

The Keys Of The Kingdom

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Voices from the Past

"Come On In"

P.J. Casebolt
Middlebourne, West Virginia

When Nathanael questioned the possibility of any good thing coming out of Nazareth, Philip replied, "Come and see" (Jn. 1:46).

Back in my boyhood days, before modern swimming pools became popular, we had to find our own swimming place in some creek or river. The swimming season was not limited by Memorial Day on the front end or Labor Day on the back end. You went in as early and stayed as late as you could stand it.

When some doubting Thomas questioned your selection of a swimming hole, you just said, "Come on in, water's fine." The next move was up to the skeptic.

When it comes to preaching and skeptics, I prefer the invitation, "Come on in" to the "Come and see" version. Some brethren stand at a safe distance from the pulpit to do their seeing, when they need to get right in the pulpit and test the waters under question. I've learned that it does little good to stay in the water and try to argue with some swimming coach on the bank. You don't make much progress converting the coach, and you don't get much swimming done. And you won't do much better standing in the pulpit trying to argue with some skeptic in the pew.

One brother who held an office job in a plant had it all figured out that when you figured the preacher's salary on an eight-hour-per-day, 40-hour-per-week basis, the preacher wasn't doing too badly. I informed that brother (in the business meeting), that for his information, I had stayed up until midnight the past Saturday, at his father's house, trying to convert the skeptic's future brother-in-law.

Then, the doubter switched gears, and said that a preacher wouldn't last a day at hard labor in a steel mill. Before I could answer, a new convert who was attending his first business meeting replied, "No, and if we put some of you fellows in the pulpit, the rest of us wouldn't last an hour." And I was afraid of what effect this typical business meeting skirmish would have on the faith of the new convert!

On the other end of the spectrum, that same critic's brother in the flesh held a time-study job in the same plant. He wrote an article in one of the papers, analyzing the preacher's salary as compared to the salary of a common laborer in the average plant, and the laborer came out way ahead of the preacher from a financial standpoint. Some of the brethren were ready to tar-and-feather that brother for revealing the discrepancies between the salaries of preachers and those of brethren in general.

Since I began to preach, the church has made considerable progress in the area of the preacher's wages, as well as in the area of attitude toward the work of an evangelist. But, there are still some brethren who will deliberately compare their net take-home pay (after taxes, social security, vacations, clothing allowances, pensions, hospitalization, etc.) with a preacher's gross wages which are listed on the financial report for everyone to see. When this glaring discrepancy was pointed out to one brother, he expressed surprise that a preacher had to pay federal income tax.

Some preachers live in a house provided by the brethren, and while this practice has both its advantages and disadvantages, the preacher has to figure the fair rental value of that house on his income tax. Another thing that some brethren overlook is the fact that a preacher returns a portion of his wages in the form of a contribution ("as prospered" - say 10 percent), back into the collection every week. So, the church is actually paying the preacher (say 10 percent) less than what the financial report on the bulletin board indicates.

And, this isn't "playing with figures," it is a simple statement of fact which will stand any accounting test you want to use. A preacher needs (and wants), to contribute of his prosperity like any other member, but how many brethren do you know who make a regular contribution of their wages back to the company which pays those wages? Some may purchase stocks or savings bonds, but they don't make a flat-out contribution to the treasury of the company that employs them. And remember, we aren't talking about spiritual benefits or treasures or sacrifices "laid up in heaven," we're still talking about the salaries paid and drawn here on earth.

Jobs and wages vary from area to area. Some preachers preach in depressed areas where brethren have low incomes, and some preachers preach where the economy is prosperous, or in what we call a "mission field" where the church is weak. That's why churches sent to Paul's needs while he was establishing

congregations where there were no brethren to pay his wages.

During my preaching years, I have been grossly underpaid at times, and on other occasions I have received sufficient wages. I have never been overpaid, for I will not allow that to happen. I have turned down a raise in wages with the suggestion that it be sent to some other preacher who needed it worse than did I. Most preachers are just as concerned about how the Lord's money is spent as are the brethren. Some brethren will waste the Lord's money on some material project, then try to economize when paying the preacher.

The pros and cons of the preacher's salary need to be considered, but I refuse to be drawn into a lengthy argument, and placed in the position of defending my God-given right to live of the gospel. The head of the church handed down that decision when the church was established, and we have examples from the Old Testament (Neh. 13:10-14). Some preachers have returned to secular employment rather than argue with brethren, and a few preachers were either hirelings to begin with or turned into such. But none of that changes what the Bible teaches about preaching or supporting the gospel.

Rather than argue with brethren about the preacher's salary, I just say, "Come on in, the water's fine."

But before they do, I suggest that they learn how to swim.

April 19, 1990

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The Deacons

&

What if there are no Elders or Deacons

Jim Miller
Gray, Maine

Paul wrote to the Philippians, “Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons” (Phil. 1: 1). Deacons, and bishops/elders, stand out among the saints. These men become deacons in a congregation by selection and appointment of the brethren. They are not picked by the elders or the preacher, but by the congregation. They are selected to serve on behalf of the church.

As with elders, Deacons are a rare find in the church today. The qualifications are specifically set forth in I Tim. 3:8-13 and Acts 6:3. It should come as no surprise that this work requires “wisdom” (Acts 6:3). Acts, chapter 6, shows that the work of deacons is of a material nature in the church. The deacons function is in the area of what we call benevolence physical matters in the church. The deacons make the decisions as to the How any and all physical matters are executed. The elders determine WHO and WHAT and the deacons decide the HOW.

Over the years deacons have received the short end of the stick so to speak. Committees have been formed taking over the work that deacons are charged to do. Elders often do the work that deacons should do and still other times the preacher assumes the work of the deacon. Thus the consequence is that deacons are left without any responsibility. They become nothing more than figureheads-men with a title, and nothing to do. Some think the deacon is one that only takes care of the menial task of the church. While it is the work of the deacon to see that such things as the mowing and upkeep of the grounds are done and that the building is cleaned and cared for they also share the task of things such as ushering, helping with baptisms, preparation of the lords table and in its service. Deacons also are to be part of administering to the looking after of widows, orphans and poor. These are parts of the work of the deacons. The preparation of the building-heating or ventilating must be done. There is an unlimited amount of work to be done by these men.

The nature of the deacons work might be likened to that illustrated by the function of the six men chosen to provide for the needs of the Hellenistic widows in the church at Jerusalem (Acts 6:1-7). This “multitude of the disciples” was instructed to choose men and then to appoint them over such business so that the apostles could “give themselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” This can also show us that the work of deacons should be to allow the overseers time to deal with the spiritual matters of the congregation.

It is unfortunate but, the responsibility of deacons to look after the care of the needy has been overlooked in our day and age. One of the main reason for this is we now institutionalize our needy and to this extent we have left deacons with little to do in this aspect of their duty. It seems gone are the days when the deacons saw to the needy widows of the church. Some churches today in order to ease their minds now just send a donation to some institution and let them handle the matter when in all truth it is the obligation of the church. So, why even appoint deacons if we are not going to permit them to do the work that God intended for them to do?

Deacons often have little or nothing to do because elders the seem to think they need to do all the work and they fail delegate such work to the deacons. Elders who tend the flock and and who are exercising proper oversight in exhorting sound doctrine and convicting the gainsayers have more than enough to do. The personal caring for the needy who are the obligation of the church rightfully falls to the deacon. Deacons need to let the elders do the ruling, and elders need to let the deacons do the serving, so that elders in turn may devote themselves to their duties, and not be burdened down serving tables. This is God's plan, and it will work if we use it. Keep in mind they were selected by the “multitude of the disciples” which indicates that each church should select its own deacons and to appoint them over such business. It also indicates that they were given the authority to act, and to make decisions in regard to the specific details involved in discharging their duties.

