

Fulton County Gospel News

Good News About Christ And His Church For All Of The World

“. . . Christ is the head of the church: and He is the Savior of the body.” - Ephesians 5:23

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KEEPING THE CHURCH SAVED

by Marvin L. Weir

For years the Lord's church taught rightly that the alien sinner must submit to and obey the will of God to be saved. However, today many congregations that profess to be the Lord's church believe in a "grace only" concept of salvation. Denominationalism has long pointed to Christ's finished work at Calvary as if such work did away with man's free moral agency and obligation to save himself "from this crooked (perverse – NAS, NKJ) generation" (Acts 2:40). It was the apostle of love who said, "He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1 John 2:4). This one verse of Scripture is sufficient to destroy the erroneous "faith only" doctrine as the present tense force of "keepeth" indicates that the one who "keeps on not keeping his commandments is a liar" (Robertson's Word Pictures in the New Testament).

Neither is the "once saved, always saved" man devised doctrine true, but many brethren are now living their lives in a way that indicates they believe it. The apostle Peter makes it abundantly clear that a child of God can apostatize and lose his soul. Peter declared,

For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they

are again entangled therein and overcome, the last state is become worse with them than the first. For it were better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after knowing it, to turn back from the holy commandment delivered unto them. It has happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog turning to his own vomit again, and the sow that had washed to wallowing in the mire" (2 Peter 2:20-22).

The Holy Bible emphasizes many things that the church must do to keep saved. Let us note three things that are sorely needed but sadly neglected in many churches of Christ today.

First, the church must teach on and demand moral purity among the lives of its members. It is a terrible and tragic shame that immodesty and immorality are tolerated in many congregations under the guise of love for the brethren. Members of the body of Christ do not have the option of dressing like the world dresses and living like the world lives. When a Christian will not speak out against lascivious dress and immoral lifestyles, he actually encourages such ungodly behavior.

The church at Corinth was proud of the fact that they were

tolerant of sexual immorality among some of their members. The apostle Paul rebuked these brethren and reminded them "a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump" (1 Corinthians 5:6). Sin, like a raging fire, will always spread if allowed to have its way. The righteous can have no fellowship with the ungodly (cf. 2 Corinthians 6:14). Moral purity is a must if the church is going to be saved.

Second, the church must practice discipline as taught in the Scriptures to preserve truth and strengthen the saints. When faced with unrighteousness in the lives of members, most congregations today can recall "Judge not, that ye be not judged" (Matthew 7:1) while conveniently forgetting the command to "judge not according to appearance, but judge righteous judgment" (John 7:24). Judgment without true facts or based upon appearance is condemned, but judgment based upon the fruit of one's actions is commended and commanded (cf. Matt. 7:16-20).

A child of God who is out of step in his walk with the Lord and refuses to repent is to be "marked" or withdrawn from. Yes, this applies to those guilty of immorality (1 Cor. 5:11-13), those who are false teachers (Romans 16:17), and those who are promoting ungodly division and sowing discord (Titus 3:10). In fact, church discipline applies to any member who has chosen to continue to walk in a "disorderly" manner. The Bible

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says, *“Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which they received of us”* (2 Thessalonians 3:6).

Third, sufficient teaching must be done on the uniqueness and identity of the Lord’s church. Many brethren are no longer faithful soldiers of the cross because they have decided to offend no one and please everybody. In these congregations, bold denunciation of false doctrine and denominationalism is a thing of the past. How can one be led to Christ if he is not shown the way (cf. John 14:6)?

Some brethren now opt for seminars instead of gospel meetings. They have given up preaching the gospel to acquaint their friends and neighbors with the

New Testament principles of worship, doctrine and church organization. But the Bible still says that the gospel is God’s power to save (Rom. 1:16), and no faithful child of God will ever be ashamed of proclaiming it in its purity and simplicity. The Bible warns to those who will hear: *“But speak thou the things which befit the sound doctrine”* (Titus 2:1).

