

To The Point

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A Little Leaven

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Paul says in **Galatians 5:9**, “A little leaven leavens the whole lump.” Is Paul instructing the Galatians on the proper method of making bread?

Of course we understand that Paul is providing a spiritual lesson from this physical fact. Paul was speaking to a group of people that wanted to go back and pick up some of the Old Law. In the course of showing that “this persuasion does not come from Him who calls you” (**Gal. 5:8**) Paul introduces this vivid picture of the affect of a little leaven on the whole lump.

Leaven is yeast. Paul is stating what everybody who has worked with yeast understands. Just a little bit added to a mixture will eventually affect the entire lump.

But not only is this imagery steeped in the normal realization of every person who has made bread, but this concept had special significance to any Jewish reader.

The Jew would remember as a great moment of national birth, the exodus from Israel. They would remember God’s commands as they exited from Israel. God commanded in **Exodus 12:15**, “Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread...”

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The concept of being unleavened was a concept of being special, set apart, even sanctified for service to God. Thus, Paul's warning that "a little leaven leavens the whole lump" would draw a Jewish reader's mind back to the exodus from Israel and the special sanctification that was to take place at that time.

Additionally, the Jewish reader would think back to the fact that the Passover remembrance not only involved unleavened bread but also involved removing all leaven from one's house seven days earlier.

Again, **Exodus 12:15** continues, "On the first day you shall remove leaven from your houses." And in **Exodus 12:19** the command was repeated, "For seven days no leaven shall be found in your houses..."

We see two principles being displayed here. First, this was a serious matter and thus preparation seven days ahead of time was required. Second, since just a little leaven leavens the whole lump, all leaven would need to be removed seven days ahead of time.

Removing all leaven seven days ahead of time from the house, would insure that not even the smallest amount would be left. This would insure that the unleavened bread would be pure and special as God determined it should be.

When Paul says "a little leaven leavens the whole lump," the old Jewish preparations would surely have come to mind to the Jewish reader.

Beyond all of this, the Jewish reader of Paul's warning would also remember the condemnation that would fall upon one who violated God's laws and allowed the bread to become leavened.

Exodus 12:15 says, "For whoever eats leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel." **Verse 19** says, "since whoever eats what is leavened, that same person shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he is a stranger or a native of the land." Clearly, God had very strong penalties in place for a person that would violate his commands regarding the unleavened bread.

Thus, when Paul says that "a little leaven leavens the whole lump" a Jewish reader would surely draw upon his remembrance of the Passover preparations and how important it was to not allow leaven to contaminate the bread.

Paul's stern warning is for people that wanted to bring into the Christian dispensation elements from the Old Law. Even the smallest amount would corrupt Christians and the congregation they were a part of.

Such a warning is needed for us today as well. Just a small amount of tolerated apostasy will corrupt a church. Just a small amount of tolerated false teaching regarding the deity of Jesus will corrupt us. Just a small amount of tolerated false teaching regarding any Bible subject, whether it be Creation, Judgment, Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage, The Lord's Supper, The Work of the Church, etc. will grow and consume a church. The lump **will be** leavened.

Paul also used this warning of the leaven in **1 Corinthians 5:6**. As he spoke

of the terrible immorality that was allowed to exist within the church at Corinth, he reminded these brethren as well of the danger of the leaven that will corrupt the whole lump.

Paul takes the illustration further in this place. He tells us that we must be unleavened. That is, we must be free from any and all influence of the leavening agent. And Paul points out that Christ was our Passover sacrificed for us. Therefore, we must follow the Old Testament example in a spiritual sense and purge out all the leaven (sin).

Paul's immediate context deals with immorality. A little immorality tolerated in a congregation will corrupt the whole lump. A little immodesty, a little dancing, a little cheer leading, a little sexual immorality, a little indecency, a little lasciviousness—will all, if tolerated, lead to the leavening corruption of the church. I continue to be surprised at reports I hear from brethren in other parts of the country, as to how much immorality is tolerated in supposedly faithful churches of Christ.