***No Elders, No Deacons,
Just A Preacher?***

Unfortunately many churches especially the smaller congregation's of today have no elders or deacons at all. This is not to say that churches without elders and deacons can not exist and work but they should never be content to stay that

way. The lack of teaching our men from a young age the importance of upright living and a true love of God and the church has led to a real shortage of qualified men to fill these positions. This is how pawning off all the work on the preacher got started. If there are no elders and deacons then this duty in part must fall to the men of the congregation.

So now the question must be asked what is to be done?

Since there are areas in the church where we have the right, and the need, of deciding what to do. Certain matters of expediency in carrying out the work of a local congregation must be addressed. Decisions must be made for the efficient, continuing and successful functioning church. As an example: teaching is necessary (Eph. 4:11-16). It is the work God "gave" the church. So, who is to teach? How are the classes to function? What materials will be chosen to use? None of this is outlined in the Bible. God gave the church the work to be done but He did not spell out the details or the means or expedients by which to do so this is a function of the elders and deacons. There are many things that must be planned and arranged that are not matters of faith, but rather, matters of expediency hence we have business meetings to decide such matters.

There is no specific command that I can find for a congregation's men to conduct a business meeting. No outline of any kind of procedure to follow when conducting said meeting. We do know that as Christians all things must be done "decently and in order." So this is where things get dicey so to speak, because most want to dump it all in the preachers lap and we have seen already that this is not his position to take. So, we necessarily infer that some manner of deciding the business of the church must be arranged. This is far from the scriptural example given but still necessary.

There is only one incident I know of that comes close to what we call today the "business meeting." This would be the meeting of the Jerusalem brethren to consider the needs of Grecian Jewish widows who had been neglected (Acts 6:1-3). The text says, *V2: Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. V3: Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.* We see action was taken and the results were immediately apparent. This example though different in some aspects I believe might be a model for us to follow in holding meetings in the churches of today. These brethren were not brought together just to talk, they met in order to take appropriate action to remedy the problem.

There is an outline that may be followed that is a good example of what should be the practice in meetings where serious problems requiring immediate attention can be dealt with. This scenario is what the apostles and brethren of the first century did when faced with some important questions:

- First define the problem. Be sure that all present understand the problem. Allow suggested solutions by all to be put forward. This will put the concerted wisdom of the group toward solving that problem. Everyone needs to have a voice in the matter and should be listened to thoughtfully and without negative comment. Allowing a free exchange of ideas is the goal. Discuss all the alternatives to see if they actually solve the problem or create other difficulties. A consensus is what is being sought.

Remember the teaching of 1 Corinthians 1:10 - *"that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment"*. We know the Lord commanded this of us "His" people, and that it is possible!

Develop the plan and then assign those responsible to put the plan into effect. Carry through on the plan immediately. Anything worth doing is worth doing right. And if it is worth doing right, then it is worth doing right then! If we only talk of business, then we are, in effect not holding business meetings at all. The result of our meetings has to be prompt, decisive action, then and only then - are we following the apostolic examples.

All scripture quoted is from the KJV unless other wise stated.

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The Keys Of The Kingdom 10

God is Sovereign

Eric Farrior
Freeport, Florida

In the previous article (“Who is God”), we learned about the holy nature of God. We will continue to study the nature of God and gain a better understanding of who He is and why we should submit to Him!

After learning of His holiness, we can truly understand WHY He is Sovereign. Merriam-Webster defines “sovereign” as: Supreme in power; possessing supreme dominion; as a sovereign ruler of the universe.

God is absolute in power and authority, having dominion over ALL, notice: *And at the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the most High, and I praised and honoured him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation: And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou* (Dan. 4:34-35)? Of His power, Brother Frank Chesser said this “Sovereignty denotes power: absolute, unmitigated, unlimited authority. God alone is sovereign. His scepter over all that is cannot be challenged. Satan and his hosts attempted to defy God’s sovereign rule. There was no literal war in heaven. There was not a single battle, not even a skirmish. Scarcely had their hearts entertained the thought of defiance than they were expelled from that heavenly realm with more swiftness than a lightning’s strike. For God did not spare “the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into the chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment” (2 Peter 2:4). (1)

A rebellious king learned a powerful lesson regarding the absolute sovereignty of God over His creation. Pharaoh, King of Egypt responded to the commands of God (as given thru Moses- Exod. 5:1, cf. Exod. 4:15) to release His people with the following words in Deut. 5:2: “*Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the LORD, neither will I let Israel go.*” It is difficult to conceive such an

attitude of arrogance and presumption! God would use this attitude to teach a valuable lesson. God's commands persisted and terrible plagues were seen in the land of Egypt, all of this working toward the "hardening of Pharaoh's heart" (Exod. 8:15, cf. Rom. 9:18). His continued refusal to release the children of Israel would allow God to further demonstrate (to all the world, cf. Josh. 2:10, 9:9) His sovereignty by destroying the military might of Egypt in the crushing depths of the Red Sea (Exod. 14:20-31). As the dead bodies of the Egyptians washed up at the feet of the children of Israel, it was understood and acknowledged regarding the God of heaven that there is none "*like unto thee*" (v15)!

Notice that His absolute authority has been demonstrated over:

#1- All creation- By creating the heavens and the earth "Ex nihilo"- Gen. 1:1ff

#2- Man's life and his forfeiture thereof for rebellion- Rendering just punishment for continually evil thoughts- Gen. 6 (cf. V5)

#3- Over the earth itself- Causing Korah to perish in a manner "uncommon to man" (Num. 16:29). *And it came to pass, as he had made an end of speaking all these words, that the ground clave asunder that was under them: And the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up, and their houses, and all the men that appertained unto Korah, and all their goods. They, and all that appertained to them, went down alive into the pit, and the earth closed upon them: and they perished from among the congregation* (Num. 16:31-33).

#4- Over death- His power was displayed: *Jesus said, Take ye away the stone. Martha, the sister of him that was dead, saith unto him, Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been dead four days. Jesus saith unto her, Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God? Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead was laid. And Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me. And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth. And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go* (Jn. 11:39-44).

#5- Over Sin- Jesus had power to forgive sins, notice: *And when he saw their*

faith, he said unto him, Man, thy sins are forgiven thee. And the scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, Who is this which speaketh blasphemies? Who can forgive sins, but God alone? But when Jesus perceived their thoughts, he answering said unto them, What reason ye in your hearts? Whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Rise up and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power upon earth to forgive sins, (he said unto the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy couch, and go into thine house. And immediately he rose up before them, and took up that whereon he lay, and departed to his own house, glorifying God. And they were all amazed, and they glorified God, and were filled with fear, saying, We have seen strange things to day (Lk. 5:20-26).

Now, since God has power to forgive sins, don't you think you ought to listen to what He has to say about it? The only way God will forgive man's sins is when man submits to God in the obedience of faith, notice: *But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness (Rom. 6:17-18).* This is in perfect harmony with the teaching of the New Testament, since the gospel is God's power to save (Rom. 1:16-17) and those who obey it are forgiven of sin and added to the one and only church of Christ (cf. Acts 2:38, 41,47)!

#6- Over ALL nations and lands- Not just the nations of Israel- God proved His authority was not limited to Jerusalem, revealing His glory to the prophet in Babylonian Captivity- *And the hand of the LORD was there upon me; and he said unto me, Arise, go forth into the plain, and I will there talk with thee. Then I arose, and went forth into the plain: and, behold, the glory of the LORD stood there, as the glory which I saw by the river of Chebar: and I fell on my face (Ezek. 3:22-23, "all the earth is mine" – Exod. 19:5b).*

Who is God? God is holy... Who is God? God is the absolute Sovereign of all creation. He has displayed His unmitigated authority over all and if man knows what is good for him, he will trust and obey!

