Spiritual Life and Discipline

studies in aspects of discipleship

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Contents

Preface

Evangelicals, no less than Christians from other traditions, have a high regard for spiritual life and spiritual discipline. While theology has traditionally been the differentiating factor between different streams of Christian thinking down through the centuries, the definition of spiritual life and the employment of appropriate spiritual disciplines are also important distinctives. The urge to put the Bible in the common language of the people, which was compelling for Wycliffe, Hus, Tyndale and Luther, in turn made possible a whole style of devotional life based upon the interaction of the layperson with Scripture, a style of devotion which was previously impossible since the beginning of history. Pietism, of course, had a strong role in the evangelical heritage almost since the Reformation, and when the Pentecostal-Charismatic renewal blossomed in the 20th century, the resulting mix produced a unique blend of spiritual concepts. Especially in the past century or so, the strong imperative for tithing has become a familiar theme in many evangelical pulpits. The American Holiness Movement made personal and social behavior a rigorous spiritual issue in which rules for conduct were extrapolated from biblical principles and specifically applied to 19th and 20th century life. Finally, in the past several decades a whole methodology has evolved about how to conduct spiritual warfare.

The present work attempts to interact with these ideas about spiritual life and discipline in the context of biblical theology. It will not answer all the questions one might pose about specific behaviors, notions, theologies and tendencies, but it does aim to provide a solid biblical base out of which to address such questions. All of the present studies were "field-tested" in congregational discussions containing input from Christians whose traditions included Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Episcopal, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Methodist, Reformed, Baptist, Pentecostal and Charismatic backgrounds. This is not to say, of course, that the ideas presented here are a consensus for such a wide group, but it does mean that the wisdom of these various expressions of Christianity certainly have been given due consideration. Each tradition has made substantial contributions to the whole, and it is hoped that the present studies will be the better for them.

Spirituality

"Spirituality is the state of deep relationship to God,"[1] and furthermore, it is often perceived to be the practical outworking of this deep relationship in the experiences of life.[2] The idea of spirituality is important to Christians precisely because they believe that in the experience of salvation they have received the messianic gift of the Spirit (1 Co. 12:13).

The background for the messianic promise of the Spirit arises in the history of Israel. Prior to the period of the writing prophets, the work of the Spirit was largely to be seen in a group of individuals upon whom the Spirit rested so that they might perform special tasks, such as, artistry (Ex. 31:3; 35:31), war (Jg. 3:10; 6:34; 11:29; 13:25; 14:6, 19, 15:14; 1 Sa. 11:6) or kingship (1 Sa. 16:13; Ps. 51:11). However, the locus of the Spirit *par excellence* was in the Most Holy Place of the tent of meeting, and later, the Most Holy Place of the first temple. Here, the heaviness (*kavod* = weight, glory) of God's spiritual presence rested between the golden cherubim over the lid of the ark (Ex. 25:17-24; 40:34-35; Nu. 7:89; 1 Sa. 4:4; 2 Sa. 6:2; 2 Chr. 7:1-3; 2 Kg. 19:15; Ps. 80:1; 99:1). The history of Israel, however, was not marked by consistent faithfulness to the Lord. Repeatedly the Israelites deviated from the law of Moses and their relationship with God. Consequently, in accordance with the Deuteronomic Code (Dt. 28), God delivered them up to exile. In anticipation of the destruction of the first temple, Ezekiel had a vision of the divine Spirit removing himself from the temple sanctuary (Eze. 9:3; 10:4, 18-19; 11:22-23).

It is against this background of occasional empowerments by the Spirit and the eventual withdrawal of the Spirit from Mt. Zion that the prophets looked toward the future. The day would come when God would restore the Spirit, not merely to a few chosen individuals, but to the entire nation of Israel (Eze. 11:16-19; 36:24-28; 37:14; 39:29; cf. Is. 44:3; 59:21). This future blessing would not be for Israel only, however, but would be for all people, young and old, male and female (Jl. 2:28-29).

The beginnings of fulfillment are to be seen in the birth narratives of John and Jesus. John the Baptist, Mary, Elisabeth, Zechariah and Simeon were all blessed with the infilling of the Holy Spirit (Lk.1:15, 35; 41, 67; 2:26-27). In his earthly life, Jesus bore the Spirit without limit (Jn. 3:34), and John the Baptist preached that Jesus not only bore the Spirit, he would also baptize with the Spirit

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[1]J. Houston, *EDT* (1984) 1046.

[2]Technically, the word "spirituality" does not occur in the Bible, though word *pneumatikos* (= spiritual, pertaining to the spirit) occurs a number of times, most of them within the Pauline corpus.

(Mk. 1:8//Mt. 3:11//Lk. 3:16; Jn. 1:33). In some measure at least, the gift of the Spirit was available to Jesus' disciples even during his public ministry (Mk. 13:11//Mt. 10:20//Lk. 12:12; Lk. 11:13). On one occasion Jesus challenged a Jewish elder that he could be born again of the Spirit (Jn. 3:3-10). So, the work of the Spirit had already begun. Still, it is clear enough that this work of the Spirit was only the start. A much greater outpouring was still to come (Jn. 7:38-39; Jn. 14:16-17, 26; 15:26; 16:7-11, 13-15). For the disciples of Jesus, the fulfillment of this greater promise began in the post-resurrection appearances of the Lord (Jn. 20:22). After Jesus' ascension, on the Day of Pentecost (Lk. 24:49; Ac. 1:4-5, 8; 2:1-4), the promise of the baptism with the Spirit was fulfilled! The messianic gift of the Spirit had come (Ac. 2:16-21).

Now, it is out of this new relationship to God through the gift of the Spirit that the concept of spirituality arises. If spirituality is a deep relationship with God through the Holy Spirit, what form does this spirituality take? What does it mean to be "filled with the Spirit" (Ep. 5:18)? What does it mean to "live by the Spirit" (Ga. 5:16)? What is a "spiritual person" (1 Co. 2:15; 3:1; 14:37; Ga. 6:1), what are "spiritual blessings" (Ro. 15:27; Ep. 1:3), and what are "spiritual things" (1 Co. 2:13; 9:11)? Why does Paul charge some in the Corinthian church of being "led astray" and "receiving a different spirit" which ultimately was "another Jesus" and a "different gospel" (2 Co. 11:3-4)? Closely related to these questions are the issues of subjective personal experience, worship style, and intuitive knowledge. How are human emotions and psychological states of mind to be distinguished from the Holy Spirit? What tests or controls are appropriate to ensure validity? These are some of the subjects to be addressed in this study.

Some Historical Perspective

Before exploring the modern questions regarding spirituality, it will be helpful to survey briefly the theological landscape of the past. The call to spirituality is not new, and there have been a variety of expressions and emphases throughout Christian history. Here are some of the major ones.

In the early centuries of Christianity, three important forms of spirituality were martyrdom, Montanism and asceticism. Prior to the legitimization of Christianity by Constantine in the early 300s A.D., martyrdom was a reality for many Christians due to the imperial persecutions. Many notable Christian leaders met death because of their faith, such as, Stephen (mid-30s A.D.), James (early 40s A.D.), Peter and Paul (early 60s A.D.), Ignatius of Antioch (about 115 A.D.), Polycarp (about 155 A.D.) and others. Martyrs were regarded with the highest esteem for their testimony unto death, and martyrdom was regarded as the ultimate sign of Christian discipleship. Origen of Alexandria (born about 185 A.D.) had to

be restrained forcibly from voluntarily joining the martyrs in their sufferings.[3] The date of a martyr's death was celebrated as a "saint's day," and in time, chapels were built over the tombs or relics of the martyrs, while the martyrs were invoked in prayer that they might intercede for the living.

Montanism, named after Montanus who was converted in about 155 A.D., held that a new dispensation and new revelation had been given by the Holy Spirit. This new revelation called for a rigorous code of ethics and the expectation of the end of the world in the near future.[4] Montanus and his two prophetesses, Priscilla and Maximilla, believed themselves to be the mouthpieces of the Paraclete. They predicted that the New Jerusalem would be established in Pepuza, Phrygia. Many Montanists gathered there to await the eschatological climax.[5]

Certain forms of asceticism are known from the earliest periods of Christianity, but asceticism came into its own in the Monastic movement especially after the end of the imperial persecutions. Asceticism became a kind of "living matyrdom." "The model Christian was no longer the courageous bishop dragged before wild beasts...[but] a lonely hermit in the forsaken Egyptian desert defying the devil."[6] Spirituality was closely connected to the deprivation of natural desires, such as, food, sex, possessions and social life. Self-denial, especially through celibacy, was urged, and the practice of penance through acts of exceptional virtue was prescribed. The ascetics gave away their wealth and moved away from civilization so that they might contemplate the face of God. Some ate only grass, while others refused to wash themselves. One of the most notable, Simeon Stylites, erected a pillar and lived on top of it for thirty years. His disciples sent food up to him in a basket.[7] Monasticism continued into the Middle Ages as a primary form of spirituality with emphasis on reading, meditative memory, prayer and good works.

The late medieval period developed a concerted strain of mysticism, the belief in a deep personal relationship between the individual and God. Leading thinkers, such as Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153),[8] Ignatius Loyola (1491-

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[3]T. Dowley, ed., *Eerdman's Handbook to the History of Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977) 80.