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YE CANNOT SERVE THE LORD

by Chris Perry

While studying the book of Joshua, an interesting statement caught my attention. Called by God to fill Moses’ place as leader of Israel, Joshua fulfilled his duty exceptionally, and brought the children of Israel to the Promised Land. As the account closes, however, Joshua is preparing to go *“the way of all the earth”* (23:14). He leaves his beloved nation with a final challenge—*“Choose ye this day”* (24:15)—and the last phrase should be familiar: *“...as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”* The people, affected by Joshua’s admonition, reply, *“God forbid that we should forsake the Lord, to serve other gods...therefore will we also serve the Lord; for He is our God”* (24:16, 18). Following that reply is the statement that caught my eye: *“And Joshua said unto the people, Ye cannot serve the Lord: for He is an holy God; He is a jealous God; He will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins”* (24:19). Surely God does not mean that it is *literally impossible* for Israel to serve God and for God to

forgive their sins; there *must* be an explanation that with some investigation would become clear. And indeed there is.

The most obvious clue that another explanation is necessary has already been noted: *“Choose ye this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord”* (24:15). Would God admonish His people to do something which it was impossible for them to do? Surely not. Paul states by inspiration: *“There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, Who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it”* (I Corinthians 10:13). God does not place before us the impossible and ask it to be accomplished; His expectations *“are not grievous”* or hard to undertake (I John 5:3). If God asks something of us, we can do it.

A close inspection of the context reveals what Joshua meant by his inspired statement, *“Ye cannot serve the Lord.”* After the people again affirm their allegiance to God, Joshua tells them, *“Ye are witnesses against yourselves that ye have chosen you the Lord, to serve Him. And they said, We are witnesses. Now therefore put away, said he, the strange gods which are among you, and incline your ear unto the Lord God of Israel”* (24:22-23). Surprisingly (or perhaps not, based on the usual performance of the Israelites), Israel was stating their desire to serve God while all the while

infested with idolatry! How brazen they were to assume that God would accept their defiled, sin-tainted allegiance! In such a context, the likely meaning behind Joshua's statement is: You cannot serve the Lord with sin present and active in your life.

Today, the same is true. Jesus' statements to the seven churches of Asia prove without equivocation that God will not accept congregations spoiled by sin (Revelation 2-3). First Corinthians proves the same for the individual: *"Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God"* (1 Corinthians 6:9-10). Despite the denominational views that some hold regarding God's acceptance of sin, His holiness demands that only those who have *"washed their robes, and have made them white in the blood of the lamb"* may come to Him (Revelation 7:14).

Consider, as well, the extended context of this passage. As the book of Judges opens, Israel attempts to defeat the inhabitants of Canaan and claim for themselves the promised possessions. However, they fail to heed God's commands. They *"put the Canaanites to tribute"* (Judges 1:28) despite God's specific prohibition (cf. Judges 2:2a). They fail to utterly drive out the inhabitants because they *"have not obeyed [God's] voice"* (Judges 2:2b). It is as if Israel never really intended to *fully* do as God said. Can we not thus see in Joshua's statement a condemnation of half-

hearted allegiance? Joshua might have stated, "Ye cannot serve the Lord half-way." God demands total subservience, dedication of no less than 100%. No fence-straddling, no "be-like-the-world-but-still-be-a-Christian" philosophy can please our Father. As Jesus said time and again: *"No man can serve two masters"* (Matthew 6:24); *"A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit"* (Matthew 7:18); *"He that is not with Me is against Me"* (Matthew 12:30), etc.

The context of Joshua 24 makes Joshua's statement of his own convictions all the more incredible: *"As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."* Notice the finality, the certainty with which Joshua said these words. Are you that certain of *your* allegiance to God? Have you put away the world and its sinful influences? Have you given your entire will to God's service? If not, *"ye cannot serve the Lord."*

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THE ISRAEL OF GOD

by Alton W. Fonville

In a world of fighting and killing over land possessions which were given thousands of years ago, much of the world still looks for a nation of people to rise and take possession of lands which were all settled in Bible times. The Israelites of Bible times were taken captive and ultimately, most of them were destroyed because of their unfaithfulness and the rejection of Jesus Christ the Lord. At the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 about which Jesus Himself taught,

warning his disciples very carefully, the Jewish nation was effectively wiped out. **As a nation of "God's people," physical Israel had ceased to exist.**