(All Scripture from KJV unless otherwise noted)

Footnotes:

1. Chesser, F. (2010). *Voyage of faith* (p. 31). Huntsville, Alabama: Publishing Designs

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Cloyd Frock

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Nero (Part 3)

Tim Bench

Abilene, Texas

“Now Nero called Sporus "Sabina" not merely because, owing to his resemblance to her he had been made a eunuch, but because the boy, like the mistress, had been solemnly married to him in Greece, Tigellinus giving the bride away, as the law ordained. All the Greeks held a celebration in honour of their marriage, uttering all the customary good wishes, even to the extent of praying that legitimate children might be born to them. After that Nero had two bedfellows at once, Pythagoras to play the rôle of husband to him, and Sporus that of wife. The latter, in addition to other forms of address, was termed "lady," "queen," and "mistress." Yet why should one wonder at this, seeing that Nero would fasten naked boys and girls to stakes, and then putting on the hide of a wild beast would attack them and satisfy his brutal lust under the appearance of devouring parts of their bodies? Such were the indecencies of Nero.”

From Cassius Dio, Roman History, LXII, 13.

“He so prostituted his own chastity that after defiling almost every part of his body, he at last devised a kind of game, in which, covered with the skin of some wild animal, he was let loose from a cage and attacked the private parts of men and women, who were bound to stakes, and when he had sated his mad lust, was dispatched by his freed man Doryphorus; for he was even married to this man in the same way that he himself had married Sporus, going so far as to imitate the cries and lamentations of a maiden being deflowered. I have heard from some men that it was his unshaken conviction that no man was chaste or pure in any part of his body, but that most of them concealed their vices and cleverly drew a veil over them; and that therefore he pardoned all other faults in those who confessed to him their lewdness.”

(Suetonius, “The Life of Nero”, XXIX).

“Although at first his acts of wantonness, lust, extravagance, avarice and cruelty were gradual and secret, and might be condoned as follies of youth, yet even then their nature was such that no one doubted that they were defects of character and not due to his time of life. No sooner was twilight over than he

would catch up a cap or a wig and go to the taverns or range about the streets playing pranks, which however were very far from harmless; for he used to beat men as they came home from dinner, stabbing any who resisted him and throwing them into the sewers...Little by little, however, as his vice grew stronger, he dropped jesting and secrecy and with no attempt at disguise openly broke out into worse crime...Besides abusing freeborn boys and seducing married women, he debauched the vestal virgin Rubria. The freedwoman Acte he all but made his lawful wife, after bribing some ex-consuls to perjure themselves by swearing that she was of royal birth. He castrated the boy Sporus and actually tried to make a woman of him; and he married him with all the usual ceremonies, including a dowry and a bridal veil, took him to his house attended by a great throng, and treated him as his wife.

And the witty jest that some made is still current, that it would have been well for the world if Nero's father Domitius had had that kind of wife.

This Sporus, decked out with the finery of the empresses and riding in a litter, he took with him to the assizes and marts of Greece, and later at Rome through the Street of Images, fondly kissing him from time to time. That he even desired a sexual relationship with his own mother, and was kept from it by her enemies, who feared that such a relationship might give the reckless and insolent woman too great influence, was notorious, especially after he added to his concubines a courtesan who was said to look very like Agrippina. Even before that, so they say, whenever he rode in a litter with his mother, he had incestuous relations with her, which were betrayed by the stains on his clothing....”

Quoted “The Life of Nero”, XXIIX from Suetonois.

“In A.D. 67 Nero ordered Sporus, a free man, to be castrated and then married to him. He allowed the boy to take the role of "bride" while Nero played the "groom." After extravagant public ceremonies that were celebrated in both Greece and Rome, they lived together as supposed "husband" and "wife." According to Tacitus, Nero engaged in "every filthy, depraved act, licit or illicit." from “Nero and Roman Emperors Partook in Same-Sex "Marriage": Depraved Practices Were Banned by Theodosian Code”, by Craig Turner, Christian Newswire, 3-25-2013.

“The practice of homosexuality in the Roman Empire had increased during the early years until the Romans accepted and adopted the pederasty of the Greeks (fornication with boys ages 12 to 18). Though at first the acts were considered acceptable only if the boy was a slave, the Romans eventually extended their tolerance of homosexual acts to adult men, both free and slave. Same-sex marriage, once unthinkable, was not far behind.

Early Roman poets and critics wrote about the practice, from Juvenal's satire that mentions Gracchus, who "arrayed himself in the flounces and train and veil of a bride," to Martial, a first-century poet who observed that homosexual marriage was not uncommon in the empire during the first century. Both Juvenal and Martial gave us accounts of men who "played the bride" in wedding ceremonies, wearing bridal veils like women.

But our most detailed images of homosexual marriages come from the descriptions of Roman emperors. Nero, a depraved first-century emperor, married at least two men. He wed Pythagoras in a formal same-sex wedding by first putting on a bridal veil that made Nero the "bride" and Pythagoras the "groom." Every symbol of a classical marriage was present at this ceremony: a dowry, marriage bed, torches, and witnesses. Tacitus, the great Roman historian who records the event, even alludes to the fact that Nero engaged in coitus with the man in front of all the guests, stating that "everything was public which even in a natural union is veiled by night." from "Same-Sex "Marriage": The Roman Emperors" by Craig Turner, Fitzgerald Griffin Foundation.

“Much has been said on the subject of Nero’s rapacious and depraved sexual appetite, particularly by Gaius Petronius...The orgies arranged by Petronius for Nero’s satisfaction reached spectacular levels of debauchery, typically involving hundreds of prostitutes and mass incidents of sodomy and torture. Apart from his allegedly incestuous relationship with his mother, Nero was said to enthusiastically participate in both homosexual and heterosexual rape. One of his favourite activities was to have male and female slaves tied naked to stakes; he would then dress himself up in animal skins and savage their genitals like a wild beast. At one point, Nero had a favourite male lover, Pythagoras, castrated and dressed up in women’s clothing. He then scandalised Rome by “marrying” Pythagoras in a mock ceremony held in front of the court. Supposedly, the couple were often seen out and about in public, kissing and embracing. “

From “Despot of the Week #2-Nero”, 8-3-2009, *The Inquirer*.

"He had received the finest of pagan philosophical educations, and yet he degenerated into one of the worst conceivable men. He visited brothels, frequently in disguise. He practised, as one historian says, "lewdness on boys... striking, wounding, murdering." He took a mistress. He wanted to have an affair with her and his wife objected. What do you do in a case like that? Well, it should be obvious to any and all: you simply kill your wife! - Which is what he did. But his mother objected. So he killed his mother. But he wasn't completely without feeling. In fact, when he looked down on her corpse at her funeral he said, "I did not know I had so beautiful a mother."

And so he married his mistress. Then one day she made the sad mistake of nagging him because he came home late from the races. She was in the latter stages of pregnancy. Nero kicked her in the stomach, killing both her and the child. Keep in mind, this was the ruler of the world at that time!".
From "What if Jesus had never been born?" by James Kennedy and Jerry Newcomb, page 160.

One can only imagine the sufferings Sporus and others endured at the hands of Nero. 20 On a wider scale, there seemed to be no degree of immorality to which Nero would not descend in order to fulfill his own wants, wishes, and political ambitions.

We will continue with part Four next month.....

