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## DANGEROUS THINKING IN ASSEMBLY LIFE...

*Jim Beattie*

When I became a Christian in early high school years, I was confronted with a plethora of "Christian" beliefs differing from what I was taught in the local assembly. Well-meaning (and sometimes devout) classmates had divergent views and I needed confirmation that what I believed was according to the Word of God.

Though I did not know the word "hermeneutics" at the time, I began to learn these principles of interpreting the Scriptures through personal conversations and public gatherings and they preserved me against imbibing false teaching.

Furthermore, my brethren instructed me that no matter what the whole Christian world believed, any doctrine was false unless the Word of God endorsed it. They reminded me that all arguments in favor of a wrong principle or practice were to be rejected no matter how plausible they sounded. Only one question was valid: "What saith the Scripture?" And only one response was acceptable: "Thus saith the Lord!"

Over many years, this conviction that the Word of God is the last court of appeal has helped maintain the assembly life we enjoy. While Christendom continues to slip into something that leaves only remnants of previously vigorous Christian profession, our collective testimony has remained largely intact.

But this is changing. As I engage in conversation about spiritual issues, I feel I am being

transported back to high school days, but with this difference: this time, I am not talking with denominational friends, but with believers in assembly fellowship. The same arguments that evangelical Christians posited to defend unscriptural practices when I was a young Christian are being utilized by believers in assembly fellowship. If we continue on this course, we will touch down at the same terminal of decadence that plagues the evangelical world at the present.

I hear believers making a case for a particular practice by stating "They have done it that way for years in other places." Such reasoning is flawed. To practice anything simply because others have done it is no basis for anything. In fact, doing anything without reference to the Word of God is clearly foolhardy. Such reasoning carried to the extreme would eventually give license to do anything at some point in time simply by copying what others are doing. Hence it is possible that, slowly but surely, we could relinquish every principle of Scripture.

And "for years?" Antiquity is not authority! The Roman Catholic Church can claim greater antiquity than most, but it is self-evident that this carries no weight. The response, of course, is that we are not talking about the Roman Catholic Church; we are talking about what some assemblies have practiced. True, but does validity belong to a practice of long duration just because it is carried out by Christians in assembly life? The proof of legitimacy lies in its correspondence with God's Word, not in the duration of the practice, no matter who is engaged in the practice.

Other believers argue that certain practices must be right because they have produced blessing. They contend, "I don't see how it could be wrong, it has proven to be such a blessing!" What they fail to grasp is that they are alleging that "the end justifies the means." The apostle Paul was falsely accused of doing this and condemn it, stating, "And not rather, (as we be slanderously reported, and as some affirm that we say,) Let us do evil, that good

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may come? whose damnation is just" (Romans 3:8). In my high school days, I can recall assemblies being accused of narrow-mindedness and missing out in "real" blessing because they would not be innovative and try some of the ideas that my denominational friends were engaged in.

In this vein, Alexander Carson makes an insightful contribution in his book, *Confidence in God in Times of Danger*. Commenting on the unscriptural marriage of Esther to the heathen king, Ahasuerus, he states:

Sometimes the servants of Christ excuse themselves from complete conformity to his institutions, and vindicate the observance of the commandments of men in the things of God by alleging the field of usefulness that accommodation in these things lays open to them. If they can point to any good done by them, they suppose that it is God's approbation of their situation. But in this they deceive themselves. Their conduct, as a transgression of the law of God, remains sinful, though his sovereignty turns their ignorance to his glory and the good of his people. Obedience is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. It is a foul calumny on God to suppose that it is necessary to disobey him, in order to do good. This takes it for granted that his laws defeat their own end. When in the wisdom of God, he makes the ignorance of his people to serve his purpose, this no more excuses their ignorance and their conduct that results from it, than the good effects of the death of Christ will justify the crime of Judas Iscariot.

All we can add to this is "Amen!"

