



The Reflector

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Dealing with the Known and Unknown

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The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law. (Deuteronomy 29:29 KJV) This suggests that there is a portion of God's will and wisdom that He has chosen to keep secret in His mind and a portion He has chosen to reveal.

As much as we might like to know *all* about God and the rest of the spirit world, we are limited to what God has chosen to reveal. All we can know for sure about God is what we can learn from observing His material handiwork (Psalm 19:1-6; Romans 1:20) and reading/hearing His written revelation, the Bible. From observing His handiwork we can learn that there is an intelligent designer (God), something of His nature and attributes, and much about His power. But to know the fulness of His nature, who He is, what He is called, and what His will is for us, we have to turn to His spoken/written revelation in the Scriptures.

As much as it may interest us to try to delve into those things deep in the recesses of His mind, we have to be content with only those things revealed. We have to recognize that much of His nature, wisdom, knowledge and judgment is "past finding out." (Rom. 11:33). It is futile to speculate about what goes on behind the scenes in the spirit world that is not revealed. There are many things (like angels, demons, principalities and powers) that may peek our interest, but we are limited to what is revealed. There is also a lot not revealed about the workings of God's providence.

The word "providence" is not in our most used English Bibles, but the idea is clearly taught. There is both God's general providence (His general care of His creation) and special providence (His intervention in human affairs and "nature" affecting change). Many believe that God created

the world and all things therein and then, much like a string propelled toy top, pulled the string, putting it to spinning, then leaving it to spin itself out on its own. No, He still takes a "hands on" approach in the affairs of nations and individuals of His creation. It is also revealed that some things happen by chance (1 Sam. 6:9; 2 Sam. 1:6; Eccl. 9:11; Luke 10:31). His providential working may look like happenings by chance from our vantage point, but is really happening because of God's, behind the scenes, intervention. The story of Joseph is an excellent example of such providential working of God.

The day that we cease to believe in God's "hands on" providence should be the day we cease to ask favors of God in prayer. When we petition Him for favors for ourselves and others we are saying we believe that prayer really does change things – because God does intervene at times.

Yes, the Bible does show that God has at times changed His mind in answer to prayers of His saints. When I pray for favors "if it is God's will," I am acknowledging that I do not know what God's will may be in each case. He has not chosen to reveal all His will for every circumstance in everyone's life (the world could not hold the book), but we can carry our desires to Him in prayer with the assurance that they will be done – **if** they fit into His will. Otherwise they will not be done. When they are granted, I may not know for sure whether, in the absence of revelation, they came about by intervention or by chance, but I can still thank and praise God for them.

Let us respect and teach all that God has revealed about Himself and the spirit world. Let us obey and teach all His revealed will – asking for forgiveness when we fall short. Also, let us continue to ask God for things we desire even

though we may not know His secret will concerning the matter, trusting Him to grant our desire if it is His will – really wanting His will to be done even if it is different from ours. ■

What Is The Church Of Christ?

Allan Turner

Many are confused by the expression “church of Christ.” They think “church of Christ” is terminology that identifies only a small segment of Christians, namely, “the Church of Christ denomination.” This is simply not true.

The “My Church” of Matthew 16:18

In Matthew 16:18, Jesus Christ said, “I will build my church.” It is the “my church,” or church belonging to Christ (i.e., Christ’s church), of this passage that we wish to consider in this study, and not some religious denomination. In order to appreciate this lesson, we ask you to set aside all religious prejudice and denominational bias, and simply consider the truths taught in God’s Word on this most important subject.

One Body And One Church

In Ephesians 4:4, we learn that there is but one body. In Colossians 1:18, we learn that this “one body” is none other than the church belonging to Christ. In other words, the “my church” of Matthew 16:18 is the body, or church, of Christ (Ephesians 1:22).

In Ephesians 2:16, we learn that all mankind, whether Jew or Gentile, is reconciled in the body “by the cross” (cf. v. 13). Consequently, it does not surprise us to learn that the church (His body) was purchased by Jesus’ blood on the cross (Acts 20:28). Therefore, those who are identified as being in the body are also described as being blood-bought (I Corinthians 6:20; I Peter 1:18,19). To be in Christ, then, is to be in His body, and to be in His body is to be in His church. If this is true, and the Bible clearly teaches us that it is, then a significant question would be: “How does one get into the church, or body, of Christ?”

The Lord Adds To His Church Those Who Obey Him

In Acts 2:47, we learn that “the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.” This is

certainly as it should be, because Christ is the “author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him” (Hebrews 5:9). In order to be saved and added to the Lord’s church, one must be willing to obey Him. In I Samuel 15:22, Samuel, guided by the Holy Spirit, informed Saul that “to obey is better than sacrifice.” The apostle John, inspired by the same Spirit that inspired Samuel, wrote, “He that saith I know Him and keepeth not His commandments is a liar and the truth is not in Him” (I John 2:4).