[4]For instance, marriage was viewed negatively, and widows and widowers were forbidden to remarry. Fasting was elevated as a spiritual discipline, and food, when it was eaten, was eaten dry. Adherents were encouraged to relish persecution: "Do not hope to die in bed...but as martyrs." Serious sins committed after baptism were believed to be unforgivable, cf. Dowley, 74.

[5]J. Gonzalez, *A History of Christian Thought* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1970) I.144-146.

[6]B. Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language* (Waco, TX: Word, 1982) 131.

[7]Shelley, 131-134.

1521),[9] Teresa of Avila (1515-1582)[10] and John of the Cross,[11] contributed to the belief that a life of prayer and self-denial, along with a concentrated love for God, would transform natural desires into redeeming, spiritual passion for Christ. *The Imitation of Christ*, a classic work by the Dutch mystic, Thomas á Kempis (1379-1471), is still widely published and read.

In England, the spirituality of the English church is associated with the communal liturgies of contemplative prayer surrounding the service of the eucharist. Its highest expression is in the Book of Common Prayer, which took the older Latin liturgies and translated them into the common tongue. From 1549, this prayer book has directed worship in the English church.[12]

Out of the background of Calvinism, Puritan spirituality developed in England and America. It focused upon the centrality of the Bible in preaching, the preparation of the heart to receive its message, and the need for a godly lifestyle. Meditation was emphasized, and prayer was conducted vocally. Also from the Calvinist tradition came writers like John Bunyan, the author of *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

German Pietism, under the leadership of Philipp Spener (1635-1705) and August Francke (1663-1727), sought spirituality in the practicalities of the Christian life. Pietism had a perfectionist bent while reacting against the cold formalism of established church forms. Pietists created schools for poor children, founded orphanages, and worked toward deepening the devotional lives of Christians as individuals. The missionary Moravian Church was closely associated with Pietism, and it carried around the world the pietistic concern for

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[8]One of Bernard's well-loved meditations is preserved in the familiar hymn:

Jesus, the very thought of thee
With sweetness fills my breast;
But sweeter far thy face to see,
And in thy presence rest.

[9]Ignatius is famous for his vows of poverty and celibacy, which became foundational for the Jesuit movement. His *Spiritual Exercises* are still practiced, a four week regimen of meditation and instruction on sin, Christ's kingship, his passion, and his risen life, cf. Dowley, 411.

[10]Teresa described her personal knowledge of God through love as a "mystical marriage." She recounted a spiritual experience in which a seraph appeared to her carrying a spear tipped with fire. He plunged the spear deep into her heart, and she was left aflame with a great love for God, cf. Dowley, 418.

[11]John's poems and commentaries, such as, *The Dark Night of the Soul* and *The Living Flame of Love*, instruct the soul on how to achieve union with God.

[12]D. Wheaton, *EDT* (1984) 170.

personal spirituality and authentic spiritual experience.[13]

In 19th century America, yet another approach to spirituality was developed within the holiness movement, the stepchild of American Methodism. Holiness preachers described the process of salvation in two crisis experiences, conversion and sanctification. The first was freedom from sin; the second was entire sanctification in which Christians were liberated from the flaws in their moral nature which caused them to sin. The holiness movement emphasized that a life completely above sin was entirely possible. The movement was marked by a rigorous set of behavior standards, including strict taboos against all forms of worldliness, as well as a strong emphasis on private devotion, self-discipline, and the renunciation of worldly values. Contemporary denominations with roots in the holiness movement include the Wesleyan Methodist Church, the United Missionary Church, the Salvation Army, the Church of the Nararene, the Church of God (Anderson, Indiana) and, to a lesser degree, the Christian and Missionary Alliance Church.[14]

At around the turn of the century, yet another spiritual movement, Pentecostalism, began as a combination of holiness theology and Black Christianity. This movement focused upon the "baptism of the Holy Ghost," which was believed to be a personal crisis experience with the initial sign of speaking with tongues. It also emphasized the spiritual gifts of instantaneous bodily healing, prophecy,[15] miracles, interpretation of tongues and the word of knowledge.[16] Today, denominations within the Pentecostal tradition are the Assemblies of God, the Church of God (Cleveland, Tennessee), the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World and the United Pentecostal Church, Inc.

Similar, but not identical to Pentecostalism, is the charismatic renewal movement. Arising in the 1960s within such mainline denominations as Anglicanism, Lutheranism and Roman Catholicism, the charismatics also embraced spirituality in the baptism with the Spirit accompanied by the experience of speaking with tongues and related spiritual phenomena. However, unlike the Pentecostals, who abandoned their old denominations, the charismatics remained in their mother denominations, at least for a time. They fostered interdenominational contact through parachurch organizations like the Full Gospel

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[13]M. Knoll, *EDT* (1984) 855-858.

[14]R. Pierard, *EDT* (1984) 517-518.

[15]For Pentecostals, the gift of prophecy was understood as direct revelation from the Spirit rather than spiritual insight in preaching and teaching.

[16]Unlike the more classical understanding that the "message of knowledge" (1 Co. 12:8) is akin to inspired teaching or special insight in the meaning of the gospel, the Pentecostals interpreted this gift to refer to the miraculous revelation of private knowledge which would not have been known otherwise.

Business Men's Fellowship International. In the 1970s and 1980s, many charismatics did, in fact, leave their old denominations to form new, non-denominational assemblies. Today, the charismatic movement is heavily involved in tele-evangelism.

Seeking a Model for Spirituality

As the foregoing survey suggests, there are several models for spirituality. For some, spirituality is understood in terms of religious discipline. This approach focuses upon distancing oneself from the pleasures and pursuits of the prevailing culture. The spiritual life is the austere life. For others, spirituality is understood in terms of holiness codes and behavioral taboos. Here, the focus is on moral purity and the renunciation of worldly evils. Lists of especially reprehensible behaviors are constructed to guide the faithful away from harmful activities. The focus is upon the outward life. For still others, spirituality is understood in terms of devotion and the private contemplation of God. Here, the focus is on inward, subjective, intuitive perceptions of God. Some Christians see spirituality as benevolent action, that is, the life of good deeds, compassion and Christian virtue. Here, the focus is upon what one does for others. Some see it in communal worship, and the focus is upon the ancient patterns of liturgy. Finally, many Christians understand spirituality in terms of ecstatic experience, either through powerful emotional events or transcendent encounters with the spiritual world. Here, the focus is upon the intuitive and immediate encounter of divine power.

Some of these forms of spirituality tend to be more corporate in nature, that is, they emphasize spirituality in the context of the group. Other forms are very individualistic, focusing upon either individual behavior or individual private experience. It should also be observed that there is considerable overlapping in the above categories. The person who emphasizes ecstatic experience might also emphasize a private devotional life. The group which urges good deeds toward others might equally be concerned about austerity and the discipline of the self.

There is yet another factor to be considered, namely, the interchange between Christians and those of other religions persuasions about ideas of spirituality. Without question, the decline of the sacred and the deep penetration of secularism into every aspect of contemporary life is cause for alarm and the need to reconsider spirituality. As the emptiness of secularism has become more apparent, the desire for spirituality has become more intense, both inside and outside the Christian family. There is currently a considerable exchange about ideas of spirituality. One of the most apparent is the increasing openness of westerners to eastern spirituality with its roots in Hindu notions of asceticism, meditation, devotion, suprarationalism and transforming techniques. These ideas drive a

person to seek spirituality within the self--and they derive directly from the eastern commitment to pantheism. Other interchanges sometimes occur between Christians and spiritualists, such as, visualization, mind over matter, extra-sensory perception and other paranormal phenomena. The popularity of the "12 Step Programs," both outside and inside Christian circles, is a further example of such exchange.

In seeking a model for spirituality, the Christian must appeal to Holy Scripture as the defining authority. Precisely because spirituality is a human category, both inside and outside the Christian faith (1 Co. 12:2), the believer must take precautions that he or she does not lapse into merely a human model. Humans are fallen. Their spirits, minds, aptitudes, perceptions and desires have all been infected with sin. Thus, the apostle warn us, "Do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God" (1 Jn. 4:1-3). The spirit of antichrist is already at work in the world (2 Th. 2:7a), and before the end, many people will commit themselves to delusion (2 Th. 2:9-12; 1 Ti. 4:1). That such spiritual forces were already at work during the apostolic era is clear in the New Testament letters. Paul warns that spiritual utterances can be motivated by spiritual forces that are against Christ (1 Co. 12:1-3). Because someone is ostensibly under the umbrella of Christianity does not mean they should be received without examination, for some kinds of spiritual distortion arise even from within the Christian fellowship (Ac. 8:13, 18-24; 20:29-31; cf. 2 Co. 11:3-5; 12:11; Phil. 3:17-19; Col. 2:18-23; Rv. 2:14-16, 20-25). All things must be tested (1 Th. 5:19-22; cf. 1 Co. 14:29). Christians should know those who teach them (2 Ti. 3:14).

So, in seeking a model for spirituality, Christians must be careful to ground their beliefs and test their experiences by the Word of God. Personal experience, in itself, is not a valid test for spirituality, for personal experience may be only a distortion of true spirituality (1 Co. 14:37-38). If those in ancient times could mistake their own imaginations for true spirituality (Je. 23:16, 21, 25-26, 30-32, 36), surely such a thing is possible in modern times as well.

Related Issues

In contemporary Christianity, there are several models for spirituality which bear examination. Some of them overlap to a considerable degree.