The Church in Revelation – The Challenge to Be Overcomers (Part. 2)

Scott D. Crawford
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We will pick up where we left off last month and begin with the church at Thyatira.

At, **Thyatira** (Rev. 2:18-29) – seen as the Corrupt Church, the church where Jezebel was a member – is the only congregation whose love is commended. The church in Thyatira was a working, loving, helping, trusting, unwavering congregation; a congregation that was improving as time progressed (2:19). Yet for all these wonderful characteristics, the church at Thyatira had perhaps fallen prey to a similar problem as the Corinthians – letting sin remain out of a false sense of love and/or a non-judgmental spirit (1 Cor. 5:1, 2). They were obviously tolerating the woman referred to as Jezebel in their midst, a woman that claimed to be a prophetess, teaching the servants of God to depart from the true path, to engage in sexual immorality, and to partake in idols (Rev. 2:20); and yet, the Lord had even tried to give this woman and her followers time to repent of their error (2:21, 22). How great is the mercy of our God! We can only pray that those that had not given into the error of this woman took themselves from under her yoke.

It's interesting that in the letter to the church in **Sardis** (Rev. 3:1-6), along with the letter to the Laodiceans; receive no commendation from the Lord. Sardis was in the worst of situations, they appeared alive from the outside but on the inside they were dead (3:1). This brings to mind one of the woes spoken by Jesus, that the scribes and Pharisees were like whitewashed tombs – beautiful on the outside yet full of dead men's bones and uncleanness on the inside (Matt. 23:37). These people could not only be called the Dead Church, but also the Sleeping Church. Twice in the history of Sardis the city had been overtaken – once by Cyrus in 549 B.C., and then by Antiochus the Great in 218 B.C. – because of failing to keep an adequate watch.¹¹ So when Jesus reminds them to be watchful, they should have been taking a lesson from their own history to reinforce the *“the things which remain, that are ready to die”* (3:2). Watchfulness is commanded more than once (Matt. 24:42; Luke 12:39, 40; Rom. 13:11; 1 Thess. 5:6; 1 Pet. 1:13) and we should follow that command lest we

also should be overtaken in our sleep by the enemy.

The church in **Philadelphia** (Rev. 3:7-13) is also referred to as the Faithful Church, and along with the church in Smyrna are the only congregations not rebuked for some problem. True to James 2:18, the Philadelphians showed their faithfulness by their deeds, and yet this faithfulness occurs in a congregation described as having “*little power*” (3:8). There are speculations about the nature of Philadelphia’s little power. Were they small in number, have a scarcity of natural talent, or perhaps poor in worldly goods? Whatever the “little power” was this congregation didn’t use their weakness as an excuse to do nothing; rather, they were doing what they could with what they had. They were living up to the truth given to Paul by the Lord, “*My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness*” (2 Cor. 12:9). It has been noted that the Lord’s followers have never been in the majority: Abraham and the 318 (Gen. 14:14-16), Gideon and the 300 (Jud. 7:19-23), and Elijah alone was more than a match for the 450 prophets of Baal (1 Ki. 18:21-40).¹² The words of Jesus should ever be echoing in our ears, “*Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom*” (Luke 12:32), and “*Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord*” (Matt. 25:21).

The church in **Laodicea** (Rev. 3:14-22), the final of the Seven Churches of Asia addressed, receives the most striking condemnation of all – they were lukewarm. This congregation was addressed more than just in Revelation. Paul appears to have had personal contact with the Laodiceans (Col. 2:1), and even encouraged the Colossians to forward their letter to the Laodiceans and read the letter sent to the Laodiceans in turn (Col. 4:16). They were a center for banking, producers of black wool used for textiles, and access to medical treatment and medicinal hot springs.¹³ From the outside the Laodiceans appeared to have it all, and yet despite their worldly blessings Jesus tells them “*you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked*” (3:17). What a tragedy that an assembly of the Lord’s people with all the worldly resources available at the time didn’t seem able to put their hand to the plow (Luke 9:62) or commit themselves to being profitable servants of God by pressing forward in His work (Phil. 3:19). How heartbreaking that this assembly supposed themselves to be in a safe state, but as Adam Clarke said, “*They rested in what they had already received, and seemed to think that once in grace must be still in grace*”¹⁴ – an erroneous conclusion propagated by many denominations to this very day.

Second, each of the congregations discussed above was given a promise; a wonderful and enduring promise of better things. To the loveless church in Ephesus the Spirit says, *“To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God”* (Rev. 2:7). The persecuted church in Smyrna was told that *“He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death”* (2:11). The compromising church in Pergamos was told that *“To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it.”* (2:17). To those faithful in Thyatira the Son of God says, *“And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations— ‘He shall rule them with a rod of iron; They shall be dashed to pieces like the potter’s vessels’ — as I also have received from My Father: and I will give him the morning star”* (2:26-29). From the dead congregation in Sardis to those that have *“not defiled their garments”* (Rev. 3:4) the promise is given that *“He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels”* (3:6). To the wonderfully faithful church in Philadelphia comes one of the most beautiful images: *“He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name”* (3:12). Even the lukewarm church in Laodicea was given a promise, *“To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne”* (3:21). The one part that we did not see in each of these admonitions was the final instruction: *“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches”* (Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). Doesn’t that sound familiar? Jesus used these same words in the Gospels in an effort to grab the listener’s attention; in essence saying, “Hey, listen up!”

Each congregation is encouraged to be overcomers, and that means there were obstacles to be faced and a goal to be attained. James is quick to remind us that we should expect trials in our life and that those trials and temptations can be endured: *“Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him”* (Jam. 1:12). Paul likens our Christian life to a race more than once in his writings. In 1 Corinthians 9:25 he says, *“And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown.”* Being told that we should

be temperate means to avoid the excesses of this life which too often become the temptations that weigh us down. Then the Hebrews writer – almost as if on cue – appeals to us to lay aside our obstacles: *“Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us”* (Heb. 12:1). The Churches in Revelation faced obstacles yes, but the Church in every time has faced, does face, and will face obstacles. Hey! Listen up!

Each congregation is also given a promise IF they overcome. We see that each of these congregations is involved in the action of “overcoming,” an action that the Greek indicates is continuous.¹⁵ When we speak about being involved in the struggle to be overcomers the words of Paul stick out like a sore thumb: *“Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified”* (1 Cor. 9:26, 27). Paul reminds Timothy to continue in the doctrine so that he and those that are taught might be saved (1 Tim. 4:16); therefore, those that do not continue in the doctrine put their salvation in jeopardy. John plainly says, *“Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but that we may receive a full reward”* (2 John 8). Just like those congregations in Revelation, we must constantly be working toward our goal – salvation. Too many in the world today feel they cannot lose what they have gained, yet Paul and John don’t seem to agree with that position. Hey! Listen up!

Each congregation is also addressed as the church. One shouldn’t let that simple fact be elusive. The church in Corinth, the problem child of the NT, struggled with factions, spiritual immaturity, egotism, irreverence, and sexual immorality – and that’s without even being specific. Those people had taken the system and broken it, and still the Holy Spirit thru Paul addresses them as *“the church of God ... saints”* (1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:1) and *“brethren”* (1 Cor. 1:10; 2 Cor. 1:8). The church in Galatians had its own problems. They were not only beset with Judaizing teachers, but had been turned away from the true gospel (Gal. 1:6). They were congregation of the Lord’s people once on the path, but now wandering from it and still, the Galatians are referred to as *“brethren”* (Gal. 1:11). Those seven churches in Asia addressed in Revelation by Jesus the Christ are wandering, being persecuted, compromising, and being corrupted. The two worst of the group, the dead church in Sardis and the lukewarm church in Laodicea, still have some in them that have *“not defiled their garments,”* and

others are told they still have time to open the door so the Lord may come in and “*dine with him.*” The congregation where one worships may have flaws, but it is the desire of God that when those flaws are made manifest, repentance and restoration should follow. Hey! Listen up!