For many years, brethren stood firm against the false doctrines of denominationalism. Just as we stand firm against **their** false doctrine, so we must also stand firm against **our** false morality.

Finally, **Luke 12:1** records a warning from Jesus about the leaven of the Pharisees, which Christ explains is hypocrisy. Hypocrisy is a word that is often associated with the Pharisees. They would teach one thing, and yet do another.

If such practices exist in the church, it is a leavening agent that will corrupt us. It is the bankrupt idea that I will condemn one thing in you, but excuse it in myself. Paul said it was “inexcusable” in **Romans 2:1** and that such persons would not “escape the judgment of God” in **Romans 2:3**.

Let us each prayerfully watch and stand fast against the leaven.

Christians Are To Follow

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Followers Are Like Sheep

The Bible declares that Christians are to be followers in spiritual matters. It is appropriate that we are often compared to sheep. For example, in **Matthew 25:33** those who will be saved are described as sheep, while those who will be lost in hell are described as goats. In **John 10** Jesus repeatedly uses the image of himself as the shepherd of the sheep (e.g. **John 10:1-16**).

I have goats on my property. I can testify that goats are rather independent. They'll follow you if they know you and you have food for them. But even if they know you, without food they're not much interested in following. Goats would rather roam around, explore and find all sorts of trouble to get into. I do not have sheep, but from everything I have witnessed and read, sheep are followers. I am presently writing this article from India and I have seen many large herds of sheep being led along a busy road by one or two shepherds. Although cars and trucks drive by very quick, the sheep follow their master.

Given that Christians are described as sheep, let's see what the Bible says about us as followers.

Follow Christ

First of all, Christians are to follow Christ. Of course we remember that Christ is the head of the church, which is his body (**Eph. 1:22-23, Eph. 5:23, Col. 1:18, Col. 1:24**). And, just as the body is to be subject to the head, and the wife is to be subject to her husband, so the church is to follow (be in subjection to) Jesus Christ (**Eph. 5:24**).

Can you imagine a situation where your head gives a command to a part of your body (e.g. your arm) and the command is not respected. When the head gives the order to move yet the arm does not move, we understand that the person has a serious health issue. Likewise, can you imagine an arm that moves without direction from the head? Again, we realize that such a person has a very serious health problem.

How much more is it a great sickness when the Lord Jesus Christ gives instruction to Christians and yet they do not respond? Or by contrast, is it not also a great sickness when Christians act without Bible authority from Jesus Christ – the head?

1 Peter 2:21-23 declares:

“For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.”

And in **Matthew 16:24** Christ says:

“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.”

And in **John 14:6** Jesus declares that:

“I am the way, the truth, and the life.”

It is no wonder then that Paul instructed Christians in **1 Cor. 11:1**, “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.”

Follow Christ by Following the Bible

All of this is made more clear when we realize that the way God speaks to us today is through His Son, Jesus Christ. **Heb. 1:1-2** says:

“Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.”

Let us quickly remember that Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit to guide the apostles into all truth. And after this promise, apostles indicated that they had indeed received the revelation from Jesus Christ. Consider these passages:

“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.” **John 14:16-17**

“But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning.” **John 15:26-27**

“When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.” **John 16:13**

“For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given to us by God.” **1 Cor. 2:11-12**

“For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel. For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.” **Gal. 1:11-12**

Because Christ has all authority in heaven and on earth (**Mat. 28:18**), and because God speaks through his Son today, and because the Son has sent the Holy Spirit to reveal all truth to the inspired writers, and because the inspired writers have indeed written down all truth for us – we must follow Christ by following the Word of God.

Follow Paul's Example

The Bible also declares that we must follow Paul's example. This of course should not be surprising because Paul was an inspired apostle. Consider the following passages:

“Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us.” **Philippians 3:17**

Notice that Paul is really saying quite a bit more than just “imitate my example.” Paul is instructing the Philippians to imitate him but to also imitate those who follow Paul's example. Therefore, when a brother today

follows the Bible pattern in a particular regard, follow that good example as well. Now we do not follow an uninspired brother today in his example merely because it is our brother, but only because our brother follows the pattern that Paul left for us.

