

*Facing
Critical Issues
Of
Change!*

12 Lessons

**Prepared by:
PAUL E. CANTRELL**

2006

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PAUL E. CANTRELL
84 Northview Drive
Mechanicsburg, PA 17050**

pecantrell@juno.com

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Preface

In 2005, it seems that change is the “in thing!” People are looking for change in many things such as their lives, their work, as well as their religion. The many independent churches that have sprung up with no longer any attachment to the older churches certainly indicate the desire for change. Our society seems to be going in the direction of the Athenian Philosophers in Jesus’ day: **“For all the Athenians and the foreigners who were there spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing.”** (Acts 17:21). These men did not put their trust in a Divine Revelation from God, but in the latest philosophical point of view being held at that time. They did not have a solid foundation to build their belief upon as Jesus emphasized in Matthew 7:21-27, but a shifting one. You might expect this from idol worshippers, but not from those who have made a commitment to the church that Jesus built and to His Divine Revelation given to us by His chosen Apostles.

But, let’s speak clearly about the need for change! Some change may be called for and therefore needed. John the baptizer came preaching on the need for Israel to change their lives (repent) and confess their sins (their waywardness) and prepare for the coming of the new kingdom of God (Matthew 3:1-3). This was a needed change because they had departed from the true way to walk before God. Jesus came and emphasized the same thing: **“Repent or perish!”** (Luke 13:3). So, some kinds of changes are not bad. God’s people today may need to make several changes such as: (1) From likewarmness to zeal; (2) From immorality to purity; (3) From religious error to truth; (4) From a lack of discipline to self-discipline; (5) From non-attendance at worship assemblies to faithful and regular attendance; (6) From a low work-ethic to a high one; and (7) From walking in sin to walking in the light. Repentance is a constant need in the lives of God’s people (1 John 1:7-10).

But there is another kind of change we are looking at that is undesirable. When one tries to change the divine side of the church; or becomes dissatisfied with God’s plan of salvation; or wants to change the organization of Christ’s church; or wants to change God’s plan of worship—then, we are talking about the wrong kind of change. When we become dissatisfied with the exclusive nature of the church and feel that the fellowship is too restrictive and narrow and we advocate change to accommodate ecumenical views—we are calling for the wrong kind of change. These things cannot be changed with God’s approval! These are the kinds of changes that will cause the church to cease being the true church of the Lord and become just another denomination of our own devising. The designation “church of Christ” is only fitting to be used by those who faithfully follow God’s divine Word. Those who forsake that way have given up the right to truthfully call themselves a “church of Christ!” It is these kinds of changing that we will be looking at in this study book. Hopefully, great good can come from such a study.

Paul E. Cantrell
2005

Table of Contents

“Facing Critical Issues of Change!”

LESSONS	TOPICS	PAGE
	Preface	
1 --	“To Change or Not to Change—That is the Question!”	1-3
2 --	“By What Authority Do You Advocate Change?”	4-8
3 --	“Can Man Improve on God’s Standard of Authority?”	9-12
4 --	“Do We Need a New Hermeneutic?”	13-15
5 --	“Is Man Totally Saved by Grace Alone?”	16-18
6 --	“Is Baptism Really Necessary in Order to be Saved?”	19-21
7 --	“How Lenient Will God be in the Judgment?”	22-24
8 --	“Is the Church Just Another Denomination Among Denominations	25-27
9 --	“Women’s Role in the Assembly of God’s People”	28-31
10--	“Changes Advocated in Worship”	32-34
11--	“Should We Fellowship With Error?”	35-37
12--	“Being Like the Churches Around Us”	38-40

Lesson One

“To Change or Not to Change—That is the Question!”

Voices are arising more and more in the body of Christ calling for change—all kinds of change! While some of these changes may be in the areas of judgment—not all are! Many are being advocated in the area of beliefs and practices that goes contrary to plain teachings of the Scriptures. Following is a listing of some things being advocated by some in the church:

1. Salvation should be extended even to those who do not believe in Christ (John 14:6).
2. Obedience to the Gospel should not be required for a person to be saved (2 Thess. 1:7-9).
3. The Bible is not to be looked upon as the only authority for our religious practices (Gal. 1:6-9).
4. Worship should appeal to our emotions and does not necessarily have to be according to truth (John 4:24).
5. Preaching should be replaced with story telling, personal experiences, and drama (1 Cor. 1:17-18).
6. We should fellowship all religious bodies regardless of their beliefs (2 John 9-10).
7. Women should be allowed more leadership in the church (1 Cor. 14:34; 1 Tim. 2:11-14).
8. We should drop the term “church of Christ” since it has too much negative concepts connected with it (Rom. 16:16).
9. Our mission should be to meet the needs of our community (Matt. 28:18-20).
10. etc.

Religious groups for years have been breaking away from the “Old-Line Denominations” and forming what they choose to call an “independent church” or a “community church.” They wanted change, but they had to start their own denomination to get their changes. *Were they wanting to get back closer to the Bible—showing their deep respect for the Word and Authority of God??* Unfortunately.....”NO!” All indications are that they just did not want to be told what they could and could not do—**not even God!** This religious revolution is well underway in this country and it is spilling over into the Lord’s church.

“Members of the church are more ignorant of the Bible than ever before in my life-time. They don’t know or desire to hold to even the basic fundamentals—and what is worse, many could care less!”

Too many church leaders are running scared. They are being told that they will lose this generation of people if they insist on having “traditional” preaching and sing “traditional” songs. So.....change is advocated as a necessity for the church to survive! Whether some changes are needed or not—one thing is sure and certain—the real problem with man lies in his

HEART! Jesus made this “crystal clear” in Matthew 15:7-9, 16-20! Man’s challenge, first and foremost, is to **“love God with all our heart!”** (Matthew 22:37). And....this is the “Love of God” that you keep His commandments (1 John 5:3). The Apostle John emphasized that we lose our relationship to God when we do not abide in the teaching of Christ (2 John 9). In

fact, of what value is “religion” if it is not recognized by the God of heaven? We need to make very sure that the changes that are being advocated are not going to cause us to lose our fellowship with God! God warns us not only of changing **HIS** message for another message (Gal. 1:6-9), but the grave danger of turning to the “Wisdom of Men” for what we believe and practice religiously.

The Dangers of Apostasy are Real!

It has been estimated that there are over 2500 warnings given in the Scriptures about the possibilities of falling away from God. Both Old and New Testament Prophets and Apostles give warnings of such. Following are just a few that could be listed:

Matthew 7:21-23, 15-20

Matthew 10:37-39

Matthew 11:21-24; 12:39-42

Matthew 12:22-28

Matthew 15:8-9, 14

Matthew 24:11

Matthew 25:26-27, 41-46

John 3:19-21

John 5:47

John 8:44

Etc.

CHANGES CAN LEAD TO OTHER CHANGES

SOME in the church have set out to change the image of the church. The changes that they are advocating are not in the area of expediency, but in the area of doctrine. These changes are being advocated by people who are discontent with “Bible Authority” and who are frustrated over trying to get the church to change to their new “theological positions.” Once changes of this nature begin, the end result is obviously apostasy—the church becomes just another denomination among denominations! This should frighten us! The Apostles’ fear was expressed about the Christians in the Galatian province as he indicated in Galatians 4:11—“***I am afraid for you, lest I have labored for you in vain.***” They had change agents among them that were in the process of changing the Gospel message that would lead to an invalidation of the death of Jesus and cause them to lose the grace of God (Galatians 5:1-4). We need to look carefully at the kind of changes that are being advocated by those who are calling for change!

SOME CHANGES MAY BE NEEDED!

God has revealed His message to man in such a way that it recognizes the need for some changes in various situations and periods of time. These changes are obviously not in doctrinal truths, but in methods, means, and efficient ways of carrying out a command of God. The

Apostle Paul showed this by his statement to the church at Corinth in 1 Corinthians 9:22-23. God's people need to be willing to make changes that will further His kingdom when circumstances require such and the Word of God allows such. To be satisfied with mediocrity and ineffectiveness in reaching the lost is to be condemned along with the Laodicean church (Revelations 3:14-22). When correct changes can be made to accelerate the growth of the church, we should be willing to embrace them.

Is all Allowable change profitable? We can nowhere find where the Apostles advocated "change for the sake of change!" But change that has a proper reason and desirable results certainly should be made—all things being equal! However, there are things that may be correct and right to do, but if it causes division and strife in the church or endangers the soul of one of the members—it certainly would be wrong to push for such changes. To say the least, it would be wise to be slow in making such changes—even though allowable! The Apostle Paul also illustrates this clearly in 1 Corinthians 10:19-23, 31-33. He shows three possible dangers of making changes:

- 1. 1 Corinthians 8:1 (Spiritual Arrogance).** If our call for change is not tempered by love, we will end up bringing about more harm than good. Correct knowledge is certainly desirable. But knowledge that is not exercised in love can bring all kinds of problems.
- 2. 1 Corinthians 8:2-3 (Self-Deception).** Some feel that change is the cure-all for all of our spiritual problems. Certainly, some changes can help cure some problems in the church, but they may fail also to accomplish their purpose for being advocated. Not all changes are desirable even if they are allowed by the Bible. In some instances, change is simply not the answer to a problem.
- 3. 1 Corinthians 8:7-12 (Destruction of a weak Christian).** When "Scriptural change" is done with a spirit of haughtiness, superiority or condescension, it will tend to divide the church and many can be discouraged and lost. Such is a sin against Christ. It is a sin to make Scripturally Allowable Changes without regard to the harm of the spirit of unity of the church (Philippians 2:2-4; 1 Corinthians 8:13).

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Sometimes CHANGE is deemed necessary, or desirable, or acceptable. We certainly need to be open to Scriptural change where the circumstances would seem to require it and God allows it. But at the same time, we need to be fully aware of the dangers to avoid in making changes. We need always to see and do that which is best for the body of Christ according to the Word of God. Love of God and love of the brethren indicates that we should be sensitive to each other's feelings about such changes.

Lesson Two

“By What Authority Do You Advocate Change?”

Underlying all discussion of differences in religious beliefs and practices is the question of a “standard” by which all things can be measured. Without a “common” standard, there can be no “meeting of the minds” by which we can arrive at the same conclusions. Instead, confusion and division will be the result rather than unity and harmony. Not only is this true when it comes to viewing the world religions and their differences, but it is obviously true when it comes to considering the religion of Jesus Christ.

The main reason for so many different groups claiming to be Christian is the many different standards that are being used to define each group. For these groups to claim that “the Bible is our only standard and guide”—such would be very misleading. It is quite obvious that the Bible and it alone does not teach all of these conflicting beliefs and practices. Somebody has another standard by which to teach and practice their different beliefs. It is one thing to advocate that the Bible is our only standard and guide and quite another to show it by our beliefs and practices conforming completely to the Bible. If you want unity and harmony among those who claim to believe in Jesus—do away with all beliefs and practices not authorized by Him! This obviously is the first big step towards “oneness” of those who say they believe in Him. He, Himself, said: **“Why call Me Lord, Lord, and do not do what I say?”** (Luke 6:46).

