

Milk & Honey

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Spiritual Food and Encouragement for Believers in the Lord Jesus Christ

The Importance of New Testament Church Principles

W. E. Vine

In the Holy Scriptures God has provided for us “the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints,” Jude 3, not once upon a time, as if the provision of the faith was a passing event, leaving something else to be provided later, but “once for all,” indicating its completeness, its finality and its permanent authority. The Lord Himself confirmed this authority as being binding and decisive by constantly appealing to the Scriptures. When, for instance, a certain lawyer questioned Him on a matter of the greatest importance, He said, “What is written in the law? How readest thou?”

What was taught by Christ and His apostles, as set forth in the New Testament concerning His will as to the principles of the formation, the gatherings, the worship and testimony of an assembly, was designed to be both sufficient and obligatory during the whole of the present period until His return. Changed conditions in Christendom, which in large measure have constituted a departure from the New Testament teaching, only make that teaching stand out the more conspicuously as the mind of God for the unprejudiced believer. Altered circumstances were never intended to involve any departure from the Word of God. The Scriptures are of such a nature as to need no modification. It has been found possible for those who desire to be obedient to Christ to carry them out through all the centuries of this period.

It is of paramount importance for us to discern and follow the will of the Lord, and that not only in our individual capacity, but also in our association with other believers in church life and practice. At the judgment seat of Christ the Word of God will be the criterion by which we shall either receive a lasting reward for our adherence to its teachings, or suffer irretrievable loss for failure to fulfill them.

The teachings of the New Testament concerning a local church or assembly are clear for all who desire to know and follow the will of God instead of the traditions of men. The claims of the Word of God demand our adherence to it and our acceptance of that alone which is in accordance to it. To follow any teaching contrary to the doctrines of Scripture is to challenge its accuracy and to deny the prerogatives of the Spirit of God and the Lord Christ.

It is therefore the responsibility of each believer to identify himself with those who are seeking to assemble in accordance with the teaching of the New Testament. Our fidelity to the Lord must not depend upon the fidelity of our fellow-believers. We should be steadfast enough to be true to Him and to His Word even if others may fail to act consistently. Where any assembly is marked by failure or faithlessness on the part of some of its members, it is ours to set an example by remaining faithful, and this example will meet with the Lord’s approval here and will receive its reward in the coming day.

The genuine acknowledgment of Christ as Lord will keep us faithful in our adherence to the Scriptures in the recognition of the presence and work of the Holy Spirit in regard to worship. The fulfillment of the will of the Lord should be our consuming ambition, and this will mean a repudiation of the traditions of men and of human additions to the faith, as well as of all that undermines its teachings as set forth in the Scriptures of truth.

The craft of Satan is ever at work to beguile us from allegiance to our Lord. What need then there is to receive the exhortation He gave to His disciples when He warned them against mere profession of faith! It is quite easy to imagine that we are rendering service to Him while all the time His revealed will is being ignored. He said, “Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven,” Matt. 7:21. Let us beware of substituting our own preferences for what He has enjoined upon us, lest, in setting aside His authority, whether in private life or in our church capacity, we are after all found wanting.

The Lord still walks amidst “the lampstands,” the local assemblies, as He did as recorded in Revelation 2-3. He discerns the ways of His people and knows all that is going on in each assembly. Blessed are those to whom He will be able to say, “Thou hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name,” Rev. 3:8.*

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Wanted: Shepherds For The Sheep

Samuel Ridout

Where are the pastors today? No time for visiting? Too busy? The wolves are busy scattering the sheep; divisions and worldliness press on every hand. Compromise, neglect of Christ's interests, disregard of His honor - all these are present; *where are the pastors today?* The Church has all the gifts; there are brilliant orators, scholarly teachers; good men and true. There are schools and colleges; education can be gained by any desiring it. Surely the Lord has not forgotten the need of His people, nor is He indifferent when He sees them scattered as sheep without a shepherd. *Where are the pastors today?*

I. Feeding the sheep. *Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away"* (First Peter 5: 1-4). Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Spirit hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood (Acts 20:28). Words fail to express the solemnity of such a trust. Those who cost the precious blood of the Son of God, are committed into the hands of men! What an honor, what responsibility to be in any way permitted to feed the lambs, to shepherd the sheep of Christ. And *ministry* it is, of the most delicate and important character. Nothing but companionship with the Good Shepherd, with a sense of the value, the need of the sheep, can qualify one to walk in His steps.

The shepherd's life is largely a quiet one. The flock cannot be over-driven or frightened. The main duty of the shepherd is to love the sheep. The rest will follow. He will feed them, causing them to lie down in green pastures; he will lead them beside waters of quietness. Brutal harshness may pass for firmness, but the shepherd never mistakes force and cruelty for strength. Love is firmer than wrath; it can "exhort, reprove, rebuke;" but it has previously gained the right to do this by showing patient love, and winning the confidence of the saints. There is an authority which appeals to the conscience; a firmness which weeps as it smites.