At times, conversations with assembly believers evokes memories of similar discussions with denominational Christians. Concerning some particular procedure, the denominational believer would say, "My pastor is a godly man and he has no problem with it." While assembly believers would not use the term "pastor," they employ the same basic argument, choosing some respected person who agrees with their position to give validity

to what they believe. The apostle Paul refuted such reasoning, asserting, "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" (Galatians 1:8). True, he was speaking of the gospel, but the principle is broad-based and is applicable to our discussion. It matters not who believes what; if divine revelation does not sanction it, it is clearly wrong. No-one is infallible and godly men are not always right just because they are godly.

In addition, we have heard believers express that they "don't see anything wrong with it." This proves nothing. There are multitudes of believers on the face of the earth that see nothing wrong with the pastoral system in their church organization, but this does not justify it. If something is wrong and we don't see it, it might only prove we lack discernment.

Linked with this argument is the contention that "most Christians feel it is fine." If this were justification for an action, however, we would have to agree that by and large denominations must be right and assemblies wrong because we are not "most Christians." Majority opinion and majority rule can never be the guidebook of conduct.

Besides these, we hear other arguments. But perhaps this sampling will alert us to the reality that a problem is arising among us in some quarters and we need to counteract it with the insistence that the Word of God - and only the Word of God - is our infallible guide.

We are not arguing for stagnation, and we claim exemption from the derogatory cliché that is sometimes thrust at us: "If it is true, it is not new and if it is new, it is not true." We believe that God's ways are sufficient for every age and circumstance, and surrendering to His principles will bring the blessing we long for. What we fear is departure that may "seem right" to us, "but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Proverbs 16:25). Consequently, we need to test every action and activity by the Holy Scriptures

Accordingly, when someone is promoting a concept, we might want to ask them for a scriptural principle for what is being suggested. If someone defends a practice because it has been such a blessing, we need to ask the

defender if the blessing is proof that it is scriptural. When it is stated that it has been done that way for years in other places, we need to ask, "So on what scriptural principles have they based their practice? If the response to that is, "I don't know!" the next question needs to be, "Then are you willing to practice something when you have no principle from the Word of God for it?" If we are told that some devout Christian does it, we need to ask if the speaker believes that every single thing that brother does is right.

The preeminent goal in assembly life is scriptural practice. We would hope that growth would follow, but growth at the expense of scriptural practice is unacceptable.

Even in the evangelical world there are voices raised in opposition to changing priorities. Writing in a major theological journal just five years ago, one pastor (one of many) in a church in the southern USA expressed his concern about the change in emphasis in the evangelical world. He observed:

As the Church advances into the twenty-first century, the stress to produce booming ministries has never been greater. Influenced by corporate mergers, towering skyscrapers, and expanding economies, bigger is perceived as better, and nowhere is this "Wall Street" mentality more evident than in the church. Sad to say, pressure to produce bottom-line results has led many ministries to sacrifice the centrality of biblical preaching on the altar of man-centered pragmatism.

A new way of "doing" church is emerging. In this radical paradigm shift, exposition is being replaced with entertainment, preaching with performances, doctrine with drama, and theology with theatrics. The pulpit, once the focal point of the church, is now being overshadowed by a variety of church-growth techniques, everything from trendy worship styles to glitzy presentations to vaudeville-like pageantries. In seeking to capture the upper hand in church growth, a new wave of pastors is reinventing church and repackaging the gospel into a product to be sold to "consumers."

Whatever reportedly works in one church is being franchised out to various "markets" abroad. As when gold was discovered in the foothills of California, so ministers are beating

a path to the doorsteps of exploding churches and super-hyped conferences where the latest "strike" has been reported. Unfortunately the newly panned gold often turns out to be "fool's gold." Not all that glitters is actually gold.

To maintain scriptural practice, we must demand scriptural principle. Those, who are unable or unwilling to provide us with scriptural principles upon which they are establishing practices, are not to be taken seriously whatever credentials they have or arguments they furnish. The future of *scriptural* assemblies is dependent on the maintaining of *scriptural* practice based solely on *scriptural* principles.

As idealistic and unrealistic as it might be, my greatest longing would be that I would never again hear among us denominational arguments in favor of any practice in assembly life. The best I can hope for, however, is that God's people will be discerning enough that when they do hear such arguments, they will recognize them for what they really are: shallow, superficial rationalizations that carry no weight with spiritually-minded thinking people. And, above all, I trust they will realize that such erroneous notions will only earn divine displeasure and accelerate departure from scriptural principles in assembly life.