But, with some in the Lord’s church, the same thing is now becoming more and more obvious – that they have a different or a perverted standard rather than the pure Word of God. The changes being advocated are often in direct opposition to a “thus says the Lord!” This is the reason that we have entitled this lesson:

“By what authority do you advocate change?”

Jesus came teaching the Jewish people publicly in their synagogues, towns, cities, on mountain sides, and by the sea and river shores. He taught in such a way that the people were astonished at His teaching.....**“for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.”** (Matthew 7:28-29). Upon one occasion when He was teaching in the Temple, He was confronted by the chief priests and elders of the people. They straight-forwardly asked Him: **“By what authority are You doing these things? And who gave You this authority?”** (Matthew 21:23). This was a very legitimate question! Just who are You or who gave You the right to stand up before the people and teach them these things? The scribes and elders of the people were duly appointed by the proper authority to do this teaching—but who appointed this man to do such? Jesus promised to answer their question if they would answer His question first: **“The baptism of John—where was it from? From heaven or from men?”** (Matthew 21:25). Jesus recognized that there are two possible sources of authority—it is either ordained by God or by men! We would do well to examine to see if our beliefs and practices are from God or man.

But, for the Word of God to be our standard, we need to recognize the need of a proper attitude towards the authoritativeness of the Word of God. Again, there are two basic approaches that can be taken by those who claim to believe the Bible to be the Word of God. These two approaches are illustrated in the work of two reformers during the 1500s.

1. **Luther's view**—*“Whatever is not expressly prohibited in the Scriptures is permissible.”* This view opens the door to all kinds of innovations—such as: (1) The burning of incense; (2) The lighting of candles; (3) The use of images; (4) Instrumental music; (5) Adding other elements to the Lord's Supper; etc.
2. **Zwingli's view**—*“Whatever is not expressly authorized in the Scriptures is prohibited.”* This view restricts people to only the Bible as the standard or guide to the things that we are to believe and practice. We believe that this is the correct view from what the Scriptures themselves say (Galatians 1:6-9; 2 John 9-10; Deut. 4:2; Rev. 22:18-19).

While both men would advocate that the Bible is to be the authority—only Zwingli's view would actually fit that description. Many things that Luther believed and practiced were not taught in the Word of God.

It is also important, in view of the above thoughts, that we briefly see “How” the Bible authorizes a thing to be believed or practiced.

1. **By commands.** There are various ways that God uses to get across to us what He wants us to believe and practice. One such example: Acts 2:38.
2. **By an approved example.** When God commands something and then has recorded an example of such being carried out, it usually serves as a means of showing us how God wants this command carried out by us today. An example of such. Acts 20:7.
3. **By an inference from a command.** When God commands something, this will often infer that we need to come up with a way that that command can be carried out. An example to illustrate:
 - a) God indicates that He wants us to assemble together to worship Him as a group (Hebrews 10:25; John 4:24).
 - b) In order to carry out this command, we need a place where we can meet together to carry out this command..

Our religion (our relationship to God) is our most important relationship! We certainly ought to be concerned and certain that what we believe and practice has been authorized by the Word of God. Our attitude should be: *“Well, if that is what the Bible says, that settles the matter!”* But we are seeing a change in this attitude in some among us. Their attitude is seen in this sentiment: *“Well, I know the Bible says that, but.....”* At that point, the listener's subjectivity takes over, and he begins to interject his personal point of view instead of submissively accepting what the Bible says!

How Shall We View the Bible?

(Brother David Sain points out the following Biblical statements that should be our view of the Bible)

1. **As the Word of God.** (2 Sam. 23:2; Jer. 1:9; Isa. 45:11; Heb. 1:1-2; Matt. 10:19-20; John 14:26; 1 Cor. 2:13).
2. **As Authoritative.** (Gal. 1:6-9; 1 Cor. 2:13; 2 Jn. 9-11; 17:8, 14).
3. **As Truth.** (Heb. 6:18; Tit. 1:2; Jn. 17:17; Psa. 19:7-9; 33:4; 119:104, 128).
4. **As Attainable Truth.** (John 8:31-32; Eph. 3:3-4; 5:17; 1 Tim. 2:4).
5. **As All-Sufficient (Complete).** (2 Pet. 1:3; 2 Tim. 3:16-17).
6. **As the Power of God to save man.** (Heb. 4:12; Rom. 1:16; 1 Cor. 15:1-4; Jas. 1:21, 18)

“All Scripture is ‘God-breathed!’”

We speak of the Bible as being our guide, our standard, or our authority for all that we believe and practice. In reality, this may not be fully accurate as a statement. It is one thing to believe that “all scripture” comes from God (2 Tim. 3:16-17)—but quite another to say that the “whole” Bible is our standard for today. Our Bible is made up of two sections—Old and New Testaments.

The **Old Testament** was given “only” to the Jewish (Israelite) Nation by God through Moses and the Prophets (Deut. 4:5-8; Psalm 147:19-20). The Old Covenant was never given to the Gentile Nations. In fact, God promised Israel that He would give them a New Covenant (Jere. 31:31-34; Heb. 8:6-13). This was fulfilled when Jesus came to earth and died in order to put the New Testament into force (Heb. 9:16). While Jesus lived in the flesh, He was under that Old Covenant (Gal. 4:4-5) and kept it perfectly (2 Cor. 5:21). But upon His death, a New and Better Covenant was put into force—making the first obsolete (Hebrews 8:6-13). The Old Testament laid the groundwork for the coming of Jesus and much of the early preaching done by the Apostles and the early Christians was to show from the Old Testament that Jesus was the Christ (Acts 2:16-36). But we do not go back to the Old Testament as a source of authority for our beliefs and practices today. We go to the New Testament Scriptures primarily. While the Old Covenant has many values for us today, we are not under that Covenant, but under the New one (Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:11).

Thus, the more accurate statement would be that the **New Testament** is our guide, our standard, and our authority for our beliefs and practices today (Heb. 10:9). While this concept has been generally recognized by members of the Lord’s church for many years—such is now being questioned by some among us. There are those that advocate that there is a “core gospel” that needs to be preached, but the rest of the Bible is not all that important as an authority for mankind. Is there a “core gospel” that people need to believe and obey to be saved? Is that all we

need? Do we not need to be concerned about the rest of the New Testament? Or, can we understand that there are “core matters,” but at the same time—there are other teachings that are also just as important?

I think that all would logically admit that there are central teachings that are vital to Christianity. But if the rest of the New Testament is not important, why did God give it to mankind? Can we ignore the “non-core teachings” and be pleasing to God? Where did this idea of a “core-gospel” come from, anyway? Is the term found in Scripture? Obviously not! Is the concept found in Scripture? I believe so! We may illustrate it like this:

- a) An apple has a core that contains seeds.
- b) The core is important to the reproducing of apples.
- c) The skin and meaty part is not important to the reproducing of apples.
- d) If you use this as an illustration of the Core Gospel; then, everything else is not important.
- e) But what is the point of even having an apple, if only the core is important, and the skin and meaty part is not important? It would seem very foolish.
- f) But the skin and meaty part is important—not for reproduction, but for the eating.
- g) So, all the apple is important—while the core is more basic to the continued existence of the apple.

Does the Bible Teach that Some Things are More Important than Others?

1. Justice, Mercy, and Faith are more weighty matters than giving a tenth of my prosperity (Matt. 23:23). However, both are important because both must be done to be right with God.

2. Love is greater than Faith and Hope (1 Corinthians 13:13). Reasons could be given as to why. But who would dare say that Faith and Hope are not important? Even love is not mentioned by Jesus in Matthew 23:23!

3. When Paul said that he determined not to know anything among them except Jesus Christ and Him crucified—does that mean that all else that he taught was unimportant (1 Cor. 2:2)? If that was all that was important, then why did he spend the rest of his letter trying to correct so many problems in the Corinthian Church? Even the “core gospel” advocates would say that His burial and resurrection are also important! Certainly, the preaching of Christ crucified is basic to the saving of men—for without it, nothing else matters. But that doesn’t mean that everything else taught in Scripture is unimportant (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:3, 5-11; 2 John 9, etc.)

4. Who would say that unity (oneness in Christ) is not important? There may be more basic things that are necessary in order to have unity—but unity is very vital to the body of Christ and to Christ, Himself!

5. Who would dare say that immoral actions are not a concern for Christians? God commands us to flee such! It defiles the Temple of God (1 Cor. 6:18-20). We are to glorify God in our body

and spirit by walking in righteousness—not to continue in the way of sin and disobedience (Rom. 6:1-2, 6).

6. Grace is not mentioned, as such by name in Matt. 23:23. Yet, who would deny its importance to man's eternal salvation? Yes, there are weightier matters that we need to be concerned about because they are primary or basic. But that does not take away the importance of the rest of New Testament teachings.

For a surety there are things that are very basic upon which the rest of the Bible depends. A person hearing the Gospel and becoming a Christian is vital because a person can live a good life and still be lost without obeying the Gospel (2 Thess. 1:7-9). Our justification is not by our own merits, but the merits of Christ. But, we not only need to be saved by the blood of Christ from having to suffer the penalty of our past sins, but we need the blood of Christ to continue to cleanse us each day of our lives in order to maintain that relationship with God. That can only be done by an obedient faith to all that Jesus has commanded us (Matt. 28:18-20; Heb. 5:8-9; 1 John 1:7; 2 John 9).

Concluding Thoughts

Let's go back to our original question and title of this lesson—“***By What Authority do You Advocate Change?***” Do I need authority from God to make any changes in my beliefs or practices? If I cannot find any authority from the Word of God, then by whose authority am I advocating change? Our fellowship with the Father and the Son depends upon each of us continuing to “***abide in the doctrine of Christ.***” Are the changes that I am advocating allowing me to abide in the doctrine of Christ?

Lesson Three

“Can Man Improve on God’s Standard of Authority?”

Our first reaction is (and should be) **ABSOLUTELY NOT!** Such would be foolish to even suggest that we can IMPROVE on what God has given! **He is God!** And we are His creatures! There is no way that mere man can improve on what God has given! After God got through with Job—having been properly and thoroughly put in his place—Job cried out: **“I retract, and I repent in dust and ashes.”** (Job 42:6).

Then, why waste time on a question that would seem to be so foolish and foreign to what children of God believe and recognize about the God of the Bible? And the reason for doing so is very simple—**MAN IS GUILTY!** When faced with the question above, men are quick to outright deny such a belief or action! But the fact still remains—**MAN IS GUILTY!** To accuse someone of something is one thing—but to prove it as a fact may be quite another thing! Would you stay with me a little longer and let me suggest some ways where man is guilty of trying to improve on God’s Word!