One such model is *the life of discipline*. Here, spirituality is defined primarily in terms of self-denial, devotional practices and the casting off of material things. In the Medieval Period, the mystics believed that they had to purify themselves before a pure vision of God could be achieved. Such

purification began with the removal of all outward sin and sensuality and spiraled inward as layer after layer of inward, deeper sins were discovered and confessed.[17] A 20th century variation of this model works at disciplining one's appetites, emotions, moods, speech, priorities, and attitude toward authority. Discipline, both self-discipline and imposed discipline, become the avenues to personal power and spiritual maturity.[18] In this model, emphasis is placed upon daily prayer (often regimented as to time and content), regular fasting, a regimen of Bible reading, careful limits on recreation, a fully developed behavioral code with many restrictions, a dress code, and many other such disciplines.

While there is merit in discipline, there are cautions to be observed as well. Discipline is not identical with spirituality. Paul pointed out the dangers of an overemphasis on discipline in his Colossian letter. There were some whose model for spirituality was: "Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!" They were careful in their observance of holy days. In their discipline, they believed that they could achieve a transcendent state where they were able to consort with angels. They experienced visions. They rigorously disciplined themselves. However, Paul is quite blunt in saying that they had an "unspiritual mind" and were "puffed up with idle notions." They had "lost connection with the Head," and their disciplines were nothing more than an adoption of worldly principles. Their lifestyle had the appearance of spirituality, but actually, it was a combination of false humility and self-designed worship. Furthermore, it was unsuccessful in controlling temptation (Col. 2:16-23).

A second model for spirituality can be seen in *the perfectionist movement*. Though there are perfectionist ideas in several ancient expressions of Christianity (i.e., Pelagius), modern perfectionism is usually traced to movements in early America. Among the Quakers, George Fox taught that moral perfection was possible, and that the born-again believer could be free from actual sinning. The believer could be restored to the innocence of Adam before the fall.[19] Among the followers of John Wesley, there developed another strain of perfectionism. While Wesley had taught that "perfect love" or "Christian perfection" could replace pride through a moral crisis of faith, his later followers developed a doctrine of entire sanctification in which the sinful nature was entirely removed in a crisis experience called "the second blessing." This experience was believed to be a second work of grace (second only to conversion), and it entirely eradicated sin

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[17]L. Boettner, "The Purgative Way," *EDT* (1984) 896-897.

[18]R. Taylor, *The Disciplined Life* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1962).

[19]R. Shelton, "Perfection, Perfectionism," *EDT* (1984) 842.

from the believer's life.[20]

There is no doubt that the American holiness movement contributed to the deepening of spiritual life in a materialistic age. However, perfectionism also carries several dangers. First is the fact that Paul seems to say that such perfection is not possible until the return of the Lord. At least for himself, Paul said, "I have not already been made perfect" (Phil. 3:12; cf. 1 Co. 13:10). There are also some practical disparities, such as, the perfectionist practice of prolonged seeking for the second blessing, a practice which is entirely absent in the New Testament. Perfectionism easily lapses into two levels of Christianity, the "haves" and the "have nots." When one adopts the belief that entire sanctification occurs in an instantaneous crisis, there tends to be an overemphasis on the emotional subjectivity of the experience. Often, subjective "signs" are sought to verify that the experience, in fact, has occurred.

A third model for spirituality flows from the second, *the Pentecostal-Charismatic theology of the baptism in the Spirit.* When those committed to perfectionism began to describe their crisis experience as the "baptism in the Spirit," it was only a short distance to the conclusion that the particular sign of speaking in tongues was the single, external, unmistakable evidence that one had been so baptized. By this conclusion, the Pentecostal movement was born at about the turn of the century. Later, the Charismatic Movement also adopted the same theological stance in the 1960s and afterward.[21] In Pentecostal-Charismatic circles, true spirituality is inevitably tied to the experience of speaking with tongues.

Pentecostal-Charismatics exhibit the same problem as the perfectionists in that the Christian community becomes divided between the "haves" and the "have nots." This division is something that is foreign to the New Testament. Even more to the point, the New Testament is quite clear that all believers have been baptized by the Spirit into a single body, the body of Christ (1 Co. 12:13). All have received the same Holy Spirit. While Paul does not forbid speaking in tongues (1 Co. 14:39), and in fact, speaks in tongues himself (1 Co. 14:18), he is also quite clear that tongues have only a limited value in the church. Since they are unintelligible, they cannot edify the congregation (1 Co. 14:2-5). According to Paul, it was quite possible to speak in tongues but still remain very unspiritual (1

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[20]V. Pierard, "The American Holiness Movement," *EDT* (1984) 516-518.

[21]While some groups still speak of three crisis experiences ("saved, sanctified, and filled with the Holy Ghost"), most Pentecostals rejected the notion of instantaneous sanctification. Instead, they see the baptism in the Spirit as a second crisis experience which fills them and empowers them to live their Christian lives. All Pentecostals agree, however, that speaking in tongues is the sign which accompanies the baptism in the Spirit, cf. V. Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Movement in the United States* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971).

Co. 13:1). The Corinthians, who placed great value upon speaking with tongues, were unspiritual (1 Co. 3:1). Finally, there is no specific teaching in the New Testament identifying speaking with tongues as the sign of the baptism in the Spirit. This conclusion is deduced from narrative descriptions in the Book of Acts, and such deductive theology is a highly questionable interpretative methodology.

A fourth model defines spirituality in terms of *worship forms and subjective worship experience.* For some, it is in the quietness or stateliness of 19th century hymnody. For others, it is in up-beat contemporary gospel music. The worship model as a gauge for spirituality can take many forms. It can be perceived as the following of ancient liturgy, as communal prayers, as particular physical actions in worship (clapping, raising hands, invitations to the altar, dancing, etc.), as enthusiasm and liveliness, as ecstatic experience, or as an encouragement for individual expressions without a formal order of worship. None of these things are necessarily wrong, but they are not the same thing as spirituality.

The New Testament does not identify spirituality with any external form of worship. There are particular dangers in doing so. One danger is that a person's worship tradition can easily be judged to be spiritual, when in reality, it is only that with which one has become comfortable and familiar. Worship proceeds from the human heart and spirit (Jn. 4:24), and it may or may not be accompanied by particular external forms. The forms themselves are traditional, and such traditions have value, but in themselves they are not the same thing as a deep relationship with God. The forms can be quite independent of spirituality. In the Corinthian church, even though the Lord's table was celebrated regularly, the Corinthian's worship "did more harm than good" (1 Co. 11:17). Thus, enthusiasm, because it is subjective, can be mistaken for spirituality.[22]

The Issue of Subjectivity in Spirituality

Currently, it is widely believed that spirituality is primarily personal and subjective. This belief has been shaped by the American Holiness Movement, the Pentecostal Movement, and the Charismatic Movement. The critical issue for Christians is how to assess subjective personal experience. Usually, such experience is perceived to be transcendent (above and independent of the material universe), ineffable (indescribable) and/or suprarational (beyond rational categories). It assumes the immediate and intuitive knowledge of God, unmediated by Scripture or Christian tradition. In such mysticism, it is

[22]D. Bloesch, *Faith & Its Counterfeits* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1981) 60-72.

particularly difficult to distinguish genuine spiritual experience from other psychological states of mind. Furthermore, some personality types seem to lend themselves to subjectivism more than others.

That the Bible affirms subjective spiritual experience, no one should deny. Such things as visions (Ac. 9:10-16; 10:3-6; 16:9-10; 18:9-10), trances (Ac. 22:17-18), transcendental states (2 Co. 12:2-4), dreams (Mt. 1:20-21; 2:12-13, 19, 22) and revelations (1 Co. 14:6, 26; 2 Co. 12:1, 7; Ga. 2:1-2) are all attested in the New Testament. At the same time, the New Testament also warns against abuses. Subjective spiritual experience is not necessarily a sign of spirituality or even of genuine encounter with God (Col. 2:18-19). Apparent acts of power may not be motivated by the Spirit of Christ (Ac. 19:13-16). Spiritual utterances can be blasphemous (1 Co. 12:3).

The following discussion may assist in assessing subjective spiritual experience. Without trying to limit God, Christians do have the responsibility to limit themselves (1 Co. 14:32-33).

Should Christians seek or expect subjective spiritual experience?

Some have argued, on the basis of passages like Ac. 1:4-5 and 1 Co. 14:1, that Christians ought to desire subjective spiritual experience. Such a conclusion is unsound for at least three reasons. First, only by misinterpretation can such passages be made to advocate seeking such experience. The few days of waiting prior to Pentecost was not a paradigm for Christians to "wait and seek" spiritual experience, but rather, a one-time event when the disciples waited for a calendar date to arrive--the day of Pentecost (cf. Ac. 2:1). What was to happen on Pentecost, they did not know precisely. So, they were hardly seeking for a subjective spiritual experience.

Second, when Paul advised Christians to "eagerly desire spiritual gifts," he was not advocating more subjective experience *per se*, but rather, that in the life of the church there should be intelligible expressions to encourage and upbuild the congregation. For Paul, anything unintelligible could not be edifying. In fact, in 1 Corinthians 12-14, Paul is urging *less* subjective experience, not more!