If a brother partakes in the Lord's Supper according to the pattern – imitate this. If a brother worships in spirit and in truth – imitate this. If a brother follows the sometimes difficult command to end fellowship with another brother who is walking disorderly, we ought also to follow that pattern. Again, we follow his pattern not because he is prominent or esteemed or popular. We follow his example because he follows the example of Scripture.

Further in the book of Philippians Paul teaches:

“What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me – practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.”

Philippians 4:9

Again, we see that the Philippians were expected to follow the things they (1) learned from Paul, (2) received from Paul, (3) heard from Paul and (4) saw in Paul. This passage includes both Paul's teaching and his example. Notice also that these are not structured as a hierarchy. That is to say, Paul is not teaching that his direct statements outweigh divine examples. We often speak of (1) direct commands, (2) approved examples and (3) necessary conclusions.

But we must not develop the false idea that somehow direct commands have more weighty precedent than approved examples. For example, is the command “Do not steal” any more divine than the approved example of **Acts 20:7** as the disciples met on the first day of the week to partake of the Lord's Supper? Of course not. Nor is the necessary conclusion that we must partake of the Lord's Supper every time there is a first day of the week any less weighty than God's command to “honor father and mother.”

Furthermore, it is abundantly clear that God's word is a unified revelation. No direct command will interfere with a necessary conclusion or an approved example. God's revelation is perfect and it will all fit together without flaw.

Finally, as we have already noted, Paul taught:

“Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.” **1 Cor. 11:1**

Follow the Faith of Elders

The Hebrew writer instructs:

“Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.”

Heb. 11:7

Clearly, the writer is pointing the reader to somebody known as “your leaders” and these are people who have taught them the word of God. The writer says that we must “imitate their faith.”

Who are these leaders? The answer is made very clear in later in the chapter:

“Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.” **Heb. 11:17**

Obviously, these “leaders” are the elders of the local congregation, who are tasked with the work of watching for souls. God therefore expects that each of us as members will look to those who are elders as an example of faith – and that we will imitate their faith.

Again, we do not do this because elders have the authority to create new doctrine. Rather, we do this because elders are mature Christians whose example of faith would be beneficial for all of us. Remember that **Hebrews 11** also addresses examples of faith. This great chapter of faith gives us many examples of those who walked in faith and this provides excellent teaching for us. In fact, the Hebrew writer gets done with this great listing of men and women of faith and he says:

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings to us so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us...” **Heb. 12:1**

The next verse exhorts us to look to Jesus, which of course is our perfect example of enduring suffering. But we are also to be motivated by the faith of those in **Hebrews 11** so that we might run better the race with endurance. In like manner we are to follow the example of faith of elders.

Finally, Peter gives these instructions to elders:

“So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.” **1 Peter 5:1-3**

So while in **Hebrews 13** the writer gives instructions to Christians to imitate the faith of elders, in this place Peter gives instructions to elders to make sure they are a good example and are leading in such a fashion.

Follow After Peace and Edification

The concept of “follow” can also carry the idea of pursuing a thing. Sometimes the Bible speaks in this way as well – that we are to pursue certain good and worthy goals. A good example of this kind of Bible teaching is this from Paul:

“So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.” **Rom. 14:19**

The idea again is to follow or to pursue. We know that certain things make

for peace with brethren and certain things make for conflict. Obviously, to teach a new and false doctrine is something that will make only for strife and not for peace. Surely there are many other such examples that we could cite.

But a Christian ought to always have this focus. What can I pursue that will bring peace and “upbuilding” as the English Standard Version (ESV) renders it. Other translations speak of “edification.” Of course, the meaning of the word “edification” is to build up as one may build up a building or structure.

If we constantly filter our choices, actions, speech, etc. through this filter, “Will it make for peace and will it edify?” then we surely are in pursuit of peace and edification.