WAYS MAN TRIES TO IMPROVE ON THE WORD OF GOD

Around 600 B.C. there was a king in Judah named Jehoiakim. When God’s revelation through Jeremiah, the Prophet, was read to him, he cut it up and burned it in a fire! (Jeremiah 36:22-23). Such disrespect on the part of the king shows the kind of spirit (attitude) that not only the king had towards God, but of others as well. **“Yet the king and all his servants who heard all these words were not afraid, nor did they rend their garments.”** (Jeremiah 36:24). If a king of Judah would exemplify such a disrespect for the Word of God; then, why would we expect anything different today?

Following are some of the ways that man shows his disrespect for the Word of God and that he can improve on what God has to say.

1. Subjectivity! This outlook is described as *“If it feels good, it is okay to do it!”* Subjectivity places feelings or emotions above all else—even the Word of God! Truth is not important—it is how I feel that is important! But Jesus said:

- a) **There is truth from God.** (John 17:17).
- b) **This truth is important—it can set us free!** (John 8:31-32).
- c) **We can know it and understand it!** (John 8:32; 17:17; Ephesians 3:3-5).
- d) **We must be obedient to this truth to be cleansed!** (1 Peter 1:22).

2. Official Creeds of Religious Groups! If the Creed is saying no more nor less than the Word

of God, why is it needed? But that is the whole point because the “Official Creeds” of men do not agree among themselves—much less with the Word of God! Creeds are needed because of the “improvements” they have made in the Word of God! Creeds are binding on men the so-called “wisdom of men,” and are to be followed in order to be a part of that particular religious group. But Jesus warned:

- a) **That men worshipped God in vain when they follow the doctrines & commands of men** (Matthew 15:7-9).
- b) **That those who abide in Jesus’ commandments abide in His love** (John 15:12).
- c) **“Why call me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?”** (Luke 6:46).
- d) **And we are warned against adding to and taking from God’s Word** (Deut. 4:2; Rev. 22:18-19).

3. When men teach what people want to hear! The Apostle Paul talked about such people in 2 Timothy 4:1-4. He tells about “children of God” that will not endure sound doctrine and will turn and listen to those preachers who will teach what pleases them (tickle their ears). They want to hear something “better” than the truth of God! But God says in His Word:

- a) **Preach the Word!**
- b) **Convince, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and teaching!** (2 Timothy 4:2).
- c) **The Apostle Paul said that he did not seek to please men, but God** (Gal. 1:9-10).
- d) **When certain religious people warned the Apostles not to preach God’s Word any longer, they all answered: “We ought to obey God rather than men.”** (Acts 5:29).

4. By false interpretation and application. Such tries to make the Bible fit their preconceived religious ideas or philosophies. Judaism and Gnosticism were early efforts to make the Bible over—to improve on it! (Gal. 1:6-9; 1 Tim. 1:1-4; 1 John 4:1; etc.).

5. By substituting eisegesis for exegesis. Eisegesis is reading into a passage what you want it to say. Exegesis is reading out of the passage what it is actually saying. (2 Tim. 2:14-18).

6. By bad translations or versions of the Bible in certain places. Men are imperfect human beings and make errors or mistakes. Bible Translators, at their very best, make mistakes. But when these mistranslations are intentional to uphold a doctrine or to cover up a doctrine—it is DEAD WRONG! By mistranslating such places as Acts 2:38 (did not translate, but transliterated baptism) and Acts 12:4 (put Easter instead of Passover (KJV))....much harm has been done to the human race in securing and maintaining their relationship to God.

8. By not being concerned about harmonizing the teachings of the Bible, and coming up with a false understanding of God’s truth. The practice of teaching “Faith only” salvation (John 3:16) and not teaching the truth—that it is an obedient faith that saves us, not faith only (James 2:17-24).

And this list could go on and on! Men will find a way to “improve” on the Word of God if it is the last thing they do!!

The following examples will help to show the boldness with which religious leaders “improve” on the Word of Truth!

1. A special committee of the Presbyterian Church (USA) proposed that practicing homosexuals be ordained as ministers and that the Seventh Commandment proscribing adultery be disavowed, along with all other prohibitions against sex outside of marriage. It took the committee four years to concoct something it calls a justice-love test to supplant the doctrine it once espoused.

2. A committee within the Episcopal Church recommended that bishops be allowed to ordain homosexual seminarians to the priesthood. *“I think the church is ready to take a little more progressive stance,”* said Bishop George Hunt of Providence, Rhode Island, who headed the committee.

3. A new book by the gadfly Episcopal Bishop John Spong claims the Apostle Paul, who condemned homosexual practice, was himself a repressed homosexual.

It is of great significance that religion has lost its moral power and has become the prisoner, rather than the leader and liberator of the culture. How can religious leaders like this have a moral impact upon a society set on destroying itself—when the church goes along with them. It is also significant that church membership continues to decline in such churches as the above. Now, it would seem that there are those among churches of Christ that want to go in the same direction as these churches. The following is an old and significant quote.....

“The only thing that people learn from history is that they don’t learn anything from history.”

When will we learn that the “Doctrine of Christ” is not negotiable! There is to be no compromise with anyone concerning the Truth of God! The truth will not be surrendered and the only remedy for error is “repentance!” We dare not substitute the “wisdom of men” for a “thus says the Lord!” We must realize that even if we are ridiculed, threatened, slandered, and falsely accused, etc., truth is still truth, and not the “wisdom of men!” And that only truth can set us free!

WHY DO MEN THINK THEY CAN IMPROVE UPON THE WORD OF GOD?

I don’t see how anyone can really deny that some men are actually trying to do such. If this is a fact, there must be a reason behind such actions. There must be something to gain or some satisfaction to find or someone to please. When we look into the Scriptures we can find several possibilities for the why!

1. **They Devil tried to “improve” on God’s arrangement and is accused of PRIDE!** (1 Tim. 3:6). He was not satisfied with God’s arrangement—he wanted first place!!
2. **Cain thought that he came up with an “improvement” on worship to God.** (Gen. 4:1-5). He was not satisfied with what God commanded, so he substituted something else!! God rejected his offering and faced him with his disobedience.
3. **Nadab and Abihu, sons of the High Priest, thought they could get fire from a better place than what God commanded!** They were consumed on the spot! (Leviticus 10:1-11). They showed a lack of respect and reverence for the worship of God and His directions.
4. **Some do it to gain money. (2 Peter 2:1-3).** They exploit people for their own gain (bellies)—neither fearing them nor God! (vs. 10-14; Rom. 16:17-18). Some do so in order to gain the praise of men (John 12:42).
5. **Some do it out of a closed-mindedness to the Truth of God.** (Matthew 13:14-15)

Many other reasons could be given, but these will help to show that men do what they do for something they want or that pleases them—not God!

WHAT SHOULD BE OUR ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE WORD OF GOD?

1. The Bible has been given by the guidance of the Holy Spirit and was infallible when first given. (2 Peter 1:20-21; 2 Tim. 3:16-17).
2. We must believe that the Bible is Truth and it can be understood. (John 8:32; Eph. 3:3-5).
3. We must submit our lives to its Authority without adding to it or taking away from it (Deut. 4:2; Rev. 22:17-18).
4. We must realize that those who will not abide in the Word of God (the doctrine of Christ) do not have fellowship with God, nor His Son (John 15:7).
5. It must be taught and practice without variation (Gal. 1:6-9; 1 Kings 22:13-14; Matt. 6:16; Gal. 1:10; 2 Tim. 4:1-4).
6. We must tremble (stand in awe and reverence) of His Word. (1 Sam. 4:13; Ps. 99:1; Ezra 9:4; 10:3; Isa. 66:2).

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Does man try to “improve” on the Word of God? Obviously, YES! But to the more important question: Does he “improve” on the Word of God? How you answer determines where you are spiritually in your relationship to God. God will be honored, respected, and revered by those who want a relationship with Him. ***“God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be held in reverence by all those around Him.”*** (Psalm 89:7)

Lesson Four

“Do We Need a New Hermeneutic?”

Hermeneuo is a Greek word that indicates “*One who interprets,*” or one who gives a proper understanding of another’s message! With reference to the Bible—it is a proper method to explain and interpret Scripture using correct rules of exegesis. It is to draw from Scripture the true meaning determined by God. The Greek word, in its two forms, appears several times in our New Testament. It is translated “to interpret” or “interpretation.” It could easily be translated as one who “translates from one language to another” (1 Cor. 12:10, 30; 14:5, 13, 26-27; John 1:38). It carries with it the idea of giving an explanation of what someone has said.

There are some among us that are openly advocating the need for a new hermeneutic—that is—our “old” hermeneutic is “flawed” and “outdated” and a new one is needed to help give the right idea from Scripture. The “old” hermeneutic was fine to help these people to become Christians; but since then, they have learned that such is “wrong.”

KNOWLEDGE AND LOVE

Have you noticed that, generally speaking, all calls for change are based on some perceived newness in knowledge—“*I have found a better way or a more correct way!*” They have found a better way for the song service, for communion, for preaching, for praying, for evangelizing, etc. You name it and someone has found a better way to improve something. The emphasis is on a superior knowledge over others. These claims may or may not be right. But the Apostle Paul warns about a danger in 1 Cor. 8:1—“***We know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies.***” One of the grave dangers involve in advocating change is “spiritual snobbery!” So, Paul’s next verse deals with that also: “***And if anyone thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know.***” While we need to keep growing in our knowledge (2 Pet. 3:18), we absolutely need to grow in our love—for—“***if anyone loves God, this one is known by Him.***” (verse 3). There is cause for grave concern when honest, sincere, and faithful people of God are doing their best to serve God and then are derided because they are “too traditionally bound.” If good and Scriptural changes are called for, such needs to be tempered with love or we will end up being “little more than an elitist and divided sect.”

THE ISSUE!

But, back to our question: “*Do we need a New Hermeneutic?*” Is the Old Hermeneutic flawed and outdated? In reality, are these people calling for a “new” Hermeneutic; or, are they really wanting to approach the Bible in such a way to allow all religious people a way into heaven? If this is what they are calling for—this isn’t new—it is “OLD!” Such is old “liberalism” raising its ugly head again! The views of Rudolph Bultmann, Hans-Georg Godamer, Ernst Fuchs, etc., have been generally rejected by the religious groups around us. They were the first to use the term “the New Hermeneutic.”

WHAT IS THE OLD HERMENEUTIC?

The old hermeneutic's approach to the Bible is that it is the inspired, infallible Word of God! (2 Peter 1:20-21; 2 Tim. 3:16-17) We learn from it what God wants of mankind in general and what He wants of His people. This is done by giving various forms of commands and these commands have inferences that authorize us to carry out these commands. God has also recorded "approved examples" (or "approved actions") that show us how these commands were carried out with God's approval. The Bible is designed primarily to tell us what God wants (authorizes) for us to do or to be and not what God prohibits. Why have we accepted this approach to understanding the Bible? Because of the many passages, both in the Old and New Testaments, that insist on our doing exactly what God says—no more or no less (Leviticus 10:1-5; Deut. 4:2; John 16:13; 2 Tim. 3:13-4:5, etc.) Please see other study books that deal with this approach more in detail, such as **Establishing Biblical Authority for our Beliefs and Practices**.