Third, in the apostolic church, subjective spiritual experience was invariably unsolicited and unexpected. Nowhere do the apostles urge Christians to seek such experience. Rather, when such an experience occurred, it did so out of God's sovereign will and was always a surprise to the one who received it. In particular, spiritual gifts are not at the disposal of the individual. Instead, they are given sovereignly as God desires (1 Co. 12:11, 18, 28; Ro. 12:3; Ep. 4:7, 11; He. 2:4). Thus, the practice of some Christians to encourage subjective spiritual experience-

-to seek for transcendent states or the gift of speaking with tongues or some other subjective experience--is inappropriate. Especially when such urging is attached to the desire to "make God real," it demonstrates not genuine faith but the lack of it.

By contrast, the validity of spiritual reality is to be grounded in the objective testimony of the apostles about the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, not immediate, spiritual experience (Jn. 20:24-31). This is not to say, of course, that subjective spiritual experience should be rejected (1 Co. 14:39; 1 Th. 5:19-20). It is only to say that the New Testament does not urge Christians to seek for it. When and if it happens, let it be at God's initiative, not at the initiative of the individual.

Should subjective, spiritual experience be part of the daily life of the individual Christian?

The answer here is both "yes" and "no." In daily life, Christians are advised to "walk in the Spirit" and to be "led by the Spirit" (Ro. 8:4-17; Ga. 5:16-18), advice which calls for a Spirit-empowered life so as to live apart from sin. The Spirit can illumine believers' minds so that they may understand what God's will is (Col. 1:9; Ro. 12:1-2). The Spirit can confirm inwardly the purity of one's conscience (Ro. 9:1), and it can give daily support during difficult times (Phil. 1:19). The Spirit motivates believers to pray in conformity to God's will (Ro. 8:26-27; cf. Ga. 4:6; Ro. 8:15; Ep. 6:18). As to visions, transcendental states, revelations and the like, however, it should be observed that while these things happened in the life of the early church, they do not seem to be the common, daily experience. Mostly, they seem to occur on occasions when God intended to give special direction to his church. Thus, the visions of Peter and Cornelius preceded the opening of the gospel to the Gentiles (Ac. 10). Paul's vision of the man from Macedonia prevented him from turning east, and instead, headed him toward the west--a redirection that had implications for the entire course of world history (Ac. 16:6-10). Agabus' prophecy of the great famine in the reign of Claudius Caesar affected the entire early church (Ac. 11:27-30). When in a number of congregations there were utterances concerning Paul's upcoming imprisonment in Jerusalem (Ac. 20:22-24; 21:10-11), such prophecies enabled the church to be prepared for the loss of its single greatest missionary.

The assumption that Christians ought to expect subjective spiritual phenomena in daily life is at best questionable and possibly misleading or even dangerous. Especially since Paul's converts often came from spiritualist backgrounds in the mystery religions of the Greco-Roman world or others sorts of pagan mysticism, he called upon them to be cautious, recalling that when they

were pagans they were "influenced" and "led" by spiritual forces which were not from God (1 Co. 12:1-2). So, Christians should be equally cautious. With the increased emphasis on humanistic pantheism in our present culture, Christians must be certain that in their subjective experience the work of the Spirit is not confused with their own imaginations, emotions or psychological states of mind.

What controls are appropriate to regulate subjective spiritual experience?

Paul is quite clear that subjective personal experience is to be tested and controlled in the life of the church (1 Th. 5:19-22). Still, it is also apparent that he does not call for the abolition of subjective spiritual experience (1 Co. 14:39). Rather, he offers guidelines.

The most extended discussion in Paul's writings concern two spiritual gifts, speaking in tongues and prophecy. These gifts were especially problematic in the Corinthian church. The controls Paul offers with respect to public worship begin with the criterion of intelligibility. Is the experience intelligible to the whole congregation? If not, then he orders the person to refrain from public display (1 Co. 14:2-20). Some spiritual gifts (or to use Paul's metaphor, some "parts of the body") are not intended for public display but should be treated with special modesty (1 Co. 12:23b; 14:23). This comment, in the larger context, seems to refer to speaking in tongues. In public worship, speaking in tongues is forbidden without an accompanying interpretation, and even then, two or three incidents is more than enough (1 Co. 14:27-28). Furthermore, even intelligible spiritual utterances must be evaluated by the rest of the church (1 Co. 14:29). Spiritual utterances do not have independent authority. Thus, Christians ought to be very cautious about presuming to speak for God, remembering especially the rule for prophecy in the Torah (Dt. 18:20; cf. Ex. 20:7; Dt. 5:11).

Another criterion has to do with order. Is the experience disruptive? God requires order in public worship, and subjective experience is not a legitimate exception (1 Co. 14:33, 40). Two speakers should not be competing with each other for the attention of the group (1 Co. 14:27, 31). Spiritual experience, however intense, still should be kept under the conscious control of the one who has it (1 Co. 14:28, 32, 37-38).

Yet another criterion has to do with edification. Does the experience build up others (1 Co. 14:12)? This criterion points up the problem with public tongues-speaking, since such an experience edifies only the one experiencing it (1 Co. 14:4-5, 16-19). Of course, the issue of edification is also open to some variation of interpretation. What very well might seem to edify one person might do nothing at all for someone else.

To the Thessalonians, Paul adds the criterion of time (1 Th. 5:21). If something is genuinely from God, it will stand the test of time.

The apostle John adds a criterion of the test of one's confession of the historic Christian faith. If the "spirits" are to be tested, that is, if those claiming spiritual experience are to be evaluated and distinguished from false voices, then the basic confession of Christian faith is critical (1 Jn. 4:1-3; 2 Jn. 7). Those who do not adhere to the historic Christian faith, as handed down by the apostles, have the spirit of falsehood (1 Jn. 4:5-6; 2 Jn. 9-10; 3 Jn. 9; cf. 2 Th. 2:1-2, 15; 1 Co. 12:3).

Finally, there is the criterion of spiritual maturity. Subjective spiritual experience does not equate to spiritual maturity. In fact, the Corinthians, who were very active in subjective spiritual experience (1 Co. 1:7), were particularly immature in their spiritual lives (1 Co. 3:1). Paul bluntly said that their public worship did more harm than good (1 Co. 11:17). Thus, subjective spiritual experience is not the same as spiritual maturity. In the case of the Corinthians, at least, subjective spiritual experience went hand in hand with spiritual immaturity.

What are the dangers of subjectivism?

Those who urge subjective spiritual experience should be aware of the dangers associated with it. One danger is the tendency to universalize a subjective experience. It is not uncommon for a person to try to reproduce in others the same subjective experience he or she may have had. Subjective spiritual experience cannot be universalized for the Christian family. In reference to one of his own subjective spiritual experiences, Paul stated that he was not even allowed to fully describe it to others (2 Co. 12:4).

Another tendency is to minimize or ignore objective controls for spiritual experience. Biblical instructions are sometimes ignored and at others times fraught with misinterpretation in the attempt to buttress the validity of subjective experience. After all, when one believes he/she hears from the Lord intuitively and immediately, the Bible is easily set aside. Those who disagree with someone's subjective experience end up appearing to argue with God if they are skeptical. When subjective experience becomes central, such experience, rather than Holy Scripture, becomes authoritative in the church, and the church slides into heresy.

Yet another tendency is toward divisiveness in the church. This polarization was precisely the problem in Corinth (1 Co. 1:11-12; 3:3-4; 12:15-27). Congregations easily can be divided into the "haves" and the "have nots," and subjective spiritual experience then is used as a test for spirituality. Those having subjective experiences tend to publicize them, and they easily leave the impression that believers not having such experiences are sub-Christian or at least low on the

spiritual thermometer.

Theologically, there are also dangers. An emphasis on subjective experience often minimizes the centrality of the cross and resurrection of Jesus. The gospel of the cross and resurrection, which is an objective historical event and the very center of Christian theology, is pushed to the background in view of an aggressive call for subjective experience (1 Co. 1:23; 2:2; 15:3-4). The priority of God the Father can be replaced by a priority of the Spirit. When this happens, the Spirit too easily becomes detached from the nature of God the Father, which was most fully displayed in the incarnation of Christ.

The issue of personality, also, seems to be a factor. Subjective experience seems to appeal to certain personality types and/or certain temperaments. Some people tend to think more cognitively, others more emotively. Because this is so, subjective spiritual experience should probably be assessed in relationship to the personality type of the person who has it.[23] The one who already tends toward the subjective may more easily confuse psychological states of mind and emotional fluctuations with the work of the Holy Spirit. In fairness, of course, the person who is more objective might tend to be overly negative toward subjective experience.

The final danger is one which Paul dealt with extensively in 2 Corinthians 10-13. This danger is the tendency of those with subjective experience to exhibit spiritual pride and the image of spiritual superiority and authority. In Corinth, there arose such a group which actively resisted Paul. They belittled him (2 Co. 10:1, 10) and commended themselves (2 Co. 10:12, 18). They even challenged Paul to show proof that God was speaking through him (2 Co. 13:3). The members of this group, who Paul sarcastically calls "super-apostles" (2 Co. 11:5; 12:11), attempted to elevate themselves to the status of church leaders (2 Co. 11:12). Paul, however, labels them as false apostles masquerading as spiritual authorities (2 Co. 11:13-15). It is apparent from the whole context of 2 Corinthians 10-13 that one of the primary characteristics of these people was subjective spiritual experience which led them to boast of their spirituality (2 Co. 10:12, 18; 11:18-21). In response, Paul says the only thing worth boasting about

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[23]The New Testament does not discuss directly the criterion of personality types, but according to some interpreters Paul might be alluding to such a thing in his call for silence by the women in the Corinthian church (1 Co. 14:34-35). Women were not favored with the education of their male counterparts, and furthermore, it was a common cultural standard that women did not speak in public meetings, either in Jewish or Greek societies. Of course, Paul did, in fact, allow women to participate in public worship (1 Co. 11:2-16). On the other hand, some scholars argue, on the basis of textual variants, that these verses are an interpolation and are not genuinely Pauline, cf. G. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians (NICNT)* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987) 699-700. However, even if the text is genuinely Pauline, the logic of the statements in the context of the discussion of spiritual gifts is highly debatable. The exact meaning of this passage is beset with difficulties, both textual and exegetical.

is God's redemptive work through Christ and our own human weakness (2 Co. 10:17; 11:16-18, 21b, 30; 12:1, 5-6, 10-13).