Obedience Is Absolutely Necessary

The Lord said, “If ye believe not that I am He, ye shall die in your sins” (John 8:24). In Acts 17:30, the apostle Paul said, “God now commandeth all men everywhere to repent.” In Romans 10:10, we are taught that in order to be saved one must be willing to confess Jesus Christ (cf. Matthew 10:32,33). While many are willing to acknowledge the importance of belief, repentance, and confession of Jesus as Lord in relationship to salvation by grace, they reject the idea that baptism has anything at all to do with salvation. This, of course, is terribly unfortunate, because the Bible unequivocally teaches that baptism, like belief, repentance, and confession, is absolutely necessary in order to be saved. If you doubt this, then we challenge you to invest a little of your time in contemplating the scriptures we are about to consider.

Baptized Into Christ

In Galatians 3:27, Paul makes it quite clear that we are “baptized into Christ.” In other words, we are “baptized into one body” (I Corinthians 12:13). Unquestionably, then, one cannot be “in Christ” (i.e., in a saving relationship with Him) unless one has been baptized. This is why baptism is said to be “for [i.e., unto, or for the purpose of] the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38). This is why Saul of Tarsus was told: “And why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16). This is why the apostle Peter said, “...baptism doth now also save us” (I Peter 3:21). And this is why the Colossian letter refers to baptism as the “circumcision of Christ” (Colossians 2:11,12). Under the Law of Moses, circumcision, the cutting away of the flesh, was a sign of being in covenant relationship with God. Consequently, the circumcision of Christ, the

cutting off or putting away of the sins of the flesh, is a sign of being in covenant relationship with God through Jesus Christ. If you have not been baptized to “wash away your sins,” then you are not in a covenant relationship with Christ.

There Is A Relationship Between Jesus' Blood And Baptism

Often, those who believe that baptism is not necessary for the remission of sins teach that an emphasis on baptism somehow denigrates the blood of Christ. Such teaching could not be further from the truth. The Bible teaches there is a relationship between the blood of Christ and baptism (I John 5:8). In Matthew 26:28, we learn that Jesus' blood was shed for the remission of sins; but in Acts 2:38, we learn that baptism is for the remission of sins. Again, in I John 1:7, we are told that our Lord's blood cleanses us from sin; but in Acts 22:16, we are told that baptism cleanses us from sin. Once more, in Colossians 1:14, we are taught that Christ's blood saves us; but in I Peter 3:21, we are instructed that baptism saves us. How can this be? How can both the blood of our Lord and baptism be for the remission of our sins?

The answer is relatively simple. Our Lord's blood was shed in His death (John 19:34), and Romans 6:3 informs us that we are baptized into His death. Therefore, it is in baptism that one first comes into contact with the precious blood of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Such clear Bible teaching is not hard to understand; nevertheless, multitudes have failed to comprehend it.

In John 16:13, we are told that the Holy Spirit would guide the apostles into all truth. He did exactly that, and, in doing so, taught that Christ's blood was shed in His death that we might have the remission of our sins. Furthermore, He revealed that by believing in Christ, repenting of our sins, confessing Jesus as Lord, and being baptized in water by the authority of Christ, we could be saved (i.e., have our sins remitted). In other words, the “one Spirit” (viz., the Holy Spirit) has directed us to be immersed by the “one baptism” into the “one body” (i.e., the church belonging to Christ) where there is continued cleansing by the blood of Christ (cf. Ephesians 4:4,5; I Corinthians 12:13; I John 1:7-9). In I John 5:8, the Bible says, “And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one.” My friend, if

it is not in baptism that the Holy Spirit, water, and the blood of Christ agree, then where is it?

In Acts 2:40, it is said that, “...with many other words he [the apostle Peter] testified and exhorted them, saying, ‘Be saved from this perverse generation.’” Those who “gladly received his word [that day] were baptized” (Acts 2:41). Don't you want to be a member of the “my church” of Matthew 16:18, namely, the church or body of Christ? Then why don't you “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38)?

Perhaps there's a church of Christ in your neighborhood. If so, contact someone there and I am sure they will be happy to discuss with you the church and its relationship to Christ. If you want to contact me by email, I will be happy to study with you further also. May God richly bless you as you continue to study His word. ■

Wrong Is Wrong!