The word “pursue” here carries great intensity of action. The word is often translated “persecute” in the King James Version. As Saul of Tarsus might zealously pursue Christians, so a Christian today must zealously pursue things that make for peace and things that build up brethren.

The Hebrew writer adds this to our understanding:

“Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.” **Heb. 12:14**

Obviously, the Lord is serious about this idea that we should strive for peace and pursue holiness. Without these things, we simply will not be saved.

Follow After Righteousness

Paul says to Timothy:

“But as for you, O man of God, flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness.” **1 Timothy 6:11**

Paul had listed in the earlier part of the chapter some dangers that a Christian must be aware of. He therefore warned Timothy to run away from these things. But now he lists somethings that Timothy must vigorously chase down.

Again, this word is the same word as noted above – the concept of seriously pursuing a thing. Timothy (and you and I) must make this a priority. We must chase down, pursue righteousness. We must pursue godliness. We must pursue faith. We must pursue love. We must pursue steadfastness. We must pursue gentleness.

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Is Capital Punishment Right or Wrong?

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“Someday, capital punishment will be outlawed in the United States. Someday, individual states will realize that it’s stupid, as well as immoral, to kill people who kill people in order to teach people that it’s wrong to kill people” (John Workman, “Parties To An Execution,” *Arkansas Gazette*, Feb. 6, 1982).

Is it really stupid? Is it immoral? Capital punishment is more than just a political or social issue, it is a moral and religious issue, because the Bible takes a definite stand on the subject.

During the Patriarchal dispensation, God said: **“Whoever sheds man’s blood, By man his blood shall be shed; For in the image of God He made man”** (Gen. 9:6).

During the Mosaic dispensation, **God commanded capital punishment for at least 20 specific crimes** (cf. Ex. 21:12-17; 22:18-20; 31:14; Lev. 20:1-6, 10-13, 27; 21:9; 24:16; Dt. 17:8-13; 18:20; 22:13-25). While the law of Moses condemned murder (Ex. 20:13), it commanded the execution of murderers (Num. 35:31-34).

Now, during the Christian dispensation, God demands capital punishment as well. Paul said: “For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. For **he is God’s minister** to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for **he does not bear the sword in vain**; for he is God’s minister, **an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil”** (Rom. 13:3-4).

Paul is clearly saying that civil government is ordained by God to administer capital punishment.

Count It All Joy

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“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials”—James 1:2

How do we react to adversity? For most, this question brings to mind times when we don’t catch breaks in life, we didn’t get along with someone, or our feelings are hurt. However, in Bible terms, adversity or trials are times when we are tested. That can be persecutions, temptations, or troubling circumstances like death and sickness that assail our faith. The Bible has some quite revolutionary things to say on the topic of trials and suffering—some ideas that warrant more than a surface consideration. Let us consider some divine thoughts on trials.

The most amazing thing taught about trials in Scripture is that trials have beneficial effects. This at once seems strange and wrong, since our world tells us that if bad things are happening in our lives, we are to be sad, frustrated, and downtrodden. Yet while God acknowledges that “*no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful*” (**Heb 12:11**), He reminds us again and again that good comes of this testing. Rather than being miserable, James tells us to “*count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience...that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing*” (**James 1:2-4**).

Without trials, we may never develop the patience we need so that our character can be complete. Paul says that we can “*glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character, and character hope*” (**Rom 5:3-4**). Until we know the gut-wrenching sorrow of life, we cannot truly appreciate the hope we have of a life without sorrow. This may seem like trying to see the glass as half-full, but we must all acknowledge that a life lived with all pleasures and happiness lacks the depth negative experiences bring. We must submit our thinking to God’s in time of sorrow. He knows what is best for us and urges us to “*count it all joy*” rather than dread suffering because it is good for us.

Another good thing about trials is that they prove our faith. Although we may really think we believe, certainty comes only when we are tested. Peter told the pilgrims to rejoice in spite of “*various trials*” because “*the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory*” (**1 Pet 1:6-7**). The metaphor of testing gold is used to describe our faith in times of trial. Just as in gold, our faith is heated up by fire and tested to its breaking point. The impurities of the gold (and our souls) rise to the top and are taken away. What is left is pure and genuine.