Maybe we can look at these congregations and see some of the qualities we should also be manifesting in our congregation today. Unlike the Ephesians let us move on to a greater love for both God and man (Matt. 22:37-39; 1 John 4:20, 21). Just like that assembly meeting in Smyrna, we should be ready for some suffering to enter our lives (Matt. 5:10-12; 1 Pet. 4:14). Unlike the church in Pergamos, we should always stand for the truth as presented in the Word of God (John 17:17; 2 Tim. 3:16, 17). Whereas many in the church in Thyatira let themselves be led away into immoral practices, we should always strive for more purity (Matt. 5:8; Titus 1:15). Unlike the church in Sardis, let us strive to be alive and working for the Lord until the hour of His return (Luke 9:62; Phil. 3:13). Like that wonderful congregation in Philadelphia, let us view the open door set before us as an opportunity to partake in the evangelistic mission of the Church (Matt. 28:19, 20; Col. 4:2-4). Finally, where Laodicea was lukewarm, let us dedicate ourselves entirely to the Lord for His glory (Matt. 10:27, 28; 1 Cor. 15:58).

If the Lord were to draft a letter – or maybe send an email – to the congregation you attend what would He say? What would He say you are doing right? What a wonderful thing it would be to be directly commended by the Lord, but that certainly shouldn’t give us license to rest and relax. What would He say needs more work? One of the greatest flaws in any group of people working together for a common goal is for the individual to think, “Well, someone will take care of that.” Brothers and Sisters – be someone.

All Scriptures taken from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted.

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Learning to Give an Answer (2)

John P. Mabrey
Hilham, Tennessee

Prophecy of the church fulfilled:

“When a prophet speaketh in the name of the Lord, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him.” (Deut. 18:22)

“The prophet which prophesieth of peace, when the word of the prophet shall come to pass, then shall the prophet be known, that the Lord hath truly sent him.” (Jer. 28:9)

In the previous section of this article we examined many prophecies in regards to the Lord’s church. We now need to investigate to see whether these prophecies are true or false. We can only do that by examining scriptures that were written after these prophecies were made. Please remember that the purpose of these articles is to prepare Christians to give an answer to people that question our doctrinal practices in the churches of Christ. It is very important to be able to answer “any man that asketh” in order to refute false doctrine.

Let us begin on the day of Pentecost (about 50 days following our Lord’s resurrection). Remember, at the time Jesus was crucified, Jesus had still not built his church, but when he arose from the grave, he later appeared to his apostles and charged them to: *“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you alway even to the end of the world. Amen. (Matt. 28:19-20)* These words conclude the book of Matthew, but what did the apostles do after that? In the opening chapter of the book of Acts, we find the Lord still speaking with the apostles. *“And being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which saith he, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.” (Acts 1:4-5)*

Jesus also told his apostles in verse 8: “...ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.” Still, at this point in time, the church had not yet been established. Then, we go to the 2nd chapter of the book of Acts and we begin to see the “promise” revealed.

Jesus had promised them “power” after the Holy Ghost had come upon them. Is this prophecy true? Look at Acts 2:4—*“And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.”* The sad part about the fulfillment of this scripture is that the men observing this event accused the apostles of being drunk. (Acts 2:13) But then, Peter stood up to preach, and in verse 16 he begins to unravel the prophecy of Joel when he said: *“But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel.”* (Acts 2:16) Then, in verses 17-21 he quotes the prophet Joel from Joel 2:28-32. Is there any doubt that when Peter said “this is that” that “that was that?” It seems clear that Peter knew exactly what the prophet Joel was talking about. What Peter is saying here is: We are witnessing the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy. But, let us continue looking in Acts 2.

After Peter preaches a scathing accusatory sermon (that is, accusing them of crucifying our Lord and Savior) to the Jews that were gathered there to celebrate the feast of Pentecost, it is said that they were “pricked in their hearts” and said to the apostles “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” (Acts 2:37) Peter then responds in verse 38 by telling them to *“Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for remission of sins and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.”*

Now, notice here what happens in verse 41 and 42: *“Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.”* Follow this thought on through verse 47 and we see the activity that continued. *“Praising God, and having favor with all the people, And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.”* Jesus kept his promise to build his church. On the day of Pentecost the church was born. God has given man an avenue through which his soul can be saved. Here in verses 37-47 we see the culmination of all of those Old Testament prophecies come to life in the fulfillment of a promise that God had made to man from the beginning of his

creation. That's right. From creation! But, is this the only evidence that exists within the scripture that the church is now established and is now alive? Let us see.

In the book of Ephesians Paul writes concerning the church, that it is a mystery that has been revealed. Eph. 3:2-5—*“If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery: (as I wrote afore in few words, Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit:”* Again in verses 10-12 we find compelling evidence that the church is that “mystery” that was revealed: *“And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord: In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him.”*

Paul also wrote to the Roman Christians concerning this revealed “mystery” in Romans 16:25-26. *“Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which has been kept secret since the world began. But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith:”*

Now folks, at the risk of overstating the obvious, (and in no wise wishing to insult anyone's intelligence) once a mystery has been revealed, it is no longer a mystery. Once a secret has been revealed, it is no longer a secret. The church is here and it is here to stay till God shall say our time is up on this terrestrial ball known as earth.

So, what and where is the origin of the church? It began in the mind of God from creation. It was prophesied by the prophets of old. Jesus proclaimed that he would build it. And, we can see clearly that it was established on the day of Pentecost in Acts chapter 2. In retrospect, Paul wrote of the great “mystery” that God kept hid from the world, but is now revealed to all nations of the world in the scripture for our obedience to it. We have seen that in Acts 2, that the saved

are in the church and there are no saved people outside the church. My friend, are you in the Lord's church? If not, why not? (We will discuss entry into the Lord's church in a later article.)

Next month (Lord willing) we will look at answers we need to know concerning “authority.”

All scripture quoted is from the KJV unless otherwise stated.

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Identifying Marks of the Church of Christ

Doug Post
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What makes the Lord's church different than others claiming to be His church? What distinguishes His church from counterfeits? Why is the church of Christ different than denominational churches? Luke reveals some identifying marks for us to consider:

Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the LORD our God shall call. And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation. Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved (Acts 2:37-47).

THE IDENTIFYING MARK OF EVANGELISM

The church of Christ is an evangelistic church. The people of God have been given the responsibility of bringing the saving gospel of Christ to a lost and dying world. We note that in Acts 2, Peter and the rest of the apostles are beginning the spread of the gospel message of Christ into all the world (Matthew.28:19-20). The Will of the Lord was that this message would begin Jerusalem and then spread world-wide (Acts 1:8). The responsibility didn't end with the apostles but was to continue down through the ages with every successive generation of Christians: "And 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 Timothy 2:2). Of course, Jesus stated the principle of evangelism very clearly saying, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel” (Mark 16:15). While the Great Commission was given to the apostles, the principle of reaching the lost, no matter who they are and where they are, is applied to the church. Paul said the church was to make the “**manifold wisdom of God**” known to the world (Ephesians 3:10). In providing an explanation of the Parable of the “Wheat and Tares,” Jesus stated that the field where the seed was to be spread was the “**world**” (Matthew 13:38). Since the sower in this Parable is Jesus, how then did He go into the world preaching the word? Did Jesus literally go into entire world? No! Rather His spreading of the seed among the field or world was accomplished through the agency of others preaching on His behalf, namely the apostles. In fact Jesus never did leave the region of Judea yet Paul tells us that Christ came and preached peace to the Ephesians (Ephesians 2:17). How did Jesus preach to the Ephesians when He never left Judea? Through the preaching of Paul and others. We are also told that Jesus preached to the “**spirits in prison**” during the time of Noah (1 Peter 3:18-21). Did Jesus literally preach to the folks of the antediluvian period? No. Rather, Noah preached to the people when He was preparing the ark, because Noah was a preacher of righteousness (2 Peter 2:5). Through Christ’s Spirit Noah preached. In like manner, the Great Commission given to the apostles, was designed to be continued into the world through the agency of the church, because evangelism is a mark of the church of Christ.*

THE IDENTIFYING MARK OF REPENTANCE AND BAPTISM

The evangelistic message of the church is founded upon “repentance” and “baptism.” Again, Jesus said:

Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen (Matthew 28:19-20).