WHAT IS THE "NEW" HERMENEUTIC?

What is classified as a new approach to the Bible may be mostly a reaction (rebellion?) against that which has been held to so long, as well as serving as a means of opening the door to many changes they would like to see in the church. These men are leaving grave doubts about their beliefs on several issues, such as:

1. Do they believe in the inspiration and infallibility of the Scriptures?
2. Are they making their subjectivism or their feelings the new standard rather than the Word of God?
3. Is man responsible for obedience to God to be right with God? Is he saved by grace without any obedience on his part?
4. Just what is their reason for advocating a new approach to the Bible? What is their agenda? What do they want to accomplish?
5. Are they opposed to logic and valid reasoning on the Bible?
6. Are they advocating fellowship with all religious people?
7. Are they advocating that women can do anything that men can in the worship assemblies?
8. What kind of changes do they want in our worship assemblies?
9. Just how far are they willing to consistently go with these changes?

While these men seem to be set on throwing out the old hermeneutic, they do not have any reasonable or logical approach to offer in its place—their ideas are mostly subjective! Such men make a real issue that they are positive, affirmative, and progressive—but are in reality the most negative men among us today! They are the new Gnostics—the only ones who really KNOW! Such men need to seriously think about what the Apostle John said: ***"Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine (teaching) of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son."*** (2 John 9). The Apostle also added concerning those who are not abiding in the doctrine of Christ: ***"do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds."*** (2 John 10-11).

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Dear reader, you may feel that we have not done justice to the “new” hermeneutics since we have given very little of what they claim to be the new approach to Scripture. This short lesson is really more interested in seeing where their thinking is leading to and questioning their sincere desire to be pleasing to God more than to please men. In their efforts to “get more people saved and right with God,” they seem to be compromising every command and requirement that God requires of men to be acceptable to Him. They are trending on a dangerous path that is the “broad way” that leads to destruction (Matthew 7:13-14). It is generally understood by mankind that we need a guide on how to be right with God and how to stay right with God—and the Bible is the only book that can do that!

Lesson Five

“Is Man Totally Saved by Grace alone?”

A full study on the Grace of God is certainly not possible in this one lesson. A more extensive study on Grace can be secured from the writer of this study book—entitled: **A Study on Grace**. In this lesson we are interested in dealing primarily with what is involved in man being made acceptable to God. We have given the above title to this lesson because there are those in our midst now that are advocating that man is saved by “Grace alone!” They feel that they are putting a proper emphasis upon the Grace of God as it should be! However, it just may be possible that they are falling into the same error that the Protestant world has found itself in. In one sense, it is an obvious truth that man is totally (100%) saved by the Grace of God! Christ has paid 100% for our salvation and we paid 0%! Christ’s shed blood was necessary for the payment for us to be saved (to be made just before God). (Romans 5:18-19). If Jesus had not obeyed God and died on the cross, none of us could be saved! Without His sacrifice, we are all lost forever! (Ephesians 1:7). Upon these Scriptural facts, we should have no problem of standing firm and standing together—saying a strong “Amen!”

But there is another side to this issue that has to be dealt with from the Scriptures. If the above idea (that man is totally saved by grace alone) means that man is saved without a response that God has ordained before he is saved by God’s grace; then, such is error, false, and a misunderstanding of the teaching of the whole Bible from beginning to end! If this teaching is true, it should be obvious that all men would have to be saved whether they wanted to be or not—for God’s grace came to all men according to Romans 5:18! From several different statements that Jesus is recorded as having said--not everyone will be saved—only certain ones (Matthew 7:21). It is because of such Scriptures as this that we can know that man does play a part in his being saved. If man wants to be saved, he must respond to God in the way that God has ordained.

MAN’S RESPONSE TO GOD!

As much as God wants His creatures to be saved, He does not force such upon them! He freely offers salvation through Christ, but He desires a response out of man in the acceptance of this gift. Man’s response to God’s offer is by or through the avenue of faith. ***“For by grace you have been saved through faith...”*** (Eph. 2:8). If man is saved by Grace alone; then, why are not all men saved? And the answer is obvious—not everyone chooses to accept the Grace of God. We must accept God’s offer through faith (Romans 5:1-2). The saved person’s confidence is not in his own works of merit to save him, but his confidence is in the work of Christ to save him. ***“But without faith, it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.”*** (Heb. 11:6). What about those that do not believe in God nor seek diligently after him? Obviously, they will not be saved! What about those who do not trust in the death of Christ to be saved? Obviously, they will continue in their lost condition!

“WHAT MUST ‘I’ DO TO BE SAVED?”

When the Apostle Peter stood up before the Jewish people on the Day of Pentecost (after the death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus), He preached salvation through Jesus...but never used the word “grace!” The people were convinced of their sinful condition and cried out to Peter and the other Apostles: **“Men and brethren, what shall we do?”** (Acts 2:37). Peter understood their question as meaning—what must we do to receive forgiveness of this terrible wrong we have done? Peter did not answer them **“There is nothing for you to do....it has already been done!”** Rather, his “inspired” answer from God was: **Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.**” (Acts 2:38). In verse 39, Peter (with many other words) exhorted them to **“Be saved from this perverse generation.”** And 3,000 gladly received his word and were baptized (2:41). How did these people save themselves from that perverse generation? Obviously, by accepting the gracious offer of forgiveness from God upon their faith leading them to repent and be baptized! They were saved by the Grace of God through the avenue of their faith. It was not a dead faith, but an obedient faith. James clearly demonstrates that it is an active obedient faith that makes us acceptable to God, and not “faith only.” (James 2:17-26). He illustrated his point well by several examples:

1. Abraham was saved by God’s grace through his faith—that was perfected by his obedience!
2. The only faith that profits is one that helps those in need—an obedient, working faith!
3. The demons have a dead faith—they believe in God’s existence—but they do not obey God!
4. Rahab was saved by her faith that was obedient or active!

Another clear-cut example of one who asked “What must I do?” was uttered by Saul of Tarsus. (Acts 22:1-16). The Lord appeared to him on the road to Damascus. If salvation was by Grace alone or Faith alone, this would have been the time to have made it crystal clear! When Saul realized who Jesus was, he cried out: **“What shall I do, Lord?”** He was told by Jesus to go into the city of Damascus and there it will be told him what he must do. The Lord did not say: **“There is nothing for you to do—it is already done!”** No, Saul had to put his faith into action by his obedience to whatever he was told he must do. When Ananias came, he told Saul: **And now why are you waiting? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.**” His faith was put into action by being baptized and thus was calling on God to carry out his promise of forgiveness. Did Saul earn or merit salvation? Obviously not! But he didn’t receive forgiveness until his faith led him to be baptized to **“wash away his sins!”** Do we earn or merit our salvation when by faith we are led to repent and be baptized for the remission of our sins? Absolutely not! But we do not receive the remission of our sins until we have responded to God’s offer of salvation. In this sense, the Jews on Pentecost saved themselves, Saul saved himself, and we save ourselves today (Acts 2:39). Not in the sense of meriting it, but in the sense of receiving it in God’s appointed way. If we can merit justification, we wouldn’t need the grace of God. But we can’t and that is the reason we need God’s grace!

WHAT IS THE BASIC PROBLEM WITH THE “GRACE ONLY” OR “FAITH ONLY” DOCTRINES?

The problem is not with the Biblical statement that man is saved by Grace through Faith! The Bible is very clear on this point. The problem lies with the unwillingness to bring all the Scriptures together on a given subject and then to draw the proper conclusions. Use of isolated passages can very easily be perverted to teach something God never intended to be taught! God's Word is Truth! Truth is in complete harmony with itself! The Word of God can be harmonized if we will spend the time to study a subject out altogether. And, we need to be constantly reminded, that perversion of Scripture is severely and consistently warned against (Gal. 1:6-9; 2 Jn. 9-10; Rom. 16:17-18; etc.).

THE FULL OR COMPLETE PICTURE!

Salvation is like a coin that has two sides: (1) There is God's side; and then, (2) There is man's side! God's side is that He has freely provided justification for sinful man. But to save man, and not convert (turn) him from sin doesn't accomplish the job that needs to be done. Man needs to be turned from walking in sin (Romans 6:1-2). Also, man's pride (boasting) has to be destroyed so that He will not continue in his rebellious ways—like Satan and his angels! (1 Tim. 3:6; Jude 6; Rev. 12:7-9, etc.). So, God has provided for man's response to be of such a nature that man cannot boast of what “HE HAS DONE!” (Eph. 2:8-9; Rom. 4:2; 3:24-28, etc.).

Clinton Hardin, in an Article in the Gospel Advocate (Feb, 2000) gave a simple illustration that clearly shows the full picture of salvation by grace. He stated that a friend sent him a letter offering him a free steak dinner. But the restaurant was 35 miles away. How did he get his free steak dinner?

1. He read and believed the message from the messenger.
2. He really wanted that “free” steak dinner!
3. He had to drive his car 35 miles in order to get to the restaurant.
4. He had to eat the steak dinner.

If he had not believed the message, he certainly would not have traveled all that distance. Was the steak dinner “free?” Yes, he did not pay a penny for the dinner. But he did have to put his faith into action in order to accept the dinner. Did he earn the steak dinner. No! it was free! His friend paid the full price!

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Acceptance of conditions set forth for a free gift demonstrates faith. Genuine faith does not waver at the conditions given; but rather, offers acceptance and obedience to those conditions, while trusting God for the gift promised. In the words of Jesus, **“If you love Me, keep My commandments!”** (John 14:15).

Lesson Six

“Is Baptism Really Necessary in Order to be Saved?”

Critical issues of change are being advocated in some churches of Christ, in a few publications by members of the church, and in some of our universities operated by members of the church. At first, these changes were not as drastic as they are now being advocated. It is almost like the expression that we have used about some moral changes... *“They are beginning to come out of the closet!”* Once these people get a good foothold (or they are confronted about their subtle teaching) they feel that they need to openly advocate their “well-thought-out” changes. I do not personally believe that these changes are being advocated upon the basis of what the Bible teaches, but rather on the basis of the subjective wishes of those who are advocating change. There is a good reason for this statement that will be discussed in this lesson. We believe that the changes in regards to baptism will help to show this conclusively. Baptism is being relegated to a non-important or a non-necessary act in regards to salvation. It is a parroting of what the sectarian groups about us have advocated for many years. The purposes for this lesson is to look at why this has come about and why their rejection of “plain Bible teaching.”

STATEMENTS TO ILLUSTRATE

While most of us are well aware of what is taught by other religious groups about us, we may not be aware of what is now being openly advocated by some in the Lord’s church. While most religious groups still practice some act that they refer to as “baptism,” the real issue is over the “HOW” of baptism and the “WHY” of baptism! Both of these questions are being answered different by those who wish to bring about radical change in the church.