It is in this way that persecutions show us how deeply we believe, temptations gauge our faithfulness to God’s commands, and dealing with death demonstrates our true belief in resurrection of the dead. Without trials, how would we know how much we believe? Jesus tells us the same in the parable of the wise and foolish man and their houses. He says that “*the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house*” (**Mt 7:25**). The question is not whether the rains will come but rather what it will reveal about our lives. Will we be too concerned about what’s happening to us or will we rejoice that our faith is proved genuine?

Trials also remind us who our Father is. The Hebrew writer chides his audience because they had “*forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as sons: ‘My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord’*” (**Heb 12:5**). Trials are a way of God disciplining His children, just as a parent. The punishment does not seem pleasant now (v. 11), but is vital to remind us of our Father. “*But if you are without chastening...then you are illegitimate and not sons*” (**Heb 12:8**). Trials prove there is someone up there concerned about our character, letting our faith be tested, and trying to turn us toward Him.

The key in this is how we react to trials. Will we “*count it all joy*” or will we resent God for allowing such things to happen? Will our view be shallow and worldly or divine? Let us permit God to work in our lives, even through trials. Let us pass the test of faith. Let us “*be trained*” (**Heb 12:11**) by our Father’s chastening. Let us count it all joy.

Precious Trials

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“For a little while you may have to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (**1 Peter 1: 6,7**).

Many people talk about precious gold and gems, jewels, life, moments, time and things and so on. If any one is going through trials it is difficult to say trials are precious, it is very easy to talk but very hard to hear and bear. God allows trials when necessary and in the right measure for strengthening faith. We have to surrender our will, when chastened let us humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God. We have to endure every hardship either great or small, have to under go pain and torment in persecutions for the love of Jesus Christ. Every time or day difficulties and impossible situations arise in our daily life but one must understand that God never gives us more than we can bear.

These trials would help us or bring closer to God, to have fellowship with him and that leads to prayer life, so that prayer will be our constant resort in trials and temptations, in times of loneliness, anguish and suffering. As gold is tested and refined by fire, so faith tested by trials enduringly is more precious than gold. The gold itself will perish, but faith endures will bring great honor and glory to God. Trails should be regarded as tests of our faith, as gold is purified by melting, so trials improve our faith. As men use fire to refine precious metals, so God uses trials to distinguish genuine faith and at the same time to strengthen faith. In **Job 23:10** says ‘ when He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold’. So trials might come in (**Romans 5: 3-4**) There is joy in tribulation because it produces perseverance in turn perseverance produces mature Christian character, and there is no way to be a faithful Christian and not have trials.

Trials will come and trials are precious because of the good they work in our character and trial brings profit. “ My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience” (**James 1:2-3**). As early Christians endured all kinds of persecutions and trials, so we must understand the suffering from the point of confidence in God’s sovereignty. The believer must meet these trials and that most any day, must expect that he is engaged in warfare, the enemy of souls to attack and harass. Trials can be considered pure joy only when there is knowledge, that they are designed by God for a purpose.

Love to God and faith in His son will become the stronger and shine forth the brighter as we are put to test. Abraham was tested and blessed by God. The hardships and adversities of life, persecutions, trials and afflictions are to fall upon us in our earthly existence, not only as tests of our faith but also for our good.

God tries our faith and works patience in our lives and that patience brings

us unto perfection/maturity.

When we have successfully endured afflictions we stand purified and approved in the sight of God. Read **Hebrews 10:32-36**. He or she must be a Christian for the trials to be precious.

Too Much of A Good Thing?

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There is a country music song that has as part of the lyrics, "You can never have too much fun". While I enjoy fun and recreation as much as the next person, I realize the old adage is true, "There is a time for work and a time for play." Yet I wonder if we as Christians display more of the first attitude than the second in our worship to God. Do we place more emphasis on activities which have no spiritual benefit, than we do upon service to God?