And:

And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every

creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:15-16).

In his gospel account, Luke writes:

And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem (Luke 24:46-47).

In the book of Acts, which was Luke’s follow up or “part 2” of His gospel account entitled “Luke,” he writes: *“Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins ...”* (Acts 2:38). From these passages we see that repentance and baptism was to continue to be preached. We know this applies to everyone (both Jew and Gentile), since Peter specifically says that *“God put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith”* (Acts 15:9). In other words, God made no distinction between Jew and Gentile but each had their hearts purified the same way – through “THE FAITH.” It is interesting to note that in the Greek text there is a definite article (“the”) before the word “faith,” which tells us that “the faith” or the word of God purified their hearts in the same way (see 1 Peter 1:22-25) – through the instruction offered them. To the Jews Peter said “repent and be baptized” and to the Gentiles the same exact message was provided (Acts 10:47-48, 11:18). The teaching of “repentance” and “baptism” is an identifying mark of the church of Christ.

THE IDENTIFYING MARK OF THE APOSTLES DOCTRINE

Another identifying mark is Apostolic Teaching. The first century Christians were dedicated to the truth. One of the major problems facing the church today is that of a lack of teaching – sound biblical teaching. Many preachers and elders allow their congregations to go through this life hearing only “feel good” sermons. However, the preaching of the gospel demands that sin be taught so people can actually identify sin and avoid it. Confrontational sermons are rarely taught, and by confrontational I mean sermons that demand change be made to one’s life-style, or to worship practices, or to their false assumptions and understanding of doctrine. Doctrinal teaching is not only part of God’s grace, but is that which His grace requires. Paul says, *“For the grace of God that bringeth*

salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world” (Titus 2:11-12). Here we learn that the religion of Christ is a teaching religion. We also learn that grace given to us saves us through instruction. From a negative aspect grace teaches us to deny “ungodliness” and “worldly lusts,” and from a positive aspect it teaches us to “live soberly, righteously and godly.” That is, grace instructs us to be faithful, but grace can only instruct us through His Word. Therefore, it is imperative that doctrine be taught and understood since we will all be judged by it (John 12:48). Doctrine is necessary for a Christian to maintain his or her faith, “*So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God*” (Romans 10:17). It is *the faith*, which produces one’s personal convictions or faith, and should a Christian fail to continue walking in *the faith* their faith will become unbelief (Hebrews 3:19). Moreover, not abiding in *the faith* will cause one to be moved from hope and the grace of God (Colossians 1:22-23). The church of Christ must be devoted to the doctrine of the apostles: “*And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers*” (Acts 2:42), which is the doctrine of Christ (2 John 9). It is to this doctrine the church of Christ must yield to and teach.

THE IDENTIFYING MARK OF *FELLOWSHIP*

We also learn that the first century church of Christ devoted themselves to “fellowship.” This has to do with godly relationships, or relationships that God desires. For instance, those who were in fellowship with each other were ones who devoted themselves to “**the apostles’ doctrine**” and to evangelizing the lost, teaching them to repent and be baptized. Moreover, they devoted themselves to the Lord’s Supper and to prayer (Acts 2:42). Christians who are not devoted to these things do not and cannot have fellowship with devoted Christians. John writes: “*But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin*” (1 John 1:7). Therefore, having fellowship with God and with one another is conditioned upon one walking in the light. The concept of walking means being devoted to the word of God. It carries the idea of faithfulness as one continues “abiding” or “remaining” in the Word of God (John 8:31; Colossians 1:23; 1 John 2:3-6; cf. Acts 2:42). It also carries the idea of

continued obedience to the apostles' doctrine or doctrine of Christ. Should a Christian not remain faithful to Christ and his Word, then he or she needs to be corrected (Galatians 6:1-2; 2 Timothy 4:2). However, should a person reject instruction (the instruction of grace – Titus 2:12), then fellowship needs to be withheld until the sinning individual repents of their wayward path of darkness.

THE IDENTIFYING MARK OF *THE LORD'S SUPPER*

When Luke records that the early Christians devoted themselves to “**the breaking of the bread,**” he was referring to the Lord's Supper. The communion of the bread and fruit of the vine were central to the early church in remembering and proclaiming the Lord's death until He comes again (1 Corinthians 11:26). It was central because it was the one thing that Jesus commanded to do in remembrance of Him (11:24). We know that the early church continued to partake of the Lord's Supper on every first day of the week (Acts 20:7), which was called the Lord's Day (Revelation 1:10). The Lord's Supper is significant for three reasons:

1. It looks back at the cross.
2. It both symbolizes, creates, and enhances unity.
3. It causes us to wait and watch for His return, understanding we have souls to save.

The cross is a symbol of loss. It is a shameful object, because Jesus had to be crucified upon it. It is where our own shame, guilt, and sin are nailed (Colossians 2:14; Ephesians 2:14). Yet, Christ's death enable us to have a new beginning. As Christians, who have repented and were baptized, we have received the promise of the forgiveness of sins. In fact, we have received all spiritual blessings (Ephesians 1:3). As we continue to walk in the light, the blood of Jesus keeps on cleansing us (1 John 1:7). When we collectively participate in partaking of the Lord's Supper we are proclaiming to ourselves, to the world, and to God, that Christ died for our sins (1 Corinthians 11:26), and we do this every Sunday (Lord's Day) until He returns.

The Lord's Supper symbolizes unity among believers and with Christ. We share together in the blood and body of our Lord (1 Corinthians 10:16-17). It is because we partake of the bread and fruit of the vine we have unity. Or to put it another way, Christ's death upon the cross provides the unity the church needs. This collective remembrance binds us together even stronger, because of the commonality we all share – we all need the cleansing power of Christ's blood. We all needed the death of our Lord upon the cross. We all need forgiveness. It is here that we share in seeing our own vulnerabilities, weaknesses, and failures and at the same time, we see victory, cleansing, revival, rejuvenation, which can only be made possible through the blood of Jesus Christ. Indeed, the Lord's Supper is an identifying mark of the church of Christ.

THE IDENTIFYING MARK OF *PRAYER*

The early church believed in prayer. There are few things stressed more in the book of Acts than the reality of God's work in answering prayer. The first century Christians devoted themselves to prayer as well. In the book of Acts we find Christians prioritizing prayer. Prior to Pentecost we find the disciples devoting to themselves to prayer (Acts 1:14). They prayed to alleviate problems in the church (6:6). The church prayed over evangelism (13:3). Paul prayed when he appointed elders (14:23). When faced with persecution, the church prayed (4:23-31). Peter and John prayed for the Samaritans (8:15), and while Paul and Silas were in prison (16:25). Paul prayed for the church with the Ephesian elders (20:36) and with believers near Tyre (21:5). He prayed in the temple (22:17), and among unbelievers aboard a ship (27:35) and for others on an island (28:8). Needless to say, the church was birthed on prayer, nurtured by prayer, and grew by prayer.