1. A brother, when asked about an unbaptized person being saved, gave his answer: *“One is saved solely by trusting in Jesus and not as the result of anything we do.”*
2. Another brother, in an article in a relatively new magazine in dealing with the question of being saved, wrote: *“The **FAITH** which **PRECEDES** baptism marks the point of salvation.”*
3. Still another brother, when asked if a person is saved apart from baptism, answered: *“Some will surely find mercy in their ‘ignorance and unbelief’ which may not be extended to others of us because of our increased opportunity to learn and do God’s will.”* Obviously, he offered no statement from Scripture to support such a view.

These and many other statements that could be given can show that men and women are beginning to compromise the plain and simple teachings of the Word of God on this critical issue also. It seems obvious to me that when this doctrine is compromised—there will be many changes to take place in congregations who accept this teaching.

WHY THE CHANGE OF TEACHING?

Several suggestions could be given as to why the change of mind about the necessity of baptism in order to be saved. Possibly, one of the most obvious reasons is to know devoted and seemingly sincere religious people who haven't been immersed for the remission of sins and have to regard them as still not being saved. Regardless as to what the Bible teaches, some people insist on believing they are saved people. To believe that baptism is necessary to salvation is a very "narrow and strict doctrine" and makes the number of saved people much, much smaller. Some people just refused to believe such. The "Biblical" view of baptism has been a fundamental teaching that has separated us from the rest of the religious world.

But there is another reason that may be behind this whole thing of change—that is a basic change of attitude towards the Bible itself! For many years most Protestant churches believed in the inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible. The whole Reformation Movement was based on the theme of "back to the Bible" for our beliefs and practices. But in the past century, Liberalism has drastically changed this picture. Among the original Protestant churches, the Lutherans and the Baptists are still holding on to a belief in the authoritativeness of the Bible. The Lutherans just recently divided over the issue. It is believed that the Southern Baptist churches are facing the same critical issue and will probably divide over such. The Lord's church is still in the main holding to this concept. However, there is a movement in our midst that is advocating a different view towards the Bible. This could be a reason why that those who are trying to bring about changes in the church are not really concerned about what the Bible says about these changes—since they do not consider the Bible an authoritative guide from God. Their view towards the Bible is that it is not to be looked upon as a book of Law to go by or a pattern for our lives, but a mere "love letter" from God to encourage his people. So, showing all this concern for seeing what the Bible says about the matter has been made undesirable and inconsequential. Without the Bible as an authoritative guide, what differences would it make what a person believed, anyway!

NEW TESTAMENT TEACHING ON BAPTISM

This part of the lesson needs to be one in which the individual needs to be sure of his convictions on what the Bible does teach about baptism. For that reason, we will have questions with Scriptures to read to find an answer.

1. Who is to be baptized? (Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:38; Romans 10:9-10)_____

2. How is one to be baptized? (Rom. 6:4-5; Col. 2:12)_____

3. Why is one to be baptized? (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 22:16; Rom. 6:17-18; 1 Pet. 3:21)_____

4. When is a person saved by God (through the blood of Christ)?

- a) When he believes in Jesus? (Jn. 3:16)
- b) When he believes in Jesus & repents? (Acts 3:19)
- c) When he believes in Jesus, repents, and confesses Christ? (Rom. 10:9-10)
- d) When he believes, repents, confesses Christ, and is baptized? (Mark 16:16)

5. Where is salvation to be found? (Eph. 2:13; Gal. 3:26) _____

6. How does one get into Christ to be saved? (Gal. 3:26-27) _____

7. Is a person Saved:

- a) Outside of Christ?
- b) In Christ?

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

There is a serious erosion of Bible teaching regarding baptism within the church that needs to be corrected! We must make up our minds to either let God's Word direct our thinking and living or turn to the "opinions" of men. We need to be thoroughly convicted and stand up and advocate such in love.

Lesson Seven

“How Lenient Will God be in the Judgment?”

The Religious world about us has struggled with the question of how lenient God will be with mankind in the judgment—especially in view of the threatened punishment for sin. Through the centuries men have handled this question in different ways:

- a) Some have come up with “the elect” who only will be saved (Calvinism).
- b) Some have gone in the other direction—all will eventually be saved (Universalism).
- c) Some reject punishment that will last on and on and believe in “annihilation!”
- d) Some advocate that God will be very merciful and lenient in the day of judgment.
- e) etc.

Involved in this issue is the question about those who have never heard the gospel—will they be judged by something different than those who have heard the gospel? Can they still be saved—even though they do not believe in Jesus as the Son of God? Then, there are more questions that arise in regards to those who have heard the gospel but they have not “obeyed the gospel,” but they are sincerely striving to live right—will or can they still be saved? What makes this such a struggle for people is their view of God as a “loving” God—so how could He send “good” people in such a terrible place of punishment?

Until recent years, the above questions have been asked by members of the church and they have gone to the word of God for the answer. While they may not have liked the answer they got, they accepted it as “the will of God!” But recently, the church has become infected with people who are giving different answers to these questions. They are siding with the religious world about us! They just can’t believe that a “loving” God can send “good” people to such a terrible place.

We plan to approach this study a little differently from our other lessons. There will be a lot of questions and scriptures to be read for the reader to draw his own conclusions.

THE GREAT COMMISSION

The “Great Commission” was given by Jesus to His chosen Apostles: ***“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.”*** (Mark 16:15-16).

1. Why did Jesus give the Great Commission to preach the Gospel to all nations?
 - a) Was it because all men were lost?
 - b) Or, was it to inform all men that they will be saved?
2. If all people are lost (Rom. 3:19-23):
 - a) Is it because all have sinned and come under the curse of death?
 - b) Or, is it because they have not heard and obeyed the gospel?

3. Are:
___ a) Honest and sincere Hindu, Buddhist, Moslem, etc., Lost?
___ b) Do They need to hear and obeyed the gospel to be saved?
___ c) Or, has God changed His mind about the need of preaching the gospel to all men?
4. Do people really need to hear and obey the gospel? (2 Thess. 1:7-9; Rom. 1:16).

5. Would it appear to be silly and foolish for Jesus to send His Apostles and Disciples all over the world—endangering their lives and suffering all kinds of persecutions—in order to preach to people who were not really lost? What would be the point of doing this? _____
6. Did Jesus know what He was saying in John 14:6 when He said that He was the only way to the Father? _____
7. Is it absolutely necessary for people to believe in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God? (John 8:24; 3:16-18). _____
8. Is it necessary for a person to be immersed in water before God will save Him? (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; Acts 22:16, etc.) _____

WILL GOD BE LENIENT IN THE DAY OF JUDGMENT?

Possibly, all of us would like to think that God would be lenient in Judgment! But should this question be answered by how we “feel” about the issue or by what God has said He will do in His Word? How would you answer the following questions?

1. How can we know for sure that God will be lenient? _____
2. Has He told us He will be lenient? If so, where is the reference? _____
3. Has He told us to what extent and to whom He will be lenient? _____
4. If He hasn’t said or indicated in His Word that He will be lenient—upon what basis can we firmly believe that He will be lenient? _____
5. Should I take a chance on God being lenient? _____
6. Should I do my thing and expect God’s grace to cover my not being responsible? _____
7. Or, should I strive to:
___ a) Work out my own salvation with fear and trembling? (Phil. 2:12).
___ b) Be even more diligent to make my call and election sure? (2 Pet. 1:10).

THE STRUGGLE TO BELIEVE!

What makes this issue such a struggle for us is that we truly would like to believe that God is going to be lenient in judgment—especially to the “sincere” religious person. Most of us have family and friends that have not “obeyed the gospel.” If we believe they are lost, it isn’t a very desirable thing to deal with. And especially if we have tried to talk to them about the teaching of Scripture and they have rejected it. The following questions become a struggle to deal with:

- 1. Is there any evidence in God’s Word of such leniency?**
- 2. Or, is this just wishful thinking on the part of people?**
- 3. Should we conform to the “politically correct thing” to believe?**
- 4. Just how concerned should we be about obeying God?**

One of the great values of the Old Testament for us today are the recording of people’s actions and God’s actions to these people (Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:6-12). This is especially helpful when it comes to the punishment of God upon sinful people. Examine the events of Adam & Eve being put out of the Garden of Eden; Cain’s punishment; the world-wide flood killing all mankind, but eight people; Nadab & Abihu being burned alive; Sodom & Gomorrha; etc. Why were all of these judgments upon sinful people recorded? (Heb. 10:26-29). Is it not to warn us against our presuming on the leniency of God? If we do as they did, will God be lenient with us?

WHAT IF GOD IS NOT LENIENT?

What if I cannot find anywhere in the Scriptures that clearly teach that God will be lenient; then, what is my responsibility to myself?

- 1. Should I take a chance or be diligent in my service to God?**
- 2. Should I constantly seek to know and do God’s will in my life?**
- 3. Should I be diligent in my efforts to obey God’s will?**

And if I conclude that God is not going to be lenient with others about me; then, what is my responsibility to them?

- 1. Should I just presume that God will save people whether they obey the gospel or not?**
- 2. Or, should I feel responsible for getting the Gospel message to them?**
- 3. Can I afford to ignore the great commission—feel no responsibility?**
- 4. Should I deeply feel the need to make the Gospel accessible to as many people as possible?**

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

My answer to the question of the leniency of God in judgment is....I, personally, do not want to take a chance on such? And I would like to encourage all of us not to take a chance! Let’s do what God tells us to do, so we can have the benefit of His Grace and Mercy in that Day!

Lesson Eight

“Is the Church Just Another Denomination Among Denominations?”

“But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come...” (2 Timothy 3:1). Our world at present is going through some challenging times: Politically, Militarily, Socially, Morally, and Spiritually. And.....the Lord’s church is also facing some challenging things as well! There are men among us who are:

1. Challenging the inspiration and authoritativeness of the Scriptures.
2. Questioning and attacking the Plan of Salvation.
3. Broadening the role of women to be equal to the man in the work and worship of the church—seemingly being more concerned with being “politically correct” than “Biblically correct.”
4. Instrumental Music is gradually being brought into the worship assemblies in some places.
5. The teaching on eternal punishment is being greatly minimized.
6. And obviously, the very nature of the church is being attacked by more people in the church—looking upon the church as just another denomination among denominations.

THE PURPOSE OF THE REFORMATION

During the 1300s and 1400s efforts were made to try to reform the Roman Catholic Church. Many of the people involved were stopped one way or another—if necessary, by death! So-called Christianity was divided into three main branches at this time:

1. Roman Catholic Churches in Western Europe;
2. Greek Orthodox Catholic Churches in Eastern Europe;
3. And the Oriental Orthodox Catholic Churches.

In the minds of the reformers none of these groups truly represented what the “church” should be. Their idea was to make changes for the better—according to the Word of God. Unfortunately, their efforts resulted into several different churches: Lutheran Church, Swiss Reform Church, Church of England; Presbyterian Church, etc., (1500s and 1600s). Continued efforts were being made by various people to still bring about reforms in these new churches. This again resulted in several different churches: Amish, Mennonite, Congregational, Baptist, Brethren, Puritans, Methodists, etc., (1600s and 1700s). In the 1800s continued efforts were being made to reform the reformed churches—but even more so! They came up with the idea of not just reforming the existing churches, but to re-establish the church as it was in the beginning. The term “restoration” began to be used to indicate this idea. The idea of “restoration” caught on mostly in the American colonies. The time was right for such an idea!