The apostle Paul while describing to the Ephesians the walk of the child of God says in **Ephesians 5:15**, "Therefore be careful how you walk not as unwise men but as wise." (NASB) The Revised Standard Version (RSV) says, "Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise," Paul is telling us that we need to be careful how we live our lives on this earth. Certainly that would include the way we treat our neighbors, as well as how we treat the word of God. But on the practical side, does it not speak to otherwise wholesome activities in which we can become entangled in as people living on earth?

For example, the Bible makes it clear that we are to work in order to support ourselves, as well as be able to give to others who are in need. But what does God say to the individual who takes that too far and spends every waking hour at the office or on the phone and neglects his family responsibilities? Or what does God say to the wife who concerns herself so much with the physical affairs of the family that she fails to give diligence to the word of God. What does God say to the teenager who becomes so involved in school either completing the research papers or soccer practice and games that they are never in attendance at the assembly of God's people? Can there be too much of a good thing?

Jesus speaks on this important subject in his Sermon on the Mount as recorded for us in **Mathew 6:24-34**. It seems that Jesus describes individuals who consume themselves with clothing and food and houses that they are leaving out the search for the kingdom of God and his righteousness. Jesus not only condemns the problem of worry, but the problem of misplaced priorities.

The point is made that when we place God first in our lives, really put him first not just say that he is first, we will have no need to overly concern ourselves with the things of this life because God will take care of us. Does that mean we may need to adjust our work schedule for the cause of the Lord? Does that mean we may need to adjust our eating or sleeping habits in order to put God first? Does that mean we may need to scale down some of

our activities so that we can be diligent servants for God? Yes indeed!

What congregation would hire a preacher who spends every other Sunday morning out on the lake fishing and on the golf course on Wednesday afternoons? I know of no congregation that would hire such a man; however, how many congregations see nothing amiss when members frequently fail to attend bible study or worship services to God, because of their own desires and activities.

Is there too much of a good thing? Absolutely; especially when it interferes with our service to God and our walk as children of God.

What Does The Bible Say About Purgatory?

David Watts (deceased)

The Bible says absolutely nothing about purgatory. It is as silent as the tomb. Purgatory does not exist, except in the mind and doctrine of men.

The idea of purgatory is that all men (except those who are perfect) must be purged by fire because of their sins. In general, it is held that the period of suffering in purgatory can be shortened by one's relatives making gifts of money to secure prayers and masses by the priest. After enough (and no one can define "enough") gifts, prayers, and masses are made, then God transports one's relatives out of the fires of purgatory and into heaven.

The idea, however, is even inconsistent with other Catholic doctrine. It is difficult to understand how, at death, a priest is summoned to administer extreme unction, at which he pronounces absolution of all sins. Then, after death, one must be gotten out of purgatory—who went there, it is declared, because of his sins!

The Bible does not teach the doctrine of purgatory, nor any other doctrine of a second chance, involving a change of state after death. Rather, it teaches:

One cannot change his condition after death. "It is appointed unto men once to die, and after this cometh judgment" (**Heb. 9:27**, ASV). According to some, this should read, "after this cometh purgatory." (See also **Luke 16:19-31**, particularly verse 26, where Jesus taught that there can be no change of state after death.)

One will be judged by what he has done here on earth, not by what somebody does for him after he dies. "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (**2 Cor. 5:10**).

It is regrettable that so many have been deceived into thinking that one can

be purged from his sins after death, for they live in false hope. The Bible says nothing of the sort, but clearly denies such a notion.

Some Things We Learn From Acts 2

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God

We learn that God foreordained that Christ would suffer and die on the cross (v. 23). We learn that God raised Christ up from the dead (v. 24). We learn that God added those who had obeyed the Gospel to the church (v. 47).

Christ

We learn that Jesus of Nazareth is Lord and Christ (v. 36). We learn that Christ was prophesied of by David in Psalm 16 (v. 25-28). We learn that it was not possible for death to hold Christ (v.24). We learn that Christ was behind the events of Pentecost (v. 33). We learn that Christ ascended into the heavens and sits at God's right hand (vs. 34-35).