In the end, then, subjective spiritual experience should be regarded as essentially private and not intended for public display. It has enough dangers associated with it to call for extreme caution and a subdued emphasis.

Counterfeits, Claims and Cautions

That there will be counterfeits and false claims to spiritual experience should come as no great surprise. In the face of Moses' miracles, the Egyptian magicians also applied their secret arts (cf. Ex. 7:22; 8:7; 2 Ti. 3:8). Non-Christian exorcists are described alongside the ministry of Paul (Ac. 19:13-16). Paul contended with some who boasted apostolic equality with him, and in fact, who belittled his own spiritual contributions as meager and weak (2 Co. 11:12-15; 12:11-12). Simon, the sorcerer, tried to bribe Peter for supernatural power (Ac. 8:9-11, 18-23). In the post-apostolic church, the problem of itinerant prophets and apostles was serious enough that careful restrictions were drawn up to prevent widespread deception. If anyone making such a claim stayed longer than two days, he was declared to be a false prophet. If he asked for money, he was declared to be a false prophet. If his lifestyle contradicted the "ways of the Lord," he was to be rejected, regardless of what he might have said "in the Spirit."[24]

In contemporary Christian life, there are also counterfeits and false claims. Earlier in this century, among the Pentecostals, a movement called the "Latter Rain" made claims for miracles of gold dental fillings, oil mysteriously appearing on the hands, stigmata, and a whole variety of transcendental experiences. A decade ago, Mike Warnke, a Christian humorist who claimed to have been heavily involved in Satan-worship before his conversion, finally admitted that much of what he had said about his past was simply not true. Some years earlier, John Todd made similar fraudulent claims which were later exposed. In 1994, Gerald Derstine of Gospel Crusade, Inc. raised $2.8 million with accounts of miracles, mass conversions and martyrdoms among the Muslims in Palestine--all of which were bogus.[25] The healing miracles of Jim Jones, who became famous for leading a mass suicide in Guyana, were also bogus and often staged with the body parts of chickens.[26] Virtually every year, some Christian leader capitalizes on the sensationalism of spiritual experience, usually as an avenue to power or money. Their sincerity notwithstanding, good Christians can be fooled.

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[24]Didache 11.

[25]J. Miles, "Leaders Falsified Ministry Reports," *CT* (Sept. 11, 1995) 64, 66.

[26]M. Kilduff and R. Javers, *The Suicide Cult* (New York: Bantam, 1978) 65-67.

Besides the charlatans whose fraudulence has been verified, there are other leaders whose claims to spiritual experience are more difficult to assess. Excitement over the "Kansas City Prophets" in the Vineyard Movement has now been replaced with the "Toronto Blessing," with reports of holy laughter, remarkable healings, and sensational experiences.[27] The line between mysticism, psychic phenomena, transcendent emotionalism and the genuine work of the Holy Spirit is sometimes blurred. Advocates of the "Prosperity Gospel Movement," following leaders such as Kenneth Hagin and Kenneth Coplin, try to control the events of history (and especially wealth) by "*rhema* words" of faith.[28] On television, Benny Hinn appears to spiritually blow people over with his miraculous breath. Claims for "words of knowledge,"[29] "inner healing"[30] and "signs and wonders" abound. *Deja vu*, the common human illusion of having already experienced something that is actually being experienced for the first time, and premonitions, the sensation that one knows what will happen in the future, can easily be mistaken for genuine spiritual experience given by the Holy Spirit. Flurries of articles and books, both pro and con, attend these claims. Hank Hanegraaff, head of Christian Research Institute, and John MacArthur, pastor and well-known radio speaker, warn the faithful against the dangers of such subjective and, in their view, chaotic religious experience. Pat Robertson, host of *The 700 Club*, and David Mainse, host of *100 Huntley Street* (Canada), embrace such experience as a genuine move of God.

The upside of such spiritual movements is that they often bring a renewed dedication to missions work, a deeper commitment toward God and the spiritual disciplines of prayer and good works, and an enthusiasm for living the Christian life in glory to God. The downside of such movements is that they can lead to superficiality, uncritical subjectivism and spiritual intimidation. Sometimes it is a moot question as to which weighs heaviest, the attractions or the detractions. Two things are certain. First, no one can put God in a box. The Spirit blows where he wills, and he cannot be ordered by conventional thinking (Jn. 3:8). The Holy

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[27]J. Beverley, "Toronto's Mixed Blessing," *CT* (Sept. 11, 1995) 22-27.

[28]The "*rhema* word" is believed to be a verbalized positive confession of what one believes will happen by faith. *Rhema* is the Greek word for "what is said," and those in the Postive Confession Movement have developed a theology around this word which aims at controlling events.

[29]The expression "word of knowledge" comes from Paul's listing of spiritual gifts in 1 Co. 12:8, the only place in Scripture where it is mentioned. Though Paul does not define it, some have taken this spiritual gift to mean that God supernaturally endows private knowledge about other people. The more classical understanding of this phrase is that it refers to inspired teaching or special insight into the meaning of Scripture, cf. G. Fee, *God's Empowering Presence* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994) 167.

[30]Inner healing is usually described as the healing of negative memories, healing of the pain of some tragic experience, such as, child abuse or sexual abuse, healing of destructive emotional states of mind, such as depression, and similar internal problems.

Spirit is Someone, not Something--he is not an impersonal force, but the Spirit of Christ himself. As the third Person in the Trinity, the Spirit cannot be controlled from the outside. Second, no one can claim spiritual experience without accountability. Everywhere in Scripture, from the Old to the New Testaments, the testimony is consistent that subjective spiritual experience does not stand on its own. It must always be tested, and those who experience it are always accountable.

Spiritual Accountability

Spiritual accountability should be maintained in at least three areas: the Bible, the Universal Church, and the local congregation. The Word of God contained in the Holy Scriptures is the first and most important resource for accountability. The controls offered concerning subjective religious experience (1 and 2 Corinthians), the warnings in the prophets concerning false prophecy (especially Jeremiah and Ezekiel), and the Christian theological center of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus (clearly outlined in the gospels) must be humbly addressed. Any phenomenon which reduces the cross and resurrection of Jesus to secondary status, either implicitly or explicitly, is a distortion. The Word of God is the judge of all spiritual experience, not vice versa. All Christians should be aware that there is an ebb and flow to spiritual experience, even in the sacred history of the Bible.

Second, the history and tradition of the Christian church is also important. A reoccurring viewpoint among many who urge spiritual renewal is a general negativism toward the Christian church which stretches backward through the centuries. One must not assume that real spiritual experience started only with whatever latest phenomenon is being manifested. Paul asked the Corinthians, "Did the Word of God originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached?" The testimony of the whole church, that which has been at all times and in all places believed, is important. Equally important is it to hear the voices of contemporary wisdom in the church from Christian circles that are outside one's own particular tradition. Christ is the Lord of the church--the whole church! He is not merely Lord of our unique denominational expressions of it.

Finally, Christians are accountable to their local congregation, both the leaders and the people as a whole. If Paul urges believers to "judge" spiritual experience, then it follows that such evaluation must come within a local context. Pastors as well as others who are spiritually mature in the local congregation are important resources for accountability. Lacking this accountability, spiritual experience is apt to become entirely subjective and self-serving. Worse, it tends toward disunity and fragmentation.

Jonathan Edwards and the Great Awakening

In 1734, the Puritans in Northhampton, Massachusetts, under the preaching of Jonathan Edwards, experienced a deep spiritual renewal now called The Great Awakening. It was attended by deep spiritual experience not unlike what happens today in many circles--repentant weeping with sorrow and distress, intense expressions of joy and love, and a pronounced liveliness to the worship services. Edwards, who was the initial catalyst for the revival, observed the process of this renewal during the several years that it spread throughout New England. While never disclaiming the legitimacy of this move of God, he still offered some cogent comments about such renewal movements in his works *Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God* (1741), *Thoughts on the Revival in New England* (1742), *Treatise on the Religious Affections* (1744), and *Treatise on the Affections* (1746).

There are five biblical marks of a genuine revival, Edwards wrote. It exalts Jesus Christ; it attacks the powers of darkness; it exalts the Holy Scriptures; it lifts up sound doctrine; and it promotes love to God and man. Edwards was keenly aware of the dangers of extremism, however, especially after a parishioner believed he heard a persistent voice telling him to cut his throat--which he did! He also wrote that one of the most prevalent dangers was spiritual pride which aims at censuring others who do not measure up to their standards of spiritual experience. Again, he warned, "'Tis by the mixture of counterfeit religion with true, not discerned and distinguished, that the devil has had his greatest advantage against the cause and kingdom of Christ." Finally, he warned that the devil, failing to succeed in lulling the church to sleep, will seek to drive them to excess and extravagance. "One truly zealous person...may do more...to hinder the work, than a hundred great, and strong, and open opposers."[31]

So, What Does It Mean to be "Spiritual"?