Let us hear the word of the Lord to His shepherds in a former dispensation. *Thus saith the Lord God unto the shepherds; woe be to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flocks? Ye eat the fat, and ye clothe you with the wool, ye kill them that*

are fed; but ye feed not the flock. The diseased have ye not strengthened, neither have ye healed that which was sick, neither have ye bound up that which was broken, neither have ye brought again that which was driven away, neither have ye sought that which was lost; but with force and with cruelty have ye ruled them. And they were scattered because there is no shepherd....(Ezekiel 34:2-5).

II. Guarding the sheep. *He that is an hireling and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth; and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep....I am the good Shepherd and know my sheep and am known of mine"* (John 10:12,14). *Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves; for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief; for that is unprofitable for you* (Hebrews 13:17). Rule, if it be truly that, is shepherd care. The model shepherd was familiar with the sheep; indeed, his kingship was but an exalted shepherd care. *He chose David also his servant, and took him from the sheepfolds; from following the ewes great with young he brought him to feed Jacob his people, and Israel his inheritance. So he fed them according to the integrity of his heart; and guided them by the skillfulness of his hands* (Psalm 78:70-72). David looked on the people as a flock: *These sheep, what have they done?* (2 Samuel 24:17).

How beautiful it is to see a caretaker visiting in the homes of the saints. Danger threatens. The father has met one who has brought strange and deadly doctrines to his attention. He is interested; the specious (erroneous) teaching of the pamphlets attracts him. But he has a friend in whose judgment he confides; he will lay the matter before him, and the pastor is enabled to point out the error, to warn, even to admonish. What a work, what a privilege! He loves the sheep, and does the work. *

Amillennialism Examined

This 46 page book by David McAllister examines Amillennialism and its beliefs that there will be no one thousand year reign of Christ on the earth, God's promises to Israel are fulfilled spiritually in the Church, God has set the nation of Israel aside permanently, and Satan is currently bound. Write for a free copy.

Nothingness by J.N. Darby

It is a very disagreeable work to get to know ourselves, but very useful work. Peter is sifted, and has to learn that this confidence that he has in himself is the very occasion of failure....In the end the Lord not only restores his soul but makes him the channel of blessing to others. When you know your own utter nothingness, then you can go and help others. 'Go and feed my sheep' the Lord says to Peter.*

Preachers of the Truth

Charles Fuller

Additional comments by Bob Gessner

Preachers of the truth! God has always had them down through the centuries. Did you ever wish you could hear some of these great servants preaching from the Word of God? We cannot hear them, but some of their messages have been preserved. Let's go way back to the early centuries of Christianity and look at three brief messages concerning the Lord Jesus Christ.

1. Here's a brief message from Athanasius concerning Christ's incarnation. He lived from 293 to 373 A.D., over 1600 years ago. *And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory....(Jn. 1:14).* "For He did not simply will to become embodied, or will merely to appear. For if He willed merely to appear, He was able to affect His divine appearance by some other and higher means as well. But He takes a body of our kind, and not merely so, but from a spotless and stainless virgin, knowing not a man, a body clean and pure from intercourse of men. For being Himself mighty, and Artificer of everything, He prepares the body in the virgin as a temple unto Himself, and makes it His very own as an instrument, in it manifested, and in it dwelling. He took pity on our race, and had mercy on our infirmity, and unable to bear that death should have the mastery, lest the creature should perish, and His Father's handiwork in men be spent for nought, He takes unto Himself a body, and that of no different sort from ours." Because he preached Christ, in his old age, Athanasius was forced to flee to a cemetery and take refuge for nearly half a year in a sepulcher.

2. Now let's again go back 1600 years and listen to the words of Ambrose, who lived from 340-397 A.D. He holds forth on the subject of Christ's deity. *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God (Jn.1:1).* "Seeing then that Christ is God, He is, by consequence, good and almighty and eternal and perfect and true; for these attributes belong to the essential nature of the Godhead. Further, that none may fall into error, let a man attend to those signs vouchsafed us by Holy Scripture, whereby we may know the Son. He is called the Word, the Son, the Power of God, and the Wisdom of God. Now these are not mere names, but signs of power manifesting itself in works, for while there is fulness of Godhead in the Father, there is also fulness of Godhead in the Son, not diverse, but one. The Godhead is nothing confused, for it is an unity; nothing manifold, for in it there is no difference." Faustina, the mother of the Roman emperor, sent a troop of soldiers to arrest Ambrose because of his stand on the Person of Christ. His bold spirit caused the soldiers to refuse to obey

the orders of Faustina and they gave up on their mission. Aurelius Augustine (354-430), a great preacher in these early times, came to understand the Gospel of grace through the preaching of Ambrose.