**It is better to be a saint than a scholar; indeed the only way to be a true scholar is to be striving to be a true saint.**

**George Whitefield**

## **Christian Practices: Believer's Baptism, pt 1**

*Joel Portman*

**T**hrough the centuries of time since our blessed Lord instituted the practices for every local assembly until He comes, debates and confusion have raged over every function. Included in this is baptism, reception to a local church, or assembly, and the Lord's Supper,

along with other issues. What clearly were very simple and deeply spiritual activities of the early believers quickly regressed into ceremonies and rituals that were linked with a mystical significance that only a "consecrated priest or pastor" could properly perform. Even today, in religious discussions, the concept of needing a "consecrated individual" to officiate at these events is accepted as a basic tenet. One can read, even in theological journals of a more fundamental character, that unless baptism is performed by one of this kind, it is not a valid baptism, and this is true of other activities. I have personally heard, in a fundamental church setting, the declaration made concerning an individual who sought church membership, that though their baptism wasn't effected in that particular denomination, it was being accepted as valid since an individual performed it who was acknowledged as one having such authority and status. This attitude and demand is outside of the evident description of the assemblies in the New Testament, and has developed in order to restrict and ritualize what our Lord instituted. The extremity of this degeneration can be seen in the practice of the Roman Catholic religion, (and in many other mainline protestant denominations) where baptism of infants is seen as essential to cleanse them from "original sin" and make them fit candidates for the kingdom of heaven. The teaching maintained is that, "baptism is intended as a sacrament that opens the doors of Christian life, incorporating that person into the catholic community, the Mystical Body of Christ, that is His church. . . baptism pardons original sin and all personal sins, as well as the punishment for sins." In many cases, it is defined as an act taken on behalf of the baby that, if affirmed in confirmation, is enough to give them the hope of heaven. All this, and much more in detail, is obviously in contrast to the simple practice of the NT when only believing adults were baptized. The same corruption is seen in the Lord's Supper, which morphed into a religious ceremony that confers grace to the participants if performed by a consecrated priest.

### **Historical Degeneration**

Anyone can trace the changes that began after the apostles were taken to heaven, and some

of those changes are suggested in latter writings of the New Testament. The condition in Corinth that Paul describes and deals with in 1 Cor. 11 is one indication of its degeneration. George Dollar ("The Lord's Supper in the Second Century") writes, "The fact is that no church father called it the Supper in a single instance and Pauline names for it ceased." They had already begun the practice of calling it the "Eucharist", a word from the Greek language meaning "praise, or thanksgiving". He continues by saying, "Much of the language of the fathers of this era reflects Jewish ideas as seen in the common use of such terms as altar, priest, oblations, sacrifices, and offerings. This is evident to such a high degree that the scholarly Neander wrote that we have "the whole system of the Jewish priesthood transferred to the Christian Church." The same degree of change can be traced in baptism, which quickly degenerated into the means by which one became integrated into the body of Christ. E. Glen Hinson, ("Baptism in the Early Church History") states, "Without saying so explicitly, of course, the Fathers assumed that in baptism one becomes a member of Christ's body, the Church." The practice of baptizing infants also became accepted practice, though it cannot be supported by any clear exegesis of the NT passages. The same author quoted above says, "Augustine, among others, had occasion to clarify the point in his anti-Pelagian writings. The Church baptizes infants, he said, because they inherit sin through the generative process and thus stand under condemnation. Although baptism is efficacious for them during the infancy period, when they reach a responsible age they must exercise deliberate faith. Hence their baptism is performed in hope, ready to be appropriated by faith, but has no saving value unless they believe and live righteously." The manner in which this, along with other simple church practices evolved, he also describes in the article, but they can be traced in other historical writings. We will discuss the Lord's Supper further in other articles. This is only mentioned to indicate the rapid decline in significance and practice of what was intended and seen in the NT churches to be simple and spiritual activities.