All but two of the appearances of the word *pneumatikos* (= spiritual) occur in the Pauline correspondence.[32] Paul uses the word "spiritual" to describe the charismata (Ro. 1:11; 1 Co. 12:1; 14:1), certain forms of Christian music (Ep. 5:19; Col. 3:16), the typological interpretation of Old Testament passages (1 Co. 10:3-4), and the difference between earthly existence and the resurrection at the end (1 Co. 15:44-49). He uses the same word to describe the blessings which believers have received in the redemptive work of Christ (Ro. 15:27; 1 Co. 9:11; Ep. 1:3). He uses it to describe the character of evil which originates from the

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[31]R. Lovelace, "The Surprising Works of God," *CT* (Sept. 11, 1995) 28-32.

[32]The two exceptions, both in 1 Pe. 2:5, are used in a different way than in Paul.

Christians' arch enemy (Ep. 6:12). He uses it to describe the Torah, which in turn was inspired by the Spirit (Ro. 7:14). As one can easily see, the term *pneumatikos* has a rich variety of nuances. All of them, however, seem to point to things which derive their existence or meaning from the Holy Spirit.

Of special interest is the cluster of usages where Paul speaks of Christians as being "Spirit-persons" or "spiritual." His prayer for the Colossian believers is that they would be filled with the knowledge of God's will through the wisdom and understanding given by the Spirit (Col. 1:9). To the Galatians he writes that the ministry of restoring a brother or sister who has fallen into sin belongs to those who are spiritual (Ga. 6:1). To the Corinthians, Paul contrasts human wisdom with the things which the Spirit teaches (1 Co. 2:12-16). The believer has been endued with the mind of Christ through the Holy Spirit, enabling him or her to exercise discernment and make critical judgments. Such wisdom and discernment are not automatic, however. Even the Corinthians, who were also filled with the Holy Spirit and who did not "lack any spiritual gift," were described as carnal and not spiritual (1 Co. 3:1) primarily because of their disunity and contentions. Finally, Paul says that if any believer "thinks himself to be a spiritual person," he must acknowledge that the teaching concerning the charismata is the command of the Lord (1 Co. 14:37-38).

This cluster of usages clearly suggests that true spirituality has to do with Christian maturity. If Paul calls upon "those who are spiritual" to restore erring Christians, he does so immediately after describing what it means to live by the Spirit (Ga. 5:13-18) and to demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit (Ga. 5:22-26). If he prays that the Colossians will be filled with all spiritual wisdom and understanding, his prayer is to the end that they may "please him [God] in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, [and] growing in the knowledge of God" (Col. 1:10ff.). If he rebukes the jealousy and quarreling among the Corinthians as worldly and the antithesis of being spiritual, then he obviously means that the sign of true spirituality is living out the graces of Christian character within a harmonious community of faith. Furthermore, those who claim spirituality must also be in submission to the apostle's instructions about spiritual gifts, or they are to be discounted (1 Co. 14:37-38). Self-appointed authorities are to be ignored.

If true spirituality is the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of believers to bring them to maturity, then there are a considerable number of passages which bear upon the subject. Maturity, at least in Christian terms, is Christ-likeness (Ep. 4:13). It is characterized by Christian unity, Christian stability, discernment, love, and a concern for the building up of the church (Ep. 4:14-16). High on the list of character traits is the fruit of the Spirit (Ga. 5:22-23). The mature Christian is one who recognizes the limitations of earthly life yet presses on toward the call of God

to a life beyond this life (Phil. 3:7-16). The mature Christian is one who lives by the mind of Christ (1 Co. 2:6-16; Phil. 2:1-5). This kind of maturity may or may not include subjective spiritual experience, but in any case, subjective spiritual experience is not the unmistakable sign of true spirituality. Rather, walking as Jesus walked is the sign of true spirituality (1 Jn. 2:6).

Any discussion of Christian maturity must also include the category of good works. Since good works are precisely what believers were created in Christ Jesus to do (Ep. 2:10; 4:12), it is entirely to be expected that the apostles would urge Christians to be people "eager to do good deeds" (Ro. 2:7; Col. 1:10; 2 Th. 2:16-17; Tit. 2:14; cf. 1 Ti. 2:10; 5:10, 25; 6:18; He. 10:24; Ja. 2:14-26; 3:13; 1 Pe. 2:12). So, true spirituality cannot be separated from Christian maturity. The spiritual person is the one who has gone far in the transforming process of becoming more and more like Jesus Christ (2 Co. 3:17-18).

Prayer and Scripture

One of the hallmark's of evangelical Christianity is its emphasis on piety and personal devotion to God. Such emphasis has given rise to a vocabulary which, though not derived strictly from the Bible, nevertheless is associated with this particular expression of spirituality. Modern words and expressions are "quiet time," "prayer life," "personal devotion," and so forth. While many things characterize this facet of spirituality, the most obvious is that it is informal rather than formal.

The earliest roots of this kind of piety go back to the monastic movements which emphasized meditation upon Christ, and often enough, asceticism and withdrawal from society at large. Modern approaches to devotional life often emphasize the same things, such as, the act of isolating oneself from the world and the effort toward personal holiness. In the 15th and 16th centuries, movements such as the *Brethren of the Common Life* focused on private devotion to Christ, particularly his passion, and a life of obedience, simplicity and holiness. The best-known writer of the group, Thomas a Kempis, produced more than thirty works, the most popular being his *The Imitation of Christ*, which was widely read among Roman Catholics and Protestants alike. Somewhat later, in the Reformation and Post-Reformation periods, other works became equally popular, notably John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. American Puritanism, Wesley's Methodism, 19th century evangelicalism, the American holiness movement, and its stepchild, Pentecostalism, were all characterized by devout pietism.

Pietism, with its emphasis on the practicalities of the Christian life, has reoccurred within Christian history at various times. Pietists are people of the

heart for whom Christian living is the fundamental concern. The focus for this spirituality is the Bible and private prayer. Pietists tend to emphasize holy living and the earnest effort to follow God's ways. In general, they oppose what they regard as coldness and sterility in established church forms and practices. The dangers of pietism are that it can lead to inappropriate subjectivism, emotionalism, anti-intellectualism, separatism and legalism. It tends to dismiss the history and traditions of Christianity as unworthy. The strengths of pietism, on the other hand, are that it can be a powerful source for renewal in the church. It points to the indispensability of Scripture and personal devotion to God for the Christian life, it encourages lay people in the work of Christian ministry, it stimulates concern for missions, and it urges individual believers to find intimate fellowship with God.[33]

Biblical personalities are frequently described in terms which are very compatible with pietistic concerns. Enoch "walked with God" (Ge. 5:24) as did Noah (Ge. 6:9). Abraham was "God's friend" (2 Chr. 20:7; Is. 41:8-9; Ja. 2:23), and Moses conversed with God "face to face" (Ex. 33:11). The psalms of David speak of arising before sunrise to praise the Lord (Ps. 57:8; 108:1-2). Anna, a devout widow, never even left the temple, but continually worshiped night and day (Lk. 2:37). References to personal prayer in the New Testament are many. The pietistic lives of these biblical people are held up as models for devotion to God which was personal and relational. This, then, is the area we wish to explore.

Piety in Form and Relationship

Worship and devotional life exhibits a two-fold character. There is a formal side to worship and devotion in both the Old and New Testaments, but equally important, there is a devout fellowship which individuals cultivated with God on a daily basis in the midst of the regular affairs of life. The formal (ritualistic) aspect of devotion included *sacred places* (tent of meeting, temple, synagogue, house churches), *sacred times* (religious festivals, sabbaths, covenant renewal ceremonies, the Lord's day), and *sacred acts* (circumcision, purification, offerings, baptism, eucharist). The place of formal worship and devotion was central, and particularly in the Old Testament, it was extensively described and regulated. The liturgies of the Christian tradition derive largely from patterns set within the Jewish worship in temple and synagogue. These patterns go back to Moses, David and Ezra. Formal worship symbolized the reality of spiritual communion with

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[33]The following articles are helpful in defining pietism and tracing its influence in Christian history: M. Knoll, "Pietism,"; P. Davids, "Devotio Moderna," *EDT* (1984) 855-858; D. Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979) II.36-39; J. Hunter, "Moral Asceticism," *Evangelicalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1987) 56-75.

God, and it provided a format for a unified and corporate expression of faith, foreshadowing the eschatological future when the limitations on communion between God and humans will cease.

Informal (relational) devotion and worship was equally important. This devout personal relationship of an individual with God is possible apart from the structures of formal worship, particularly in prayer and private meditation upon Scripture. This is not to say, of course, that formal worship is unnecessary. Both formal and informal expressions are encouraged, for both expressions offer ranges of spiritual experience that are unique. Still, both expressions have dangers, too. One of the great spiritual problems of Israel, to which the prophets gave much attention, was the tendency for outward observances to replace the inward reality of a living faith. The eighth century prophets in Israel, for instance, sharply rebuked the people for externalism without true piety (cf. Am. 4:4-5; 5:4-6, 21-23; Ho. 4:1, 5-9; 6:6). The same message was issued to the southern nation of Judah (Mic. 6:6-8; Is. 1:10-17). Even after the northern nation had succumbed to the Assyrian invasion, Judah still persisted in the formalism of temple worship without true personal piety (Je. 7:1-29; Zep. 3:1-4). Of course, the pendulum could swing the other way, also, where proper formal worship was held in contempt, as it was in the post-exilic community (Mal. 1:6-14). When formal worship and personal piety are not joined, the one without the other leads to distortion (Mal. 2:11-16). In the New Testament, the same insidious lack of true piety seemed to sap the character of the churches in Ephesus (Re. 2:4-5), Sardis (Re. 3:1-3) and Laodecia (Re. 3:15-18).