REFORMATION vs. RESTORATION

To reform the existing church or churches was one thing, but to restore the church became quite a different idea. Following below is an attempt to try to clarify the use of these two terms.

- 1) To **REFORM** is to believe that the existing “church” is a “church of Christ” but it needs to be cleaned up. So, efforts continued to be in order to bring about reforms that brought the church back to what God wanted it to be.
- 2) To **RESTORE** is to believe that the existing “church” is not a “church of Christ;” but rather an apostate religious group that no longer was recognized by God as His people. Thus, things need to be done that brings the church back into existence again and insist on it being and doing what God design for it.

There are key questions that need to be answered in regards to restoration:

- 1) What causes a group of people to become a “church of Christ?”
- 2) Can a “church of Christ” cease being a church that God recognizes?
- 3) If so, what would cause God to no longer recognize the existing “church” as a “church of Christ?”

WHAT BRINGS A “CHURCH OF CHRIST” INTO EXISTENCE?

When we look at the existing churches and analyze their beliefs and practices—do they measure up to what the Bible tells us about the Lord’s church? Let’s ask two questions and see what kind of an answer you would give:

- 1) Does a group of people become a “church of Christ” when they decide to just start meeting together and calling themselves “church of Christ?”
- 2) Does a group of people become a “church of Christ” when they decide to draw up a list of beliefs (calling it their Creed) and say to everyone who wants to be a member of this church that he has to believe and do the following things? (a listing of such is found in their “Creed”).

I don’t believe that any knowledgeable person would say that either one of the above is correct! If so, then what makes a group a “church of Christ?” Let’s turn to the Word of God and see how such comes about (Read Acts 2:1-47).

- 1) Thousands of devout Jewish worshippers were preached to by inspired men from God.
- 2) Many people were convinced that they had crucified the Messiah—their Redeemer that was to come.
- 3) They cried out and ask what they must do.
- 4) They were told (upon believing the message) to repent and be baptized (immersed) for the remission of sins.

- 5) They gladly received the message and 3000 were baptized and the Lord added them to “the church” (KJV) or to their number.
- 6) These 3000 people became the first “church of Christ!”
- 7) Then, everywhere this same Gospel was preached and people believed, repented, and were baptized (immersed)—they became a “church of Christ.”
- 8) When anyone of these churches went astray from the teachings of Christ, a letter would be sent to them, or they would be admonished by concerned leaders to straighten up and do right (Most of the New Testament Letters were sent with this in mind). Also see Revelation 2 & 3 (Letters to seven churches of Asia).

WHEN DOES A “CHURCH OF CHRIST” CEASE BEING A “CHURCH OF CHRIST?”

Now to the next question that we feel is critical to our discussion in this lesson: *“When does a “church of Christ” cease being a “church of Christ?”*

- 1) A church can so turn from God that He will no longer recognize them as His people. He will blot out their name in the book of life (Rev. 3:5) and remove their lamp stand (Rev. 2:5). In both instances such people cease to be acceptable to God.
- 2) It would also seem logical and obvious that when a group no longer teaches people what to do to be saved correctly—eventually that group will cease being a “church of Christ” period! The reason is—no one has “obeyed the gospel” (2 Thess. 1:7-9)—even though they may still be meeting together and actively doing some things that the Bible teaches.

The problem that “churches of Christ” are facing now from a few preachers in our midst is—they no longer believe that we are a “church of Christ” in the Biblical sense, but just another denomination among many denominations. Their idea is that which religious groups have held to for a long time—all churches make up “the church of Christ” (generic) whether they have obeyed the Gospel or not and whether they call themselves that or not. These preachers have given up the “Biblical instructions” that the inspired Apostle Peter gave in Acts 2 that brings about a “church of Christ” and makes one a member of such. These preachers want to do some reforming within the churches of Christ to fit the “culture” and “beliefs” of religious people around us.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

I believe that people can be a member of a “church of Christ” and not belong to a denomination! But it can only be done by going back to the original teaching of the Word of God and holding fast to such. And we must at all times take heed to the warnings against departing from the faith (1 Timothy 4:1) or not abiding in the teaching of Christ (2 John 9).

Lesson Nine

“Women’s Role in the Assembly of God’s People”

When Christianity spread throughout the world, it faced many obstacles not only in reaching people with the Gospel, but in dealing with the peculiarities of differing societies (differing cultures). There are basic principles or teachings of Christianity that are given by God to regulate the many relationships that people can have. Often these teachings go contrary to the culture of the people. When this happens a choice has to be made. One of the things that can be easily seen in this regard is on the relationship or role of women in different societies. The women in the Greek and Roman world were more involved in leadership roles in religion. Special research has been done by Valerie A. Abrahamsen that indicates this. The following quote will serve to illustrate: *“Women served as priestesses and other leaders in most pagan cults, including Diana, Isis, Livia, Dionysos and Liber and Libera. They were active participants in liturgies, composed hymns and rites, administered temple and cult finances, organized feast-day celebrations, played music and made leadership decisions that affected large numbers of people.”* **Women and Worship at Philippi**, page 194.

For a long time, religious groups that claim to believe in the Bible as the Word of God respected the special instructions concerning the role of women in the public assemblies. That has drastically change in recent years. Instead of holding to what the Scriptures teach, they have given in to the demands of society. As one writer expressed it: *“Indeed, a massive restructuring of values and reorientation of moral and spiritual standards is taking place in American culture. The feminist agenda is one facet of this multifaceted effacement and erosion of biblical values.”* These religious groups are allowing women to serve publicly, teach over the man, preach, and serve as elders or deacons. While it is not surprising that these groups would give in to the pressures of the society around them, it is a surprise and disappointing that some who claim to respect the Word of God have begun advocating and allowing women to do what is expressly forbidden in Scripture. And...women who have been actively involved in other religious groups may find it hard to adjust to the restrictions placed on them in the assemblies of the Lord’s church. However, these restrictions are not cultural, or made up by men who are “women-haters,” but they are based on plain statements of Scripture and on spiritual principles that are universal and have been from the beginning of time.

Jesus’ statement, concerning divorce for any reason, illustrates this truth very clearly when He stated: **“...from the beginning, it was not so.”** (Matt. 19:8). God’s original intentions (from the beginning) was that man and woman marry and remain married all of their lives. And in the same way it was not God’s plan or desire that women have the same role as the men in the affairs of the home or religion. It is important that God’s people stand together and speak as one voice to the religious world about us—God’s Word is Truth and must be respected! It doesn’t take a Solomon to see where all of this is leading—femininity with all its graciousness and charm is going to disappear. Masculinity is being watered down to the point that men are confused about their role, and homosexuality becomes the norm, not the perversion.

It is one thing to acknowledge the equality of men and women in regards to their relationship to God, but quite another to insist they are equal in their roles in the church and in the home. Men and women are made different and are designed for different functions and places of responsibility. God expected of His people under the first covenant to live by His directions and not by the directions of the societies around them (Leviticus 18:3-4). The same admonitions are given to God's people under the new covenant—be willing to be taught and follow all that Jesus teaches us (Matthew 28:20; Romans 12:2, etc.). We are now ready to look at the special instructions concerning the woman's role in the public assemblies of the church.

WOMAN'S ROLE FROM THE BEGINNING

1. Man was created first; then, the woman (Gen. 2:7; 1 Tim. 2:13).
2. The woman was created from the man—for the man (Gen. 2:18, 21-22; 1 Cor. 11:8-9). She was to be a *“helper suitable for him.”*
3. “Headship” or “authority” was given to the man over the woman (Gen. 3:16; 1 Cor. 11:3; Eph. 5:22-24; 1 Tim. 2:11-12).
4. Man is the image and glory of God; while the woman is the glory of man (1 Cor. 11:7). Look carefully at Gen. 1:26-27).
5. Man was given the authority to name all the animals (Gen. 2:19) before woman was created.
6. Man was given instructions from God not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, not the woman (Gen. 2:16-17).

From the above Scriptures, it would seem to be obvious that God created man to lead and the woman to support his leadership. Man has the authority role, woman has the submissive role.

CHANGES IN GOD'S DESIGN

God's order is given again in 1 Corinthians 11:3—*“But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.”* The animal world was placed under man and woman (Gen. 1:28; 2:19). Sin (disobedience) reversed the order that God originally designed for the man and the woman. Notice the sequence of events as recorded in Genesis 3:

1. The serpent took the lead over the woman.
2. The woman took the lead over the man.
3. Man disregarded his leadership role when he followed the lead of the woman.
4. Both man and woman tried to excuse themselves.
5. God called Adam, not Eve, to be responsible since man had been given the command and the leadership role (Gen. 3:9-11). Adam listened to woman and not God!
6. Eve led instead of listening.
7. Eve's subjection to her husband (mentioned in Gen. 3:16) was not something new after the sin—it was already an obvious fact.

Man was designed by God to provide, rule, to lead, and to be an authority. Woman was designed to be in submission, to help, to assist, and to nurture to complete what man needed in his role.

A CLOSER LOOK AT NEW TESTAMENT REGULATIONS

1 Corinthians 11:3-16—Reasons are given for the headship of the man over the woman, as well as dealing with a cultural problem of a covering that women often wore as an outward sign of their subjection to the man. While the woman was given some of the same “miraculous gifts” that the man was given; she needed to know how, where, and when to exercise these gifts. These verses deal primarily with the “how”—showing that she respects God’s arrangement of the “authority” and “submissive” roles. As Paul continues his discussion of the problems in the church at Corinth, he does deal with the where and when that such gifts can be used by women directly and indirectly in chapter 14. To my knowledge, there is nowhere in the Scriptures that requires a woman’s head to be covered to show her respect to her husband. If this is a fact; then, it may be that Paul is regulating a custom in regards to the covering in these verses. One of the special reasons given for the woman to be in a subjective role is given in verse 10—“...*because of the angels.*” If this has reference to the fallen angels who “*did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode*” (Jude 6), it would be warning women not to do as these fallen angels did! They should accept God’s arrangement for the roles of men and women and not rebel against God. But to keep man from taking advantage of the woman, we are reminded that we are also dependant upon the woman for our very existence—so don’t be too proud and haughty.

1 Corinthians 14:34-35—After showing in chapter 12 that these miraculous gifts are given for the building up of the church and proper consideration should be given in the assembly to be sure that these gifts are used out of love for God and one another (chapter 13), he shows in chapter 14 that only men could use these gifts in the public assembly of the church. In regulating the use of these gifts, Paul tells even the men to keep “silent” while another is speaking and to wait their proper time to speak to the assembly. But when he speaks about the women, he says they do not have a time to speak in the assembly—that is, they cannot use their gift of prophecy or gift of tongues in the assembly to speak as the men do. And he makes it very clear that this injunction is based on God’s original arrangement “in the beginning,” when God gave the leadership to the man.