## **Baptism in the New Testament**

Studying the Scriptures reveals to us that there are many "baptisms" within its pages. Some are not called baptism, but they are acts that were similar. When the world was covered by water in the flood, it was like a baptism, and Peter links it with baptism in 1 Pet. 3:20-21. The sons of Israel were "baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea," (1 Cor. 10:1-2), for in passing under the cloud and through the sea, they were identified with Moses as their new leader, symbolically immersed in the two elements. We find in Heb. 6:2 a reference to "baptisms" in the context of Jewish practices involving washings, not only including ritual washings of hands and arms (Matt. 15:2) but also of the baptism of proselytes being brought into the Jewish religion.

John, the forerunner of Christ, baptized those who came to him at the Jordan River, doing so as they publicly acknowledged their repentance of their sins and see the coming of Christ (Matt. 3). They were identifying themselves with John's message and anticipating the coming of the Messiah. The disciples were evidently baptized by John, though this is not stated, and they subsequently baptized others in John 3:22, 4:2).

Those who received Peter's message in Acts 2 were baptized, not to remit their sins, but, as most good expositors explain, because of the remission of those sins through believing what Peter preached concerning the Lord, His work and resurrection. This was a sign of their personal reception of that truth ("gladly received his word"), and it gives the sense, also, in that doing so, they were publicly disassociating themselves from the sin of the nation when those of the Jews were guilty of rejecting and crucifying their Messiah. This seems to be the thought in what Paul says that Ananias told him (22:16), "arise, be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord." His was the sin of rejecting Christ and persecuting Him (9:4) and His people (1 Cor. 15:9). By being baptized, he was publicly removing his relationship with past sinful deeds and identifying himself with the Christ that he had rejected.

The Lord commanded his disciples who He left in the world to "Go ye (or "having gone") into all the world, and preach (herald, proclaim)

the gospel to every creature (all creation). He that believeth (the believing one) and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned (condemned)." This passage in Mark 16:15-16 should be linked with Matt. 28:18-20, where we have a more complete record of what He said. It is helpful, to resist the teaching of some that baptism is essential for salvation, to understand the passage in its context and words, comparing the two passages with each other. Notice the order: Going (or having gone, suggesting that this was to be a part of daily lives) into the world is first in both cases. Then, we read that they were to "teach" or "make disciples", which we observe was through preaching the gospel and teaching the truths concerning Christ (Acts 4:4), for those that believed had heard Peter's message in ch. 3; the pattern is the same throughout Acts, even though they were not called "disciples" until ch. 6, and then in ch. 11, they were called "Christians". So clearly they didn't become disciples by baptism, but by believing the message. That would involve a public identification with the name of Christ as one of His followers, adhering to Him. Baptism, in Mk. 16:16, follows that work, and thus baptism was an outward sign of what they had professed. Mt. 28:19 says that they who were discipled were to be "baptized in (into, or in association with) the name (singular) of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost". So that the baptism, so closely associated with believing, provided public proof as a part of their confession, that they were no longer associated with the sinful past, but were now identified with the Lord Jesus. Failure to desire baptism, or fearfulness to take that step of public identification, would be an indication of not believing and not being a disciple. So that the Lord says that believing and baptism clearly indicate that the person is saved, while not believing (omitting not being baptized) means that person isn't saved, but that failure to be baptized cannot define what might have taken place in their soul. H. A. Ironside writes, "Those who received the message in faith were to witness to it by being baptized, thus declaring themselves openly as His disciples. There was no saving virtue in the ordinance itself, but it was the expression of subjection to Christ. Those who

refused to believe would be condemned. Note that He did not say, "He that is not baptized shall be condemned." In Matt. 28:20, we learn that having become disciples and being baptized, they are to be taught all things that the Lord had entrusted to the apostles, which is what we have today in their epistles. Quoting F. B. Hole on this passage, "In no scripture is baptism connected with justification or reconciliation, but there are other scriptures which connect baptism with salvation. This is because salvation is a word of large content, and includes within its scope the practical deliverance of the believer from the whole world system, whether Jewish or Gentile in character, wherein once he was embedded. His links with that world system are to be cut, and baptism sets forth the cutting of those links—in one word, dissociation. He who believes the Gospel, and accepts the cutting of his links with the world that held him, is a saved man. A man may say he believes, and even do so in reality, yet if he will not submit to the cutting of the old links, he cannot be spoken of as saved. The Lord knows them that are His of course, but that is another matter."