In the Old Testament, the character of true piety is especially expressed in three terms. These are *the fear of God*, that is, reverence and sober awareness of God (cf., Ps. 111:10; Pro. 1:7; Ecc. 12:13), *faith in God*, that is, belief in his existence and sovereign rule over the universe and human history (cf., Ge. 15:6; Ps. 14:1a; 24:1; 25:1-3; 53:1a), and *love for God*, that is, devotion to and dependence upon him expressed in obedience (cf., Dt. 6:5; 7:9; Jos. 22:5; 23:11; Ps. 42:1-2). In the New Testament, the primary Christian graces are faith, hope and love (cf. Col. 1:3-5; 1 Co. 13:13; 1 Th. 1:3). Genuine piety, of course, cannot be restricted to one's private life; it must also be expressed in concrete actions toward others (Ja. 1:27; 1 Jn. 3:17; 4:20-21). At the same time, the truly devout believer will nourish a personal relationship with God in the two outstanding devotional practices of the people of faith, that is, communion with God through the Scriptures and prayer (2 Ti. 3:15; 1 Th. 5:17-18; Ac. 10:2, 30-31, 34-35).

Prayer in the Devotional Life of the Old Testament

There is no formal doctrine of prayer in the Old Testament which outlines the

manner, occasion and content of communication with God. Rather, prayer is most often a spontaneous expression of implicit trust in Yahweh within the midst of life circumstances. There is, however, a marked contrast between the prayers of God's people and the prayers of the pagans, aside from the fact that each group was praying to a different deity.[34] The typical elements in pagan prayer are conspicuously absent in the Old Testament. These pagan elements consisted of the magical use of the name of the gods and goddesses and a frequent repetition of prayer phrases. Also, pagan priests prescribed the specific manner and voice tone to use, such as murmuring or whispering. Radical actions were taken, such as the self-infliction of wounds (cf. 1 Kg. 18:26-29), in order to attract the attention of the gods. Imitative magic, especially among the fertility cults, was aimed at inducing the gods and goddesses to act favorably toward the suppliants. All these postures were efforts to manipulate the deities by placating them or inciting them to favorable action. Furthermore, the deities were associated with special places (shrines, high places) and three-dimensional artistic representations (idols). The worshipers sometimes engaged in self-induced ecstasy, either by psychological manipulation or narcotics, and these trances were intended to convey the worshiper into a transcendental state.

The prayers of the people of faith in the Old Testament were strikingly different. Perhaps the foremost characteristic of prayer in the Old Testament was its natural spontaneity. Prayers were offered in the midst of personal experiences, and they take the form of *intercession for others* (Ge. 20-17-18; Ex. 32:30-32; 1 Kg. 8:27-30; 2 Kg. 19:14-19), *petition for self* (Ge. 24:12-14; 1 Kg. 19:14-19; Ja. 5:17-18), *confession of sin* (Ps. 32:1-5; 51:1-12; Da. 9:4-19), *complaint* (Ex. 17:4; Nu. 11:10-15; Job 19:6-7; Je. 20:7-10), and *thanksgiving* (Ps. 136; 75:1; 1 Chr. 16:4; 23:28, 30; Ne. 12:31-40). There were no restrictions on prayer in terms of posture, structure, length or occasion. Hannah prayed silently (1 Sa. 1:9-13), Elijah prayed while prone and walking back and forth (2 Kg. 4:32-35), Daniel prayed kneeling (Da. 6:10), Hezekiah prayed while in bed (2 Kg. 20:1-3; Is. 38:2), and David prayed while lying on the ground (2 Sa. 12:15-16). On one occasion, Daniel prayed for twenty-one days for a single request (Da. 10:2, 10-14), while Elijah's majestic prayer was only a handful of words (1 Kg. 18:36-37). Many of David's prayers were carefully composed poems (2 Sa. 22; 1 Chr. 29:10-13), and of course, about half of the psalms are connected with his name. On the other hand, the prayer of the Israelites on the banks of the Red Sea was a short, terrified call for help (Ex. 14:10).

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[34]W. Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961) I.173-174; L. Wood, *The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976) 90-112.

The character of prayer in the Old Testament was grounded in the recognition of God in the midst of the entire fabric of life. Prayers in the form of intercession and petition are often directly related to historical events. Such prayers demonstrate awareness of God's sovereignty and purpose. They are not attempts to manipulate God according to human desires. Rather, they are expressions of faith in and cooperation with God's sovereign will. God answers prayer, but not unconditionally. There were even occasions when prayer was not appropriate (Je. 7:16; 11:14; 14:11-12; 15:1). There were also times when intercessions failed (Ge. 18:22-33; Ex. 32:30-35; 2 Sa. 12:15-18). Of course, there were many times when God answered petitions with a divine, "Yes."

The most extensive examples of Old Testament prayers are in the Psalms. Many, if not most of them, came to be used in liturgical worship, as is implied by the fact that they were collected. The various notations for choirmaster and musical score also suggest as much. At the same time, over ninety of the psalms are written in the first person, and this observation, in turn, suggests that the stimulus for their composition is individual and personal.[35] It is, in fact, this personal dimension that has made the psalms so popular for the believer's devotional life. Almost anyone can find identify with the psalmist's particular dilemma and allow the words of the psalm to intercede for him/her. Many of the prayers in the psalms can be prayed by the modern individual (though some cautions should be added here, especially with regard to the imprecatory psalms), and some Christians have even found it helpful to retain the basic structure of a psalm while rephrasing its content to express personal needs and thanksgivings (e.g., Ps. 136). The psalms include prayers calling for pardon (51), communion (63), justice (10, 13), protection (3, 7, 16), healing (6), and vindication (17, 109). They also contain vibrant expressions of confidence in God (5), praise (8, 9), and the joy of forgiveness (32).

Holy Scripture in the Devotional Life of the Old Testament

The relationship of the Old Testament believer to Scripture must be assessed progressively in accordance with the development of Old Testament literature. In the earliest periods, of course, there was no literature. God communicated directly

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[35]One of the great scholarly controversies regarding the psalms is how to identify the individual suppliant. For an extensive treatment of this issue, see S. Croft, *The Identity of the Individual in the Psalms* (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1987). It is noteworthy to observe that even in psalms written in the first person, the superscriptions are in the third person, indicating that such notations may not have been attached to the psalms when they were first composed, cf. D. Kidner, *Psalms 1-72* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1973) 16-17, 33.

with the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob at special intervals in their lives. Their devotion and faithfulness to God revolved around the covenant promises God had made to them as well as his ethical mandates, such as, "I am El Shaddai; walk before me and be blameless" (Ge. 17:1). Not until the giving of the Torah at Mt. Sinai was there any extensive collection of written Scriptures.[36] The inspiration to write and collect the documents of the Hebrew Bible was, in the words of the author of Hebrews, "at many times and in various ways" (He. 1:1). As the collection of sacred writings increased, so did the profound respect of devout believers toward such Scriptures. Still, the ancient people of faith did not have personal access to such writings. They depended upon teaching priests and Levites who would orally read and interpret the Scriptures on the high holy days in Israel's religious calendar (cf. Dt. 5; 17:9-11; 33:10; 2 Chr. 17:7-9; 35:3; Ne. 8:7-8).[37] As an added measure, the people were advised to orally transmit such teachings to their children and to display symbols (or small portions) of these Scriptures in phylacteries and mezuzahs (Dt. 6:4-8; 11:18-21; Ex. 13:9, 16).[38] The king, as the sovereign of the land, was to keep a Torah scroll beside his throne at all times for ready reference (Dt. 17:18-20). However, we also know that there were long periods when substantial sections of Torah were neglected and even misplaced by such leaders (cf. 2 Kg. 22:8-13//2 Chr. 34:14-21).

Given such a system, the modern practice of devotional Bible reading was unknown among the ancient people of faith. Their familiarity with Holy Scripture was dependent upon the teaching of others. Of course, this did not mean that they were excluded from reflection and meditation upon the laws, events and wisdom recorded in Scripture. The psalms are full of such reflections and meditations, and Psalm 119 is the epitome of devotion to God's Word. However, such meditation and reflection would necessarily have been based upon memory rather than

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[36]Early written sources existed which antedate the canonical writings, such as the various *toledot* in Genesis (Ge. 5:1, etc.) or other resources which were incorporated into the canonical writings (cf. Ex. 24:7; Nu. 21:14). However, how widely these were known or available is impossible to determine. It seems unlikely that they would have been available to the average person.

[37]One of the sharp rebukes of the prophets toward the priests was concerning their lack of diligence in their teaching office (cf. Ho. 4:4-10; Mic. 3:11; Zep. 3:4; Je. 2:8; 18:18; Eze. 7:26).