Believers

We learn that true believers recognize that salvation involves action on their part (v. 37). We learn that believers are not yet saved: they must repent and be baptized (v. 38). We learn that believers were baptized the same day (v. 41). We learn that believers continue to walk in right paths (v. 42).

The New Converts

We learn that the right thing to follow and continue in is the apostles' teaching (v. 42). We learn that the Lord's Supper and prayer is important (v. 42). We learn that the new converts showed love and benevolence to each other (v. 44-45). We learn that they met together in daily assemblies in the temple (v. 46). We learn that they also met privately in each others' houses (v. 46).

Can a Christian Be Lost?

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A popular religious doctrine says that when a person obeys the gospel, they can never fall away from salvation. While that is surely a comforting thought for many, when we examine what the Bible says, we find that this concept is false and is empty comfort. Let us consider that...

- Losing salvation was certainly a reality for Ananias and Sapphira (**Acts 5:1-11**).
- Losing salvation was certainly possible for Simon the Sorcerer (**Acts 8:19-23**).
- Losing salvation was certainly a reality for Hymenaeus and Alexander who suffered “shipwreck of faith” (**1 Tim. 1:9**).
- Losing salvation was certainly possible for the apostle Paul (**1 Cor. 9:27**).
- Losing salvation was certainly possible for the church at Sardis (**Rev. 3:3**).
- Losing salvation was certainly possible to some in Galatia (**Gal. 5:2-4**).

A Counterfeit Testament

David Watts (deceased)

If you’ve seen the clever Mormon portrayals of their Book of Mormon as “Another Testament of Jesus Christ,” don’t be fooled. What Mormons call “Another Testament of Jesus Christ” is actually counterfeit scripture.

Mormons, of course, have long claimed Joseph Smith translated the Book of Mormon from golden plates, and that his writings are “holy scripture comparable to the Bible.” In fact, they even put Smith’s book above the Bible. They claim it is “the most correct of any book on earth,” and that one gets nearer to God by following it than by following any other book.

Now, with a clever public relations television campaign, they are trying to associate Smith’s book with the Bible by passing it off as “Another Testament of Jesus Christ.” Bible students, however, shouldn’t be deceived.

The new message God promised in the Old Testament (**Jeremiah 31:31-34**) was the New Testament (cf. **Hebrews 8:6-13**), and there is no promise anywhere in the Bible of a “Third Testament” or a “New Bible.”

Furthermore, the revelation Jesus’ apostles received from the Holy Spirit completed God’s revelation to the world. In **John 16:13** Jesus told his apostles, “When he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth...” Obviously, since the Holy Spirit revealed “all truth” to Jesus’ apostles in the first century (**John 16:13**), what Joseph Smith claimed to reveal seventeen centuries later isn’t really truth.

Combined with the earlier Old Testament Scriptures, the New Testament Scriptures Jesus’ apostles delivered contain God’s completed written message to the world. Those Scriptures reveal “all truth.” That is why it can be said the Bible contains everything necessary to make people spiritually complete (cf. **2 Timothy 3:16, 17**).

Yes, when Jesus’ apostles completed the Scriptures, people with the Old and

New Testaments had everything pertaining to life and godliness (cf. **2 Peter 1:3**). The world didn't need to wait another seventeen centuries for Smith's Book of Mormon to give them fuller spiritual knowledge, and we shouldn't be deceived by Mormon claims that we need "Another Testament" to supplement the Bible.

In view of the Mormon Church's attempts to pass off their Book of Mormon as "Another Testament of Jesus Christ," it is also noteworthy that the real Scriptures not only warn against later false gospels but specifically include "gospels" delivered by angels.

Galatians 1:8-9 says, "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed."

Friends, don't be misled by what the Mormons are calling "Another Testament of Jesus Christ," or by anyone else's alleged latter-day revelations. They are counterfeit gospels and, according to the Bible, those who preach them will answer to God.

To The Point

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