THE IDENTIFYING MARK OF *SACRIFICIAL LIVING*

When we consider the work of the church, what we find is one general theme:

that salvation leads to service. What does this service entail? We see immediately that the early church helped others in need, and gave of their means (Acts 2:43-47). Not only did the early church share together in Spiritual things, but they shared together in meeting the physical needs of one another. Not only did the early church help one another, but they also helped even non-Christians. Paul describes this interaction of selfless giving of “*doing good*” to all, especially Christians (Gal.6:10).

This one verse alone clearly authorizes Christians to help all people when a need is seen and when opportunity presents itself. While this is true, we also must remember that the church is not a lending institution. It is not a bank, a soup kitchen, a social services office, or a hospital. It is first and foremost the Lord’s church whose mission it is to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10). The only way the Lord seeks and saves, is through agency of Christians – the church. Therefore, it is imperative that the church not lose sight of this vital mission. Of course, giving and sharing were vital aspects of the church. They sacrificed. Sacrifice must involve some pain, otherwise it is not sacrifice. I suppose that is why many do not give of their money, their time, and of themselves, because it would cause them to be uncomfortable. It might disrupt their daily routines. Just think of the work the church could do if every Christian gave from deep within their pockets? When we give we need to remember that it is sacrifice, and giving must hurt if it is going to be considered sacrifice. But giving back to the Lord in order to help His body is one of the most rewarding things this life can bring. We out see our sacrificial giving as a blessing. And while the monetary aspect usually gets center stage, the giving of ourselves, including our time is just as vital. Concerning this matter, Paul speaks of the churches in Macedonia who happened to very poor people, but he commends them for having supported him monetarily above and beyond their own means. Paul calls attention to their personal sacrifice:

“Praying us with much intreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints.⁵ And this they did, not as we hoped, but first **gave their own selves to the Lord**, and unto us by the will of God” (2 Corinthians 8:4-5, emph. DP).

Sacrificial living means sacrificial giving – giving of self, first, then giving of our time, our money, our services, our talents, etc. It also entails sacrificing ourselves on behalf of Christ for His kingdom (Matthew 6:33) and for others (Gal.6:10). Paul writes: *“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service”* (Romans 12:1). Sacrificial living means living the way God desires. It means denying self and carrying our cross daily for the Master (Matthew 16:24). Sacrificial living is ultimately and expression of our love for God: *“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind”* (Matthew 22:37). Sacrificial living is indeed a mark of the church of Christ.

40th Annual Bellview Lectures – 2015

Refuting Realized Eschatology

June 12 – 16, 2015

Open Forum Questions

To submit a question for the Open Forums please click on the link below:

[Submit Open Forum Questions
Information](#)

Lessons on:

Viewing Times are for Central Standard Time (USA)

Friday, June 12

7:00 pm	What Is Realized Eschatology and Its History	Jess Whitlock
8:00 pm	Partial Versus Full Preterism	Danny Douglas

Saturday, June 13

9:00 am	Exposition of Daniel 7:13-14	Charles Pogue
10:00 am	Prophecy of Joel	Bruce Stulting
11:00 am	Exposition of Daniel 12	Dub McClish
<i>Lunch Break</i>		
1:00 pm	Exposition of Luke 20:27-40	Harrell Davidson
2:00 pm	Exposition of 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12	Johnny Oxendine
3:00 pm	Open Forum	
<i>Dinner Break</i>		
7:00 pm	The Nature of Prophecy	Jerry Brewer
8:00 pm	Word Studies Refuting Realized Eschatology	Daniel Denham

Sunday, June 14

9:00 am	The End of the Law of Moses	Michael Hatcher
10:00 am	The Establishment of the Kingdom	Gene Hill
<i>Lunch & Dinner Break</i>		
1:00 pm	The Grave of Judaism Doctrine	Doug Post
2:00 pm	The Bible's Teaching of Spirit and Soul Regarding Man	Lee Moses

Monday, June 15

9:00 am	Allegory of Sarah and Hagar (Galatians 4:20-31)	Jess Whitlock
10:00 am	Sin-Death Doctrine of Realized Eschatology	Daniel Denham
11:00 am	Exposition of John 5:24-29	Charles Pogue
	<i>Lunch</i>	
	<i>Break</i>	
1:00 pm	Exposition of 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18	Johnny Oxendine
2:00 pm	Old Testament Texts Misused by Realized Eschatology	David P. Brown
3:00 pm	Open Forum	
	<i>Dinner</i>	
	<i>Break</i>	
7:00 pm	Interpretation of Figurative Language	David P. Brown
8:00 pm	Exposition of 1 Corinthians 15	Harrell Davidson

Tuesday, June 16

9:00 am	Exposition of 2 Peter 3:1-13	Jerry Brewer
10:00 am	Does Revelation Prove Realized Eschatology?	Doug Post
11:00 am	Exposition of Acts 2:29-36	Dub McClish
	<i>Lunch</i>	
	<i>Break</i>	
1:00 pm	The Olivet Discourse and Luke 17:20-37	Lee Moses
2:00 pm	The Last Days	Gene Hill
3:00 pm	Open Forum	
	<i>Dinner</i>	
	<i>Break</i>	
7:00 pm	The Judgment and Resurrection of the Dead	Bruce Stulting

8:00 pm Bible Doctrine of Hades,
Heaven, and Hell

Danny Douglas

Travel directory of churches of Christ

Since we cannot attest to the soundness of any given assembly, we suggest you call ahead and speak with the Elders or Preacher.

Remember: always make plans to worship God, even on vacation, or just out-of-town for the weekend.

Alabama

Montevallo Church of Christ: 830 Vine St, Montevallo, AL. 35115

Sunday Bible Class: 10 AM ***Morning Service: 11 AM***Evening Service: 6 PM***Wednesday Bible Class: 7 PM***No Website***Phone: 205.665.7579 *****Preacher: Ray Brunner; Scott Crawford; & John Hutchinson**

East Huntsville church of Christ: 801 Humes Ave Huntsville, AL. 35801

Sunday Bible Study: 9:00 am***Sunday Worship: 10 am & 1 pm***Wednesday Bible Study: 7:00 pm
[Church Website Click Here](#)***Phone: 256.534.4001*****Preacher: Bill Cantrell**

Riverchase Church of Christ: 1868 Montgomery Hwy, Birmingham, AL 35244

Sunday Bible Class: 9:30 AM***Morning Service: 8:30 & 10:30***Evening Service: 6 PM***Wednesday Bible Class: 7 PM***[Church Website Click Here](#)***Phone: 205.988.5808*****Preacher: Dewayne Spivey**

Roebuck Parkway Church of Christ: 400 Roebuck Pkwy, Birmingham, AL 35206

Sunday Bible Class: 9 AM***Evening Service: 10 AM***Evening Service: 5 PM***Wednesday Bible Class: 7 PM***[Church Website Click Here](#)***Phone: 205.833.1400*****Preacher: Jason Moon**

Austinville Church of Christ: 2833 Danville Rd. SW Decatur, AL 35603

Sunday Bible Class: 9:30 AM***Evening Service: 10:30 AM***Evening Service: 5:30 PM***Wednesday Bible Class: 7 PM***[Church Website Click Here](#)***Phone 256.353.4256*****Preacher: Mark N. Posey**

Arkansas

Letona Church of Christ: P.O. box 141 Letona, Arkansas 72085

Sunday Bible Study: 10 am***Sunday Worship: 11 Am***Sunday Evening: 5 pm***Wednesday Bible Study: 6 pm***No Website***Phone: 501.230.1201*****Preachers: Sid Scudder, Jack Meredith**