We see in the case of Simon (Acts 8:13) that his baptism accomplished nothing in view of his eternal salvation (or deliverance from the world and his associations), for he was exposed by Peter as an unbeliever (v. 20-23). Multitudes are baptized in religious organizations who have never been born from above, and who show no change in their lives as a result.

We don't minimize the importance of baptism, since it should be the expected result of genuine salvation. It is baffling at times, when there are those who have professed to be saved, but seem to not have any desire for baptism. Or who have been baptized, but who do not desire to be received in an assembly. This order is the pattern of scripture, and as one has said, if there is no desire to be in an assembly fellowship, one needs to ask if that person understood what baptism involved. If there is no desire for baptism, it may be necessary to ask if they understand what salvation truly is.

*(continued)*

**Long for God's presence  
rather than His power.**

## Glory of the Cross

*Dr. Alexander Maclaren*

"Therefore, when he (Judas) was gone out, Jesus said, Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in Him. If God be glorified in Him, God shall also glorify Him in Himself, and shall straightway glorify Him." (John 13:31-32)

There is something very weird and awful in the brief note of time with which the Evangelist sends Judas on his dark errand. "He . . . went immediately out, and it was night." Into the darkness that dark soul went. That hour was "the power of darkness," the very keystone of the black arch of man's sin, and some shadow of it fell upon the soul of Christ Himself.

In immediate connection with the departure of the traitor come this singular burst of triumph in our text. The Evangelist emphasizes the connection by that: "Therefore, when he was gone out, Jesus said." There is a wonderful touch of truth and naturalness in that connection. The traitor was gone. His presence had been a restraint; and now that that "spot in their feast of charity" had disappeared, the Master felt at ease; and like some stream, out of the bed of which a black rock has been taken, His words flow more freely. How intensely real and human the narrative becomes when we see that Christ, too, felt the oppression of an uncongenial presence, and was relieved and glad at its removal! The departure of the traitor evoked these words of triumph in another way, too. At his going away, we may say, the match was lit that was to be applied to the train. He had gone out on his dark errand, and that brought the cross within measurable distance of our Lord. Out of a new sense of its nearness He speaks here. So the note of time not only explains to us why our Lord spoke, but puts us on the right track for understanding His words, and makes any other interpretation of them than one impossible. What Judas went to do was the beginning of Christ's glorifying.

We have here, then, a triple glorification — the Son of Man glorified in His cross; God glorified in the Son of Man; and the Son of Man glorified in God. Let us look at these three thoughts for a few minutes now.

### **I. First, we have here the Son of Man glorified in His cross.**

The words are a paradox. Strange, that at such a moment, when there rose up before Christ all the vision of the shade and the suffering, the pain and the death, and the mysterious sense of abandonment which was worse than them all, He should seem to stretch out His hands to bring the Cross nearer to Himself, and that His soul should fill with triumph!

There is a double aspect under which our Lord regarded. His sufferings. On the one hand we mark in Him an unmistakable shrinking from the cross, the innocent shrinking of His manhood expressed in such words as "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished"; and in such incidents as the agony in Gethsemane. And yet, side by side with that, not overcome by it, but not overcoming it, there is the opposite feeling, the reaching out almost with eagerness to bring the cross nearer to Himself. These two lie close by each other in His heart. Like the pellucid waters of the Rhine and the turbid stream of the Moselle, that flow side by side over a long space, neither of them blending discernibly with the other, so the shrinking and the desire were contemporaneous in Christ's mind. Here we have the triumphant anticipation rising to the surface, and conquering for a time the shrinking.

Why did Christ think of His Cross as a glorifying? The New Testament generally represents it as the very lowest point of His degradation; John's gospel always represents it as the very highest point of His glory. And the two things are both true; just as the zenith of our sky is the nadir of the sky for those on the other side of the world. The same fact which in one aspect sounds the very lowest depth of Christ's humiliation, in another aspect is the very highest culmination point of His glory.

How did the Cross glorify Christ? In two ways. It was the revelation of His heart; it was the throne of His sovereign power.