3. Moving into the eleventh century of Christianity, still over eight hundred years ago, we hear the words of Anselm (1033-1109) regarding the death of Christ. *Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit (Jn.12:24).* "No man besides Him ever gave to God, by dying, what he was not necessarily going to lose at some time, or paid what he did not owe. But this Man freely offered to the Father what he would never have lost by any necessity, and paid for sinners what He did not owe for Himself. Therefore He gave us a more striking example, to the effect that each man should not hesitate to surrender to God for himself, when reason demands it, what he is going to lose very soon. For although He did not need to do it for Himself, and was not compelled to do it for others, since He owed them nothing but punishment, He gave up such a precious life - yes, nothing less than Himself - surrendering so great a person with such willingness." This message was preached four centuries before the Protestant revolution. Compromise, political changes, ecclesiastical double-dealing put Anselm in difficult positions, but he stuck to his principles.

Of these great preachers of centuries ago, Charles O. Fuller, in his book, *Valiant for the Truth*, says of them, "Each man possessed the same fierce conviction, that all truth is absolute, never relative. For these men, truth was never a nose of wax to be twisted to suit their system of dialectics or deceptive casuistry. Two times two made four. In mathematics, their supreme authority was the multiplication table; in theology, their absolute authority was the Bible. They held verbal inspiration essential. To them it was as much a test of Christian fellowship as any other fundamental of their faith: the virgin birth, the sinless life of Christ; His substitutionary death; His bodily resurrection. These truths, absolute in their nature, formed a golden chain forged by the Holy Spirit. If one link was missing, the whole would be in jeopardy."

What about those of us who, in the will of God, may enter the twenty-first and probably the last century of Christianity? Will we be as valiant for the truth as these men were? They were vessels used mightily of God when Christianity had its beginning. God wants us to be vessels standing valiantly for him when Christianity has its ending.

Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us" (Heb. 12:1).*

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Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; 1 Pet. 5:2

June, 2014

Characteristics of the Sheep

Edward Dennett

And when He putteth forth His own sheep, He goeth before them, and the sheep follow Him; for they know His voice (John 10:4).

It is profitable if we ponder a little upon some of the characteristics of Christ's sheep:

1. *They hear His voice (Jn. 10:4,16,27).* This goes back to the very commencement, when He calleth His own sheep by name, and is that which distinguishes them as His sheep. We may combine with this another trait, "They know not the voice of strangers" (verse 5). Herein lies the safety of the flock. They at once recognize the voice of the Shepherd, but though a stranger should simulate the tones of the Shepherd ever so closely, they know not his voice and detect it as that of a stranger. There is no need, therefore, that we should seek to be familiar with all the errors that abound on every hand in order to escape their seductions; it is enough for us that we know the voice of the Shepherd; and our safety will be in ever listening to it, becoming increasingly acquainted with it, maintaining evermore the attitude of her who sat at the feet of Jesus, and heard His word (Luke 10:39). This will be at once our preservative from danger and the means of our safety and blessing.

2. *They follow the Shepherd (Jn. 10:4,27).* The sheep have no will but that of the Shepherd and ceasing to follow Him, they become wandering sheep. In Eastern lands, and indeed in some parts of Europe, the shepherd ever goes before his sheep; and when he moves onward, they follow, and when he stops, they stop likewise. Our blessed Lord alludes to this in the scripture before us, and uses the custom to convey most striking instruction. For to follow the Shepherd necessitates

that the eye of the sheep should be ever upon Him, that they should ever be on the watch to ascertain when He would have them to move, and where He would have them follow. Everything is thus left in the Shepherd's hands; it is His to discern a coming danger, to provide for their sustenance, and to indicate their path. Their responsibility is to follow the Shepherd wherever He may lead and to follow Him until He shall come to receive them to Himself.

3. *They know the Shepherd (Jn. 10:14,15).* They not only know His voice; but they also know Himself. This is the highest blessing of which the sheep are capable; for it implies entering into His own thoughts, ways, and desires. It is thus that we are brought into communion with Him. We may know His voice, and be following Him, and yet be without much acquaintance with His character. This is the highest and most blessed attainment which the believer can make. And the Lord desires that it should be made in an infinite measure, "as the Father knoweth me, and I the Father." He knows us, and He desires that we should know Him. May He Himself lead us into an ever increasing acquaintance with Himself that we may so keep Himself before our souls and may grow daily in the knowledge of Him. *

Milk & Honey Information

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