Newton Street church of Christ: 412 Newton Street Paragould, AR. 72450

Sunday am Bible Study - 9:15***Sunday Morning Worship - 10:00***Sunday Evening Worship - 5:00
Wednesday Bible Study – 6:30***No Website***Phone 870.378.5551*****Preacher: Joshua Dement**

Connecticut

Tolland County Church Of Christ: 24 Hyde Ave (Rt.30) P.O. Box 3201 Vernon, CT 06066

Sunday Bible Class: 9 A.M.***Morning Service: 10 A.M.*** Evening Service: 12:45 P.M.***Wednesday
Bible Class: 7 P.M.***[Church Website Click Here](#)***Phone 860.810.9833*****Preacher: Douglas Post**

Florida

Bellview Church of Christ: 4850 Saufley Field Road Pensacola, Florida 32526

Sunday Bible Class 9:00 A.M.***Morning Service: 10:00 A.M.*** Evening Service: 6:00 P.M.***
Wednesday: Bible Class 7 P.M.***[Church Website Click Here](#)***Phone: 850.455.7595*****Preacher:
Michael Hatcher**

Freeport Church of Christ: 17003 Highway 331 SouthPO Box 66 Freeport, Florida 32439

Sunday: Bible Study: 9:00 am*** Sunday Worship: 11am***Evening Service: 6pm***Wednesday Bible
study: 7pm***No Website***Phone: 850.835.4640*****Preacher: Eric Farrior**

College Avenue church of Christ: 337 DeFuniak Springs, FL. 32435

Sunday Bible Class: 9 am***Sunday Morning Worship 10 am*** Sunday Evening 6 pm***Wednesday Bible
study 6 pm***[Church Website Click Here](#)***850-892-5384*****Preacher:Robert Alexander**

Midway church of Christ: 7226 Tamiami Tr. Sarasota Fl. 34243

Sunday: Bible Class: 9:30 A.M.***Morning Service: 10:30 A.M.***Evening Service: 6:00 P.M.***Tuesday:
Ladies Class: 10:00 A.M.***Wednesday: Bible Class 7 P.M.***No Website at this time***Phone: 941-355-
6785*****Preacher: Jack Pinckert Jr.**

Georgia

Hartley Bridge Road church of Christ: 3465 Hartley Bridge Road, Macon, GA. 31216

Sunday Bible Class 10 AM***Sunday Worship 11 AM***Sunday Evening 6 PM*** [Church Website Click Here](#) ***Phone: 478.781.1818*****Preacher: Steve Waller**

Kansas

Parsons church of Christ: 2900 Briggs Ave., Parsons, Kansas 67357

Sunday Bible Class: 9:45 AM***Morning Service: 10:45 AM***Evening Service: 6:00 PM***Wednesday Bible Class: 7:00 PM***No Website***Phone: 620-421-1497*****Preacher: Cloyd "Ben" Frock, Jr.**

Kentucky

Mt Moriah church of Christ: 181 Mt. Moriah Rd. Dunmor KY 42339

Sunday Bible Study: 9 AM***Morning Service 10 AM***Evening Service: 6 PM***Wednesday Bible Study: 6PM***No Website***Phone: 270.934.2007*****Preacher: Rick Shutt**

Sturgis church of Christ: 801 N. Monroe St. Sturgis, KY 42459

Sunday Bible Class: 10:00 AM***Morning Service: 11:00 AM***Evening Service: 6:00 PM***Wednesday Bible Class: 6:00 PM***[Church Website Click Here](#)***Phone: (270) 333-4371*****Preacher: Audie Cherry**

Maine

Gray Church of Christ: 13 Liberty Ave, Gray Maine, 04039

Sunday Bible Class: 10 A.M.***Morning Service: 11 A.M.***Evening Service: 6 PM***Thursday Bible Class: 6 P.M.*** [church website click here](#)***Phone: 207.299.0454*****Preacher: James Miller**

Michigan

Ridge Road Church of Christ: 1770 Ridge Road; Ypsilanti, MI 48198;

Sunday Bible Study 10:00 a.m.*** Morning Worship 11:00 a.m.***Evening Worship 6:00 p.m.***Wednesday Bible Study 7:30 p.m.***[Church Website Click Here](#)***Phone 734-485-293
Preacher: Leonard J. Whit

Nebraska

Kearney church of Christ 1004 East 16th St. PO BOX 643 Kearney NE 68848

Sunday Bible Class 9:30 a.m.*** Sunday Worship 10:30 a.m.*** Wednesday Bible Class 7:00 p.m.
[Church Website Click Here](#)***Phone: 308.240.4622*****Preacher:John Shafer**

North Carolina

Eden church of Christ: 250 the boulevard, Eden NC 27288

Sunday Morning Bible class 9am***Sunday Worship 10am***No evening service***Thursday Bible class 7pm***No Website***Phone: 276-340-2653*****Preacher: James Oldfield**

Ohio

Wolf Creek church of Christ: Malta, OH (Rt. 78-West of town)

Sunday Morning Bible Class 9:45***Morning Worship, 10:30 AM***Evening Worship 7:00PM***
Wednesday Bible class 7:00PM***No Website***Phone: 740-962-3363*****No regular preacher**

Tennessee

Sevierville Church of Christ: 208 Hicks Dr, Sevierville, TN 37862

Sunday Bible Class: 9 AM***Morning Service: 10 AM***Evening Service: 6 PM***Wednesday Bible Study: 7 PM***[Church Wesite Click Here](#)***Phone: 865.453.8009*****Preacher: John Daniels**

Cullom church of Christ: Hwy 84 & Collins Cove Rd, Livingston, TN 38570,

Sunday Bible Study 9am***Worship 10 am***Sunday Evening 6pm***Wednesday Bible Study 6pm***
[Chuech Website Click Here](#)***No phone*****William H. Sowder Sr.**

Central Church of Christ: 112 Hay Long Avenue Mt. Pleasant, TN 38474

Sunday Bible Study: 9:30 AM***Sunday Worship: 10:30 AM***Sunday Evening: 6:00 AM***Wednesday Study: 6:30 PM***[Church Website Click Here](#)***Phone Number: (931) 325-3040*****Preacher: Danny Douglas**

Texas

Oldham Lane Church of Christ: 5049 Oldham Lane, Abilene Texas,

Sunday Bible Class: 9 A.M.***Morning Service: 10 A.M.***Evening Service: 6 P.M.***Wednesday Bible Class: 7 P.M.***[Church Website Click Here](#)***Phone: 325-695-0055*****Preacher: Chris McCurley**

Northpoint Church of Christ: 908 Imperial Dr. Denton, TX 76209

Sunday Bible Class9:30 AM***Sunday Worship 10:30 AM***Sunday Evening 1:00 PM***Wesday B.C./Worship 7:00 PM***Scripture Cache www.scripturecache.com***[Church Website Click Here](#)***

Phone: 940.387.1429*****Preacher: Dub McClish**

Central Church of Christ: 507 Park Ave. Weatherford, Texas 76086

Sunday Bible Study: 9:30 AM*** Sunday Worship: 10:30 AM*** Wednesday Study: 4:30 PM***
No Website***Phone 817.304.3615*****No formal preacher: David Calvert**

Leonard church of Christ: 204 East Fannin St. Leonard, TX. 75452

Sunday AM B/S- 9:00-9:40***Sunday AM Worship- 9:45***Sunday PM Worship- 6:00***Wed. Bible
study- 7:00***[Church Website Click Here](#)***Phone: 903.587.2229*****Preacher: Bob Lewis**

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