But, the Holy Spirit taught of a new nation of people known as the "Israel of God" which would rise in the days of the Roman kings, when God would set up a kingdom which would last forever (Daniel 2:44). This kingdom would be composed of all peoples of the earth—not just one nation as had been the case. It is identified as being the Lord's church which Jesus promised to build (Mark 1:15; Matthew 16:18). When Jesus told his disciples that the kingdom was "at hand" and that repentance and belief of the gospel was necessary, He was laying down the steps for admittance to this kingdom. Belief of the gospel necessarily included obedience to it, because He said, *"Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned"* (Mark 16:15-16). "Every creature" means to every nation under heaven—not just one nation of people.

Notice further what the Spirit said through the pen of Paul: *"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation; to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek"* (Romans 1:16). Salvation is made possible to every one who will believe and obey it. That includes all people of the earth—Jews and Gentiles alike. **Jews now have no monopoly on salvation.** Today, **"whosoever will"** may come and drink of the water of life and receive salvation.

The Jews were always so very proud of their heritage—being

children of Abraham. They are fighting today because of that very reason, yet they cannot trace their genealogy. But, when the Old Testament prophecies were fulfilled on the day of Pentecost, about A.D. 33, all nations of people, being assembled at Jerusalem, responded to the preaching of the gospel by Peter. He had just quoted from Joel 2:28-32; and, regarding all those strange things which had been mentioned, Peter said, "this is that" which had been prophesied hundreds of years earlier. And, of course, Jeremiah 31:31-34 was among the fulfilled prophecies of that day. Jeremiah told of that **new covenant** which was to be established, and that it was not like the old one written on tables of stone, which was taken away.

When Solomon had built the beautiful temple at Jerusalem and prayed his powerful prayer to God, even with all his wisdom it is doubtful that he fully understood just what he had said. He mentioned that even the stranger who was among the Israelites could pray to God and learn to fear Him, walking in His ways—the good way (2 Chronicles 6:32-33, 27). The temple was the place for God's habitation and it had hopes of lasting forever, but, due to the failures and sins of mankind, including those of the great Solomon, it was at last destroyed, never again to be rebuilt. But, **the church**, that eternal kingdom which was started on that first Pentecost day after Christ ascended to heaven, **is the dwelling place of God today**. And all people can become a part of that kingdom. No one will be able to vote you into it. **The Lord does the adding** of obedient believers to it, just like on that first day of its existence (Acts 2:47).

The Spirit makes it quite clear that **anyone can be** a child of Abraham and there will be no difference between the Jew and Gentile through faith and obedience: *"For ye are all the children of God by faith in Jesus Christ. . . . And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's' seed, and heirs according to the promise"* (Galatians 3:26-29). We each must be "in Christ" to be qualified as an heir (Romans 6:3-6).

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GOD'S AUTHORIZED WORSHIP - COLOSSIANS 3:17

1. **LORD'S SUPPER** - The New Testament and early church history record that Christians met on the first day of every week (Sunday) to worship God and remember Christ (Acts 20:7; I Corinthians 11:23-34; 16: 1-2).
2. **PRAYERS** - (Acts 2:42; Philippians 4:6-7; I Thessalonians 5:17-18).
3. **SINGING** - God's word authorizes only vocal music and specifically singing (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16; Hebrews 2:12). The New Testament shows no use of mechanical instruments of music in worship to God by the church Christ established. Church history notes no such use for nearly 700 years after the New Testament was completed. It is an innovation of men, not of God.
4. **GIVING** - Free-willed, cheerful, generous, and every week (Acts 20:35; I Corinthians 16:1-2; 2 Corinthians 8 & 9).
5. **PREACHING OF THE WORD** - The gospel of Christ, not men's doctrines nor entertainment, saves and strengthens us (Acts 2:42; 20:7; Romans 10:17; I Corinthians 1:18-23).

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