1 Timothy 2:11-15—While the woman has the same basic responsibility of teaching the world around us about Christ (Matt. 28:18-20; 2 Tim. 2:2; Tit. 2:3-5), God has placed limitations on her teaching role. She is not to teach over the man in a position of authority, but to remember that she is to be in a submissive role. The reasons given are three-fold:

- 1) Adam was formed first, then Eve.
- 2) Adam was not deceived, but the woman was.
- 3) Her role is different from the man’s in a special way of childbearing.

It is important that decisions that we make about the woman’s role in the church adheres to God’s arrangement.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

God’s arrangement is for the man to lead in the assemblies of God’s people as well as in the home. Obviously, this submission does not signify inferiority. Jesus clearly shows this when the

Scriptures state that He was subject to His parents—showing that He respected their role as His parents and God’s law that tells children to be obedient to their parents. Women show that they respect God and desire to be obedient to Him when they respect His injunctions. Restrictions placed on women in the assembly are not a cultural thing, but a Scriptural thing! Christians are allowed to blend in with culture (1 Cor. 9:20-22) as long as such activities do not violate the law of Christ or bring about conformity to the world (Rom. 12:1-2).

Lesson Ten

“Changes Advocated in Worship”

The reason for change is often hard to ascertain even when some reason is presented to try to justify the change. The person may have one or more reasons that he does not want to reveal at the time and will cover up his real reason(s) by a more acceptable one. “Change for change’s sake” usually has little value overall; so, most people who advocate change will offer one or more reasons for suggesting the change.

Changes being pushed by certain people in the Lord’s church are manifold. Following is a list that is probably incomplete, but will illustrate many of the things being suggested.

1. Hand clapping with the singing.
2. Swaying with the beat of the singing.
3. Raising up hands during singing or prayer.
4. Men & Women standing before the congregation with microphones to lead the singing together.
5. Solos and choirs.
6. Plays and drama.
7. Dancing.
8. All kinds of instruments to accompany singing.

Some of the reasons often given to justify these changes are:

1. The church will have a better outreach to the community.
2. The unsaved will be attracted to contemporary music rather than traditional hymns.
3. These things make worship more meaningful touching the emotions.
4. etc.

We have an actual case of changes in worship under the Old Testament System in 1 Kings 12:25-32. Jeroboam had been made king over the ten tribes of the North and he was afraid that when these people went up to worship at Jerusalem that their hearts would be won back to Rehoboam, king of Judah. So several changes were made:

1. The object of worship—from God to a golden calf (vs. 28-30).
2. The place of worship—Bethel and Dan (vs. 29, 31)
3. The priesthood to lead the worship—Not of the sons of Levi (vs. 31)
4. The time of worship—8th month & 15th day (v. 32).

The outcome—the people stayed with Jeroboam as king, but God gave up Israel on account of these sins of Jeroboam (14:16). 250 years later, the northern kingdom was taken away by the Assyrians (721 BC). (2 Kings 17:21-23).

Did his changes make the people more acceptable to God or lead them away from God?

The answer is obvious. Did it please the people? Yes! Any time that change is advocated, we need to obviously be concerned about this question! Just whom are we trying to please—other people, ourselves, or God? Our reason for suggesting change needs to be carefully evaluated in light of this and other vital questions that we will be looking at during this lesson.

ACCEPTABLE WORSHIP

A person not concerned about worship being acceptable to God will fall into the same spiritual trap that doomed Jeroboam and the Israelite kingdom. The real basic issue in all of this matter is an “authority issue!” The question of who is in charge is a critical one—is it God or man? And the answer should be an obvious one—**GOD!** God has regulated man’s worship, not only under the Old Covenant, but under the New Covenant as well. Jesus taught as one “having authority” because He was **THE AUTHORITY!** (Matt. 7:29). He made this very clear to His Apostles when He gave the “great commission” to them—“**All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth...**” (Matt. 28:18; John 17:2). As the exalted head over the church, He regulates what is right and acceptable with God, the Father (Eph. 1:20-23). All that we do as followers of Christ is to be done “**in the name of the Lord Jesus.**” (Col. 3:17)—that is, by his authority or approval! When men worship according to their own inclinations; such is called “will worship” (Col. 2:23).

True and acceptable worship that pleases God is that which Jesus has authorized as the head over His church. This principle is easily illustrated in the Old Testament over and over. This is one of the great values of the Old Testament Scriptures for us today (Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:11).

1. **Cain and Abel** (Gen. 4:1-8; Heb. 11:4; 1 John 3:12). They both brought sacrifices to God, but God rejected Cain’s offering. Why? He did not bring what God required. True worship is offered in faith—doing what God commands, not what I like. God does not accept all worship, but only that which is authorized by Him. We don’t dictate to God what He will accept—He tells us!
2. **Nadab and Abihu** (Lev. 10:1-7). These were the two sons of the High Priest (Aaron). They just offered “strange fire” before the Lord, which He had not commanded them. Fire from God consumed them for their error! God told Aaron to: “**make a distinction between the holy and the profane, and between the unclean and the clean, and so as to teach the sons of Israel all the statutes which the Lord has spoken to them through Moses.**” (vs. 10-11). These men died a terrible death because they thought they could tell God what was acceptable worship! (Lev. 16:12).

There are other examples that could be given from the Old Testament, but the two above should well illustrate the importance of listening to God and doing what He says. And since Jesus has all authority now, we do what He commands in order to be acceptable. Wrong or ignorant worship is not acceptable to God (Rev. 19:10; 22:8-9; Acts 17:23; Col. 2:18; Matt. 15:3, 6, 9; etc.). Man has not been left to himself, or his imagination, or his subjective impulses as to whom he worships or how he worships. The Lord has given us instructions through His inspired Apostles (1 Cor. 14:37). He has given us:

1. **The How of worship**—(John 4:24; 1 Cor. 14:15, 40; Col. 2:22; Matt. 15:9).
2. **The Who of worship**—(1 Cor. 14:25; Rev. 14:7; 15:4; Matt. 14:33).
3. **The Acts of worship**—(Acts 2:42; 1 Cor. 11:20-34; 14:15; 16:1-2; Acts 20:7).

It would seem logical that the safe course to pursue in worship is to stay with those things clearly prescribed and them alone. Stay with those things that are right and can’t be wrong. Why venture into questionable things?? After all—worship is being offered to God, not man! However, when done correctly, man is edified and built up (1 Cor. 14:26).

THE USE OF INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC IN WORSHIP

For about 100 years the Lord's church in America has not been disturbed by people wanting to bring instruments into the worship assemblies. In the late 1800s and early 1900s there was a huge division in the church over this issue (as well as other issues). This resulted into two separate groups ("churches of Christ—non-instrumental & "Christian churches" or "churches of Christ"—instrumental). By the introduction of instruments into the worship, it forced a decision on the part of the worshippers—whether they could consciously worship with the instrument or not. But the real underlying issue in his division was on the question of the Authority of God. Some people forgot that we answer to God, not He to us! What we do in worship is to be directed by God, not what we want or what pleases us. And one thing that is absolutely certain, **GOD HAS NOT AUTHORIZED INSTRUMENTS OF WORSHIP FOR US TODAY!** The silence about such is deafening in the New Testament, but God was not silent about it in the Old Testament.

One of the interesting facts about the use of instruments in worship is—that both the Jews and Gentiles were quite familiar with the use of instruments in their worship activities, but the New Testament church nowhere used such for hundreds of years later. By then, the church was well on its way towards full apostasy away from God.

Another very interesting fact about such use is—that the early reformation leaders were all firmly against their use in the newly established churches coming out of Roman Catholicism. Quotations can be found against such up into the 1700s from outstanding leaders in the "old-line" protestant churches.

A lack of teaching on this issue and "inconsistent practices" on the part of the older generation has left the younger generation in the church without any means of determining the rightness or wrongness of the use of the instrument in worship. They are listening to the modern "Christian music" on the radio and on CDs and are impressed with what they hear. Unless they have a good reason for rejecting the instrument in worship—it is just a matter of time until it will be brought in.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

For most of the changes in worship that are being advocated by some among us there can be no Scriptural authority for such. We are warned not to add to nor take away from God's directions (Deut. 4:2; 18:20; Prov. 30:6; Rev. 22:18-19). When we teach people to do what God has not authorized, we are guilty of doing just that!

Let's be absolutely sure that our worship to God is correct according to God's directions!

Lesson Eleven

“Should We Fellowship With Error?”

“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.” (Psalm 133:1). The writer of this Psalm expressed one of the great joys of being a child of God and the fellowship also of fellow-Christians. This togetherness is very desirable and is clearly spelled out in the first congregation of God’s people (Acts 2-5; 2:42). Their fellowship was something to be desired and many entered into that fellowship. And the same should be true with the Lord’s people today as well.

MEANING AND USE OF THE TERM

This term is used in the following Scriptures in the Greek, but may not be translated “fellowship.”

1. It is to share something with others (Rom. 12:13; Philemon 6; 2 Cor. 8:4).
2. It is to participate with others in something (1 Cor. 10:16).
3. It is to be a partner with others (Phil. 1:5).
4. To be a partaker of another’s evil deeds by “bidding him God’s Speed.” (2 John 9-11).

We are part of a “fellowship” in Christ that shares and participates in things that we hold to in common. Then, there is a “spirit” of fellowship or closeness that we can experience in common. Christ has broken down the barriers so that we can all be “one” in Christ (Eph. 2:11-22). We share in a mutual and sincere concern for one another (1 Pet. 1:22). All negative traits that disrupt this “oneness” or “harmony” or “togetherness” must be cast aside (1 Pet. 2:1; Eph. 4:32). In Christ, we find acceptance, forgiveness, kindness, and longsuffering and patience. We are to make every effort to maintain this fellowship (oneness, unity, harmony) in our midst (John 17:20-21; Eph. 4:1-6; 1 Cor. 1:10).

God has called us into His kingdom to not only enjoy this fellowship, but to work hard at upholding it. We are to be there for one another, to support one another, to build up and strengthen one another (Rom. 12:13; Acts 28:15). Such a fellowship has the potential of accomplishing great things—there is no limit to its possibilities. Like God said of the people that built the “tower of babel”—“*...and now nothing which they purpose to do will be impossible for them.*” (Gen. 5:6; Ecc. 4:9-12).

THE BASIS OF FELLOWSHIP

This fellowship is made possible by God for the good of His people. The emphasis is upon “His people!” This fellowship is made possible through Jesus’ death on the Cross and upon our obedience to the Gospel of Christ (Acts 2:36-42; Gal. 3:26-27). It is a fellowship of the “sons of God” and also with God! This fellowship is maintained by our continuing to “walk in the light as He is in the light!” (1 John 1:7). It is to abide in the “teaching of Christ.” (2 John 9). It is to fully submit to the authority of Christ in all we do and say (Matt. 28:18; 10:40; Col. 3:17). It is to be

maintained by not going beyond that which is written (1 Cor. 4:6). This fellowship is to be fully appreciated and enjoyed by those who are “living righteous or holy lives” (1 John 3:7). This fellowship is limited by only by what God gives as limitations!