It was the revelation of His heart. All his life long He had been trying to tell the world how much He loved it. His love had been, as it were, filtered by drops through His words, through His deeds, through His whole demeanor and bearing; but in His death it comes in a

flood, and pours itself upon the world. All His life long He had been revealing His heart, through the narrow rifts of His deeds, like some slender lancet windows; but in His death all the barriers are thrown down, and the brightness blazes out upon men. All through His life He had been trying to communicate His love to the world, and the fragrance came from the box of ointment exceeding precious, but when the box was broken the house was filled with the odor.

For Him to be known was to be glorified. So pure and perfect was He, that revelation of His character and glorification of Himself were one and the same thing. Because His Cross reveals to the world for all time, and for eternity, too, a love which is diffused over the whole surface of humanity and through all the ages, a love which comes laden with the richest and the highest gifts, even the turning of selfish and sinful hearts into its own pure and perfect likeness, therefore does He say, in contemplation of that Cross which was to reveal Him for what He was to the world, and to bring His love to every one of us, "Now is the Son of Man glorified."

We can fancy a mother, for instance, in the anticipation of shame, and ignominy, and suffering, and sorrow, and death, which she encounters for the sake of some prodigal child, forgetting all the ignominy, and the shame, and the suffering, and the sorrow, and the death, because all these are absorbed in the one thought: "If I bear them, my poor, wandering, rebellious child will know at last how much I loved him." So Christ yearns to impart the knowledge of Himself to us, because by that knowledge we may be won to His love and service; and hence when He looks forward to the agony, and contumely, and sorrow of the close, every other thought is swallowed up in this one: "They will be the means by which the whole world will find out how deep my heart of love to it was." Therefore does He triumph and say, "Now is the Son of Man glorified."

Still further, He regards His cross as the means of His glorifying, because it is His throne of saving power. The paradoxical words of our text rest upon His profound conviction that in His death He was about to put forth a mightier and diviner power than ever He had manifested in His life. They are the same in effect and in tone as the great words: "I, if I be lifted up, will

draw all men unto Me." Now I want you to ask yourselves one question: In what sense is Christ's Cross Christ's glorifying, unless His Cross bears an altogether different relation to His life from what the death of a great teacher or benefactor ordinarily bears to his? It is impossible that Christ could have spoken such words as these of my text if He had simply thought of His death as a Plato or a John Howard might have thought of his, as being the close of his activity for the welfare of his fellows. Unless Christ's death has in it some substantive value, unless it is something more than the mere termination of His work for the world, I see not how the words before us can be interpreted. If His death is His glorifying, it must be because in that death something is done which was not completed by the life, however fair; by the words, however wise and tender; by the works of power, however restorative and healing. Here is something more than these present. What more? This more, that His Cross is the "propitiation for the sins of the whole world". He is glorified therein, not as Socrates might be glorified by his calm and noble death; not because nothing in His life became Him better than the leaving of it; not because the page that tells the story of His passion is turned to by us as the tenderest and most sacred in the world's records; but because in that death He wrestled with and overcame our foes, and because, like the Jewish hero of old, dying, He pulled down the house which our tyrant had built and overwhelmed them in its ruins. "Now is the Son of Man glorified."

And so, brethren, there blend, in that last act of our Lord's—for His death was His act—in a strange fashion, the two contradictory ideas of glory and shame; like some sky, all full of dark thunderclouds, and yet between them the brightest blue and the blazing sunshine. In the Cross, Death crowns Him the Prince of Life, and His Cross is His throne. All His life long He was the Light of the World, but the very noon-tide hour of His glory was that hour when the shadow of eclipse lay over all the land, and He hung on the Cross dying in the dark. At His "eventide it was light." "He endured the Cross, despised the shame"; and lo! the shame flashed up into the very brightness of glory, and the ignominy and the suffering became the

jewels of His crown. "Now is the Son of Man glorified."

