeare & Howson or Bruce. Picirilli frequently references the aforementioned authors and Ramsay as well. Scholarly, easily within the reading ability of the general reader, this work could serve as a first read on the Life of Paul.

The Apostle: The Life of Paul, John C. Pollock (Victor, 1985 hard cover [o/p]; 1994 paper, \$8.95).

Pollock work on Paul's life has been described as a "novelized" account. Indeed, the book reads like a modern biography. Yet it is accurate and provides a readable introduction to the Greco-Roman world and the circumstances in which Paul labored and in which his epistles were penned. Another easy read, it is used in some Bible colleges as a complement to other more scholarly approaches to Paul's history. Still available new, it also is readily available used.

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