We must not make this fellowship too narrow, nor too loose. Jesus recognized only those who do the will of the Father (Matt. 7:21-23). We need to accept one another and be tolerant and patient where there are differences in temperament or immaturities.

LOSS OF THIS FELLOWSHIP

You cannot lose what you never had! If we have not become “sons of God” by being born again; then, we are not a part of this fellowship and cannot lose what we do not possess. But, even those who have been born again can lose this fellowship—which should be felt as a great loss!

1. A brother can lose this fellowship by continuing to walk in sin (unrepentant). When he is faced with his continued disobedience and he will not repent—we are to look upon him as an unbeliever (Matt. 18:15-17; Gal. 6:1; 1 Cor. 5:1-12).
 - a) Fornicators
 - b) Covetous
 - c) Idolaters
 - d) Revilers
 - e) Drunkards
 - f) Extortioners
 - g) etc.
2. A brother can lose this fellowship by neglect or indifference (Heb. 2:1-3; 10:24-25; Rev. 3:14-22).
3. A brother can lose this fellowship by walking disorderly (2 Thess. 3:6-15).
4. A brother can lose this fellowship by being a divisive person (Tit. 3:9-11).
5. A brother can lose this fellowship by being a false teacher (Rom. 16:17-18; 2 Jn. 9-11).

Those who do not appreciate this fellowship do not really deserve to be included in it. The prodigal Son chose to leave the fellowship of his family, but when he “came to himself” (realized what he was missing), he returned (Luke 15:11-24).

WITH WHOM SHOULD I FELLOWSHIP?

I should fellowship all of those whom Deity fellowships! I should limit my fellowship to those with whom the Lord limits His fellowship! I should be in full fellowship with those who are children of God who are striving to live righteous lives.

1. This would include newborn babes in Christ up to the more mature of God’s people—with all of their differing opinions and immaturities.
 - a) A difference must be made in faith and opinion.
 - b) Opinions must not be bound.
 - c) Faith must not be compromised (Rom. 14).
2. This would include those with doctrinal misunderstandings that need some time to grow.
 - a) Corinth had doctrinal misunderstandings which needed to be corrected, but

- they were to stay together as the people of God (1 Cor. 1:10).
- b) However, Paul mentioned two men at Ephesus that he had to deliver unto Satan because of their false teaching (1 Tim. 1:19-20).
 - c) Some diversity will probably always exist in a growing church because of the variation in the maturity level in each congregation.
 - d) But in no way should we condone or fellowship that which is false or not true (2 John 9-11).
 - e) Definite efforts need to be made to clear up the misunderstandings.
 - f) Truth must be upheld and error put down.
 - g) We are to abide in truth, not contradict it, violate it, or go beyond it (2 John 9)

While Christians are called upon to fellowship all of those with whom the Lord fellowships; it is also true that we must limit our fellowship as well.

1. We should not include in our fellowship those who have not been born again (Jn. 3:5).
2. We should not fellowship immoral brethren, unless they repent (1 Cor. 5:1-13; 2 Cor. 2:6-7).
3. We should not fellowship with known false teachers (2 John 9-11), or we become partakers of their evil deeds.
4. We should not fellowship with those who cause division (Rom. 16:17-18).
5. We should not fellowship with those who refuse to follow the teachings of the Apostles (Acts 2:42; 2 Thess. 2:15; 3:6).
6. Examples: Rev. 2:14-16; 2:20-23; 3:1-3; 3:14-19.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

“Fellowship” is a Divine-human relationship that has been designed by God for a blessing to His people. The early church continued steadfastly in the fellowship that Christ had brought them into. It was something they were a part of, possessed, and jointly participated in.

Fellowship, however, cannot be with God when we are at odds with our brethren in Christ. It is a joint venture with both God and man. The “church” does not determine the limits of this fellowship, but merely recognizes God’s limitations.

How do we feel about “our” fellowship here at this place?

Lesson Twelve

“Being Like the Churches Around Us”

Jesus (the master teacher) taught the great truths of God to a people who (in the main) were not really interested. They mainly followed Jesus for the food and the miracles (John 6:26-30; Matt. 13:13-15). But, just like the Old Testament Prophets, Jesus was blunt and uncompromising with the message of God. The people complained about the hard sayings (teachings) and many turned and walked no more with Him (John 6:41, 52, 61, 66). The choice was theirs to make—and they made it!

Unlike Jesus, many who profess to believe in Him, do not speak God’s truth as Jesus did, but are compromising the message that they bring. Mishandling of the truth has been the plague of the Lord’s church through the centuries (2 Thess. 2:1-12). Jesus, Himself, warned of the false teachers that would come to deceive the people (Matt. 7:15-20; 24:9-13). The Apostles and Prophets of Christ warned of the same dangers (Rom. 16:17-18; 1 Cor. 1:10; Gal. 1:6-9; Phil. 1:16; Col. 2:6-8; 1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Tim. 4:1-5; Tit. 1:13-14; 2 Peter 2:1ff; 1 John 4:1ff; etc. These false teachers are characterized by the inspired Apostle Peter in his second letter as:

- 1) “secretly bringing in destructive heresies” (2:1)
- 2) “will exploit you with deceptive words” (2:3)
- 3) “they are presumptuous, self-willed...and not afraid to speak evil of dignitaries” (2:10)
- 4) “entice unstable souls” (2:14)
- 5) “forsaken the right way and gone astray” (2:15)
- 6) etc.

Possibly, one of the best phrases that could describe the false teacher is found in Romans 3:18—**“There is no fear of God before their eyes.”** They show their arrogance by their misuse and mishandling of the Word of Truth (2 Tim. 2:15). They feign concern for people and all the time use them to their own ends. The dangers are great—we need to be awakened to such!

THE DANGERS OF INDIFFERENCE

False teachers can be stopped! “Change agents” can be dealt with correctly! But it must be done by people who are concerned enough to learn and follow only the Word of God. It will not be done by a church that is like Laodicea (Rev. 3:14-22):

- 1) Neither cold nor hot—but lukewarm (indifferent—unconcerned spiritually).
- 2) Self-satisfied (rich and in need of nothing.
- 3) Do not see their true condition before God.
- 4) Christ was not truly living in them—He was on the outside knocking to be let in!

Apathy, indifference, and a lack of zeal in service to Jesus guarantee the gradual destruction of the church in any location. A “dead faith” is worthless (Jas. 2:17, 20, 24, 26). It is a working, obedient faith that will make the difference in the struggle the church is now facing with those who are trying to change the church. We must remember that those who support and encourage those that teach contrary to the teachings of Christ not only do not have God, but they become partakers in his “evil deeds!” (2 John 9-11).

WILL HISTORY REPEAT ITSELF?

The Lord's church is perfect as God designed it, but imperfect because it is made up of imperfect people. The Corinthian church, with all of its problems, has become a big help to congregations today to help us deal with problems in our own midst. And...as long as we try to profit from the mistakes of others we will not have to repeat their mistakes. But humans seem to have a way of forgetting or ignoring the past and have to learn all over again the hard way.

During the late 1800s and early 1900s, the Lord's church struggled with several issues and questions that eventual led to a division. And now—100 years later—we are in danger of facing another division over some of the same issues. What has brought this on?

- 1) A big change in the society around us. Our outlook used to be one that was rational, logical, and demanding of facts upon which to base our decisions. Now, we are seeing a more subjective, emotionally-driven culture that makes their decisions not on truth, but on feelings. Truth has now become whatever a person wants it to be.
- 2) Changes in attitudes within the church. We are more and more allowing cultures to dictate to us. Our younger men have been exposed to the philosophies of this present age and are not able to properly deal with such. They are being sucked into being like the rest of the religious world about us.
- 3) Also, pride often plays a sign role as well. Younger men, seeking a name or reputation for themselves, get caught up in something “new!” They have discovered something that the ablest among us have not seen nor understood. Where did they get this new information? Not from the Word of God, but from the philosophies of men or a perversion of the word of God. Instead of showing clearly from the Word of God that preachers have been wrong, they give their philosophical rationalizations. Instead of harmonizing the Scriptures, they misuse them to their own ends as denominational preachers have done all along. They have no reservations in being secretive or misleading when applying for a position of leadership among us. They play down their “reservations” until they get a stronghold in the congregation. They work deceptively to reach people who can be easily swayed to their position. They usually isolate themselves from “sound” preachers and align themselves with preachers after their own ideas. In time, the church they work with will no longer desire to be called a “church of Christ.” They prefer “Community Church” or something like this to get away from the stigma of being a “church of Christ!”

Will history be repeated? YES! It always has been and probably always will. The Lord's church is heading for another big division in this country. Our survival depends to a large extent on the younger generation that is coming on now to be “grounded” in God's truth! Hopefully, the controversy in the church will cause many to go back and study the Scriptures to find the answer for themselves. But by all means, let's not spend our time on a negative outlook, but on teaching and encouraging people to let God be their sole guide for their lives.

JUST WHAT IS OUR GOAL?

Is it to be as close as humanly possible to being the “ideal” church of Christ as presented in the Scriptures? Or, are we satisfied to be just another denomination among the many denominations around us? Do we really want to be the Lord’s church, or be satisfied to be like the churches started by men? These churches do not have to wear human names, have human creeds, and engage in worship activities contrary to the teachings of Scripture (etc.)—THEY CHOOSE TO BE WHAT THEY ARE! We have a choice also—whether to be like them or to be different, unique, like the church described in the Word of God.

The Christians in the first three centuries of the church’s existence had to make the same choice—whether to be like Judaism or be different and persecuted; or, whether to be like the pagan religions or be different and be persecuted. You know the choice that many of them made that cost them their lives. According to Fox’s **Book of Martyrs**—all of the Apostles, except for the Apostle John, died a martyr’s death for the cause of Christ. They would not compromise, nor change the truth of God—neither would they deny Christ. Persecution was like a fire that purged the church for almost 300 years of the more nominal members while strengthening the rest. The admonition “*Be faithful unto death*” was far more than a trite saying among them—it demanded a conscious, daily, life-or-death decision on their part.

Do we have the courage and strength to be different and stand firm on the truth of God? (Col. 2:6-8). Are we willing to die to be different as the Lord teaches us to be?

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The purpose of a name or descriptive phrase is to identify a person or thing. Terms are used in the New Testament to distinguish the Lord’s church from the religious world around it. These people were the church “called out” of Christ or God. They made up the new kingdom, or body, or temple, or family of God. The need for proper identity of the church is still with us today. We need to be differentiated from the world religions as well as those churches started by men. Are we ashamed to be a member of the “church” that Christ started, died for, is head of, and will come back for someday? May we always uphold the name of Christ and be willing to even die before denying our connection with Him.