**The truths of the Bible are like gold in the soil. Whole generations walk over it, and know not what treasures are hidden beneath. So centuries of men pass over the Scriptures, and know not what riches lie under the feet of their interpretation. Sometimes when they discover them, they call them new truths. One might as well call gold, newly dug, new gold.**

## Spiritual Growth, pt 2

*Robert Surgenor*

### Timothy – A Developed Man

Paul warned Timothy not to neglect the gift that was in him. In other words, "Timothy, you have been given a gift, do not be careless about it. Do not treat it lightly for this is serious, for it involves the spiritual welfare and blessing of the assembly at Ephesus." Paul then goes on to exhort his son in the faith, writing; "Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all. Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee" (1 Tim. 4:15-16). Thayers Lexicon tells us that the word "meditate," means, "attend to carefully, practice." In other words, Timothy's gift was to occupy a prominent place in his life, and he was to exercise that gift through constantly using it to the benefit of the assembly. This was not to be a spasmodic activity, but one that would continue. It was to be his way of life. "That thy profiting may appear to all," simply means, that thy progress, thy advancement, may be plainly recognized by all in the assembly. Saints are not called upon to do nothing, or to remain

babies after their new birth. That will never do! All of us are called upon to make progress, advance, to grow, so much so that all will see it.

I want you to notice what Paul writes about Timothy; "Wherefore when we could no longer forbear, we thought it good to be left at Athens alone; And sent Timotheus, our brother, and minister of God, and our fellowlabourer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you, and to comfort you concerning your faith" (1 Thess.3:1-2). Timothy had the spiritual ability to stabilize and strengthen the assembly at Corinth. However, the interesting factor is that Timothy at that time had been saved only 8 years.

Come with me to Corinth, and what do we find? Notice. "For this cause have I sent unto you Timotheus, who is my beloved son, and faithful in the Lord, who shall bring you into remembrance of my ways which be in Christ, as I teach every where in every church" (1 Cor. 4:17). "Now if Timotheus come, see that he may be with you without fear: for he worketh the work of the Lord, as I also do" (1 Cor. 16:10). At this point Timothy had been saved 13 years.

Then we have Philippi, and Paul commending Timothy to the assembly there; "But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timotheus shortly unto you, that I also may be of good comfort, when I know your state. For I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state. For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's. But ye know the proof of him, that, as a son with the father, he hath served with me in the gospel. Him therefore I hope to send presently, so soon as I shall see how it will go with me" (Phil. 2:19-23). What a tremendous testimony for a man saved 18 years!

### Faithfulness – No Deviation

There are some Christians to whom the Spirit imparts more than one gift, and Timothy was in that category. He was an evangelist, a pastor, and a teacher, and the developing of those three gifts were very readily seen. He labored faithfully with Paul in the gospel, and saw souls saved in various cities, resulting in assemblies being planted. As a teacher he had the ability

to bring to remembrance Paul's ways in Christ to his audience. In other words, the teachings of Paul were repeated by Timothy. There was no deviation, no alteration from the original teachings. He was faithful to the doctrine. It is vexing when younger men cast aside the teachings of older brethren who have departed for heaven. They profess to have better ideas, better solutions, and better translations. Paul said to Timothy, "I have kept the faith" (the doctrine) (2 Tim.4:7), and Timothy could say the same. Not only did Timothy have the ability to establish an assembly as a teacher, he also had the ability to comfort an assembly as a pastor. As for his health, seemingly he was frail. Paul mentions his stomach and his many infirmities (weakness and frailty), yet in spite of manifold physical problems, he was not deterred – he plodded on (1 Tim. 5:23). Timothy was a going and a growing saint.

### **Hebrews – Joyful Days**

How differently were those addressed in Hebrews 5. "Called of God an high priest after the order of Melchisedec. Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing. For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil" (Heb 5:10-14).

First of all, consider the culture and first beginnings of the Hebrew Christians. When the first local assembly of this dispensation was planted, all that were added to it were Jews. This happened on the day of Pentecost, 50 days after the resurrection of Christ. "Then they that gladly received His word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls." "Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." "And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women" (Acts 2:41, 47, 5:14).

What a tremendous work of the Holy Spirit. There was much joy and praising God. They had gladly received the word of God. It was like a breath of new life to them, "and they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness (exceeding joy) and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people." (Acts 2:42, 45-47). Hebrews 6:10 and 10:34, give us an insight as to the character and practice of these new converts from Judaism to Christianity. Notice. "For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward His name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister."