R. J. Evans

We live in a time of declining morals. Political correctness has “gone to seed” in our present culture. Our enemy, the devil, provides many rationalizations for improper behavior. We must so live as to “not be ignorant of his devices” (2 Cor. 2:11). The Apostle Paul told the Corinthians— “But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ” (2 Cor. 11:3). Quite often, we hear the true statement: “wrong is wrong”. With these warnings in mind, we must ever realize that wrong is wrong despite the efforts of so many to excuse their actions. Let us heed the following:

Wrong is wrong, even if we don't get caught. Let us remember that “The eyes of the Lord are in every place, Keeping watch on the evil and good” (Prov. 15:3). The Hebrew writer tells us “there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account” (Heb. 4:13). On that great day, “God will bring every work into judgment, Including every secret thing, Whether it is good or whether it is evil” (Eccl. 12:14).

Wrong is wrong, even if we think it is for a good cause. Some will forsake worshiping God for some worldly activity or “good cause”. A supposedly

honorable purpose does not justify a dishonorable deed or action. The end never justifies the means. The Apostle Paul made this point to the Romans as it had to do with those who were slandering him— “And why not say, ‘Let us do evil that good may come’?—as we are slanderously reported and as some affirm that we say. Their condemnation is just” (Rom. 3:8). Sin is transgression of God’s law. (1 Jn. 3:4; 5:17; 2 Jn. 9) But how many times have we heard feeble attempts to justify sin on the basis of— “it is doing so much good”, “it is such a great cause”, or “it feels so good”. For an action to be pleasing in the sight of God, it must be morally and doctrinally right---all in accordance with the will of God. Thus, all that we do must be authorized and justified by Scripture. See 2 Tim. 3:16-17; 1 Pet. 4:11.

Wrong is wrong, even if it doesn’t bother our conscience. The conscience must be taught and properly trained. If not, it will accept wrong-doing. Remember, the Apostle Paul persecuted Christians, casting them into prison, all with a clear conscience. He stated, “Indeed, I myself thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth” (Acts 26:9). And, again, He stated to the council as he reflected back on his sinful conduct, “Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day” (Acts 23:1). This is why we often do sinful things just as the world does and think nothing of it because we have not been taught correctly. For example, the Bible clearly teaches “in like manner, also, that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing’s, but, which is proper for women professing godliness with good works” (1 Tim. 2:9-10). It is wise for parents to begin instilling a strong sense of modesty in their children’s hearts and lives at a very young age. Otherwise, they will more than likely grow up thinking immodesty is fine, giving it no serious thought. Hence, the conscience must be guided and taught strictly by the Word of God, so as to have the proper standard and guide.

Wrong is wrong, even if it is commonly considered acceptable. The Bible says, “You shall not follow a crowd to do evil” (Ex. 23:2). Just think of what has become acceptable in recent years in our present society—social drinking, partying and dancing, gambling, dressing

immodestly, using profanity, etc. We see all of this, not only in person, but on TV and in movies. 57.5 million babies have been murdered since abortion was legalized in America in 1973. And now we are witnessing the acceptance of homosexuality, the legalization of same-sex marriage, and the legalization of marijuana in some states. We begin to think—what’s next? But just because “everybody else is doing it,” or so it seems, that doesn’t make it right. The child of God should “not enter the path of the wicked, And do not walk in the way of evil. Avoid it, do not travel on it; Turn away from it and pass on” (Prov. 4:14-15). But if we are not careful, we will find ourselves entering, walking and traveling along with the ways and practices of the world, rather than turning away from them! (Rom. 12:1-2; 2 Cor 6: 17; 1 Jn. 2:15-17) We are told to “Test all things; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil” (1 Thes. 5:21-22).

Remember, there is never a right way to do wrong. **Wrong is wrong!** ■

Don’t throw out the King James and American Standard Versions

Most people I know prefer a good later translation over the old King James or old American Standard versions, either in the public or private reading of the scriptures, because of some of the archaic words used in these versions. However, “*Thou*,” “*thee*,” and “*ye*,” as distinguished from “*you*,” can actually be helpful in determining whether the singular or plural is meant in a passage. “*Thou*” is singular and is used as a subject. “*Thee*” is singular and is used as a object.

“*Ye*” is plural and used as a subject. “*You*” is plural and used as an object. For example, when Jesus said to Nicodemus, “Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again” (John 3:7). The “*thee*” is singular, referring to Nicodemus, while the “*Ye*” is plural referring to Nicodemus and others. So, if you run across a passage in a newer version where it is not clear if a “*you*” is singular or plural, it could be helpful to check it out in the *King James* or *American Standard*. While you may prefer not to use either as your primary version, it is a good idea to keep them around as reference books. - EB ■