What is revealed here is that these newly saved saints were working and laboring in love to Christ and to other saints, and this work and labor is described as ministering to others. They had undertaken, and made it their business to help fellow believers. They were not seeking their own, but the things that were Jesus Christ's (Phil. 2:21). The word "labour" here is "kopos," which carries the thought of "intense labor united with trouble and toil." They became servants to others. Whether it was preparing food for others, or attending the physical needs of others who were sick, or relieving another's necessities by giving them money – they ministered. What energetic, happy, unselfish, spiritual Christians they were! At their beginning they would perhaps put all of us to shame. This ministry was not spasmodic, but continual. They were not "roller-coaster Christians," but rather "stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord" (1 Cor. 15:58).

The second report was: "But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions; Partly, whilst ye were made a gazingstock both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly, whilst ye became companions of them that were so used. For ye had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the

spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance."

These saints knew what it was to suffer for His name's sake. The world had put them on their stage to mock and ridicule. The pressure was tremendous. Yet, their joy was even more tremendous! On occasions the government would rise up and seek to injure them. Can you picture what it would be like if soldiers unexpectedly entered your house and removed your possessions? How would you react? Would you resist? Would you cry? Would you be depressed? Would you give up all hope? Or, would you rejoice? REJOICE! How could anybody possibly rejoice over a situation of that nature? Well, the Hebrews did! How can this be? The answer is right before you. God's word tells us that they were able to rejoice because they knew something that no worldling has ever known. They knew that in heaven they had better possessions that could never wear old, decay, or be taken from them, and the very thought of this made anything of this earth that they may have possessed very minimal and unimportant. How do you value your worldly possessions? These early Hebrew Christians, I'm afraid, would put all of us to shame. They accepted their temporal loss with cheerful courage, boldness, and assurance.

### **Hebrews – Sad Days**

But now, after a few years had rolled their course, things had changed. For some, the gospel message had diminished in its appeal to them. Let's remember, these people had been steeped in Judaism and the various feast days, and sacrifices were not only embedded in their culture, but also in their hearts. Their God-given religion was their life, but trusting Jesus the Messiah as their Saviour, all had changed – or did it? They had forgotten that the law was only their schoolmaster (guardian), up to Christ. It preserved them from becoming like the nations. It kept them hemmed in until Christ came to them that they might be justified by faith in Him. When Christ came, the law had previously served its purpose, and was no longer needed. It was done away with. Read Galatians 3:23-26. But these Hebrews had lost sight of that and waxing cold, were beginning

to be enamored with those weak and beggarly elements of the law. Thus their dullness of hearing.

### **Dullness of Hearing**

When love to Christ waxes cold, the things of former days seem to rise up and occupy one's mind and heart, and this is what had happened to the Hebrews being addressed in Paul's letter. In expounding the Melchisedec order of Christ's priesthood, Paul had no difficulty with the subject itself, his difficulty lay with the dullness of the hearers. He had many things to say, but was hindered because of their inability to absorb profound truths. There was no such thing as political correctness with Paul. He bluntly stated their condition as it was; "ye are dull of hearing." Darby correctly translates verse 11; "Concerning whom we have much to say, and hard to be interpreted in speaking of it, since ye are become dull in hearing." Notice, they had "BECOME dull," indicating that there was a time in their past when they were not dull. We have already considered that time in 6:10 and 10:34. The word "dull" means; "sluggish, lazy," and is translated "slothful" in 6:12. No longer ready listeners, other interests had captured their attention. They had become as little children and were able only to understand truths of the lowest level. They had retrograded from their former state, losing their spiritual insight and strength. They had become worldly-minded, and unskilful in the word of righteousness. Like little babies, they had returned to kindergarten.

With such people, truths may be preached, but they make no impression, they are not understood nor felt. These Hebrews were no longer eager to listen, nor make any diligent application of the presented truths to their lives. The gospel had become a common thing. They had become slothful. What are the characteristics of a slothful person. Let scripture give the answer. "The slothful man roasteth not that which he took in hunting" (Prov. 12:27).