[38]Of course, it is debatable whether such commands were to be taken figuratively (as in Pro. 6:20-21) or literally. Some scholars believe that the commandment was only a metaphor, though later in Israelite history it became a literal practice, cf. J. Thompson, *Deuteronomy: An Introduction & Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1974) 123. Others argue for a literal application, and this interpretation is made plausible by the archaeological discovery of amulets with inscriptions of Hebrew Scriptures upon them, cf. M. Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1-11 [AB]* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1991) 341-343.

personal reading. Of course, ancient societies were adept at preserving traditions orally, and exact memorization, especially the memorization of poetic literature, was common. As such, an individual's devotional use of Holy Scripture was confined to meditative reflection rather than first hand reading, such as we might practice today. Daily interaction with the Scriptures, as were extolled in passages such as Joshua 1:8; Psalms 1:1-3; 119:97, is to be understood in this light.

There is irony in comparing such ancient use of Scripture with the modern. In ancient times, the person of faith had very limited access to Holy Scripture. Today, we have immediate access in a variety of translations, both written versions and oral recordings, not to mention an unending stream of commentaries. Yet, even without the conveniences that we take for granted, the ancient person was able to effectively meditate upon God's precepts, decrees, laws, statutes and promises (Ps. 119:15, 23, 48, 78, 99, 148).

Legalism Becomes Piety in the Intertestamental Period

After the exile, the religious life of the Jews underwent considerable adjustment. The exile put the faith of Israel into a state of profound emergency. Their land, capital, temple, monarchy and political freedom were gone. The prophets had warned that catastrophe was the inevitable outcome of the Deuteronomic curses if the nation did not correct its course. They were proved absolutely correct in the history that followed. In fact, it was the prophets who prevented Israel's faith from collapsing altogether. They explained to the remnant that the destruction of their homeland was not due to Yahweh's weakness, but rather, to the nation's sin. Yahweh was only being true to himself and his word when he allowed the pagan nations to invade Israel and Judah. Thus, when the remnant returned from exile, they did so with the sober knowledge that their obedience to Torah was not optional, but necessary. The reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah, augmented by the prophets Zechariah and Haggai, spurred them on to even more conscientious piety.

The institutional side of Israel's religion also passed through some significant changes. While temple worship was restored, the synagogues, which apparently began developing in the land of captivity, were not relinquished. In fact, not only were they perpetuated by those Jews who did not return to the homeland, new synagogues were erected in the homeland itself. The threat of Hellenization loomed large, and in attempting to avoid the inroads of pagan culture and religion, many Jews increasingly forced their relationship to God into a rigid mold of externalism. Righteousness in rabbinic Judaism became completely identified with conformity to Torah and its scribal interpretations (the oral law). The goal of obedience was to earn merit so as to ensure one's part in God's kingdom,

especially through works of charity and the religious disciplines of prayer and fasting.

In addition to the compulsory synagogue service, worship became a daily regimen of several devotional activities. These consisted of reciting the *Shema* each morning and evening (a combination of Dt. 6:4-9; 11:13-21; Nu. 15:37-41). Prayer was offered three times daily, the morning *Tephilla* (immediately following the recitation of the *Shema*), the afternoon prayer at about 3:00 P.M (while the evening sacrifice was being offered at the temple), and a prayer at dusk (again following the recitation of the *Shema*). In addition, graces were said before and after each meal. If one wished to addressed Yahweh outside the formal daily prayers, he was recommended to do so in the synagogue.

All the above were expected of male Jews. Women, as well as other social castes, such as slaves, were increasingly left out of meaningful worship and devotion. According to Rabbi Juda ben Elai, "One must utter three doxologies every day: Praise God that he did not create me a heathen. Praise God that he did not create me a woman. Praise God that he did not create me an illiterate person." Women could only pray, "Praise God that he created me." Women were not counted as members of the synagogue congregation, and they were required to sit apart from men in silence during the service. They were not allowed to study the Scriptures, and if a man wished to study Scripture, he was supposed to withdraw from his wife.

Form Without Relationship

By the time of Jesus, the spontaneity of Old Testament prayer and devotion was all but gone. Formalism and externalism were predominant. Prayer was an habitual discipline, but not a relationship with God. In fact, the more formality grew, the more distant God appeared to become. Religious devotion became a means to earn merit with God, not a means of maintaining a relationship with God.

Thus, it comes as no surprise that in the teachings of Jesus the distortion of form without relationship become an important subject in his teaching. In the tradition of the eighth century prophets, Jesus called the Jewish community to a deep relationship with God. He condemned their pious externalism and manipulation of the Scriptures. Probably the harshest words of Jesus were to the scribes and Pharisees (and most scribes were Pharisees), because they so severely distorted the faith of the Old Testament. Their religion epitomized everything that was the opposite of true piety. In the chapter of the seven woes (Matthew 23), Jesus denounced the formalism and pride of Judaism in blistering terms. He indicted the scribes and Pharisees for demanding unreasonable religious duties

(23:1-4), for replacing simple devotion in prayer and Scripture with prideful externalism (23:5-7), and for using the office of leadership for self-aggrandizement rather than service (23:8-12). In scathing terms he rebuked them for turning the hearts of the people away from a genuine relationship with God (23:13-15). He accused them of dishonesty (23:16-22), technical religion that ignored true piety (23:23-24), and external holiness in the midst of inward corruption (23:25-28). He thundered against their glorification of past religion while murdering God's present messengers (23:29-32). Finally, he concluded that in their religion they had rejected the message of God (23:33-39).

In the Sermon on the Mount, often considered the "charter" of the kingdom of God, Jesus sternly warned his disciples against the rabbinic religion of achievement (Mt. 5:20). He especially called attention to the emptiness of religion without relationship. He said that charity should be practiced without ostentation (Mt. 6:1-4), while devotion should be private and personal, not a matter for show (Mt. 6:16-18).

Finally, Jesus challenged his followers to a personal relational with God, their Father. He told them to boldly seek, ask and knock (Mt. 7:7-12). He emphasized that the true work which God requires is not "works," *per se*, but personal faith (Jn. 6:28-29). Righteous works flow out of faith, but they are not the same as faith. He indicted the religious leaders for their lack of knowledge of God (Jn. 8:19, 54-55), and in his high priestly prayer, he described eternal life in terms of knowing God in an intimate, personal way (Jn. 17:3, 6, 24-25).

Jesus' Teachings on Prayer

Many of Jesus' teachings about prayer and devotional life were given against the background of the legalistic piety which was prevalent in Jewry during his lifetime. Not only did Jesus chastise the scribes and Pharisees for their failure to know God, he warned against bad praying, often using the Pharisees as a foil for his teachings.

In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus called attention to two kinds of distorted praying (Mt. 6:5-8). First, he warned against hypocritical praying. The practice of the Pharisees was to simply be "caught" in the marketplace at the daily hour of prayer (about 3:00 P.M.). Thus, they could pray publicly and call attention to their piety. Of course, synagogue praying was also their special delight, and in both cases, their motive was not to be heard by God but to be seen by others. They were motivated by spiritual pride, not by the desire to know God. By contrast, Jesus instructed his followers to pray privately. As their leader, Jesus himself often prayed alone (cf. Mt. 14:23; Mk. 1:35; 6:46; Lk. 5:16; 9:18).

Jesus' second warning was against unnecessarily lengthy praying. He condemned the long prayers of the Pharisees. Besides the daily *Shema*, the Pharisees prayed the Eighteen Benedictions on each weekday, which must have seemed interminable. Then, there were the lengthy sabbath eulogies. Jesus made it clear that God was not favorably influenced by the accumulation of words. To be sure, Jesus prayed at length on certain occasions (cf. Lk. 6:12), but in his teaching he emphasized quality, not quantity.

On the positive side, Jesus taught that prayer should be a recognition of God's sovereignty (Lk. 18:9-14). It was not a recommendation of one's own good qualities to God, but a recognition of God's righteousness and lordship over all. Especially, it was the recognition that God is the one who searches the human heart and righteously judges all people.

So, how should one pray? Jesus did more than just condemn the bad praying of the Pharisees. He gave careful instructions to his followers for a new way of praying. He emphasized three central qualities which should characterize the prayers of his followers. In addition to being *private* and *concise* (cf. Mt. 6:5-8), he taught that in their prayers they should be *willing to forgive* (Mk. 11:25; cf. Mt. 5:44; 6:14-15; Lk. 6:28).

Not only did Jesus describe a new way of praying, he gave his disciples a new prayer as a model for how one should pray. This prayer comes to us in two forms (possibly taught at two different times), but each form is much like the other.

Mt. 6:9-13	**Lk. 11:1-4**
Our Father in heaven,	*Father,*
Hallowed be your name.	*Hallowed be your name.*
Your kingdom come,	*Your kingdom come.*
Your will be done on earth	
As it is in heaven.	
Give us today our daily bread.	*Give us each day our daily bread.*
Forgive us our debts,	*Forgive us our sins,*
As we also have forgiven	*For we also forgive everyone*
Our debtors.	*Who sins against us.*
And lead us not into temptation,	*And lead us not into temptation.*
But deliver us from the evil one.	

There are four parts to the Lord's prayer. It begins with the address *Abba*, which is the child's word for Father in Aramaic, something on the order of the English word "Papa." By using this designation, Jesus showed his disciples the intimacy with which one could address God.

Following the address comes two "thou" clauses. The first is a statement of reverence. To hallow God's name means to recognize and accept that which God's name implies, that is, that he is sovereign over the universe. The second "thou" clause is a petition for the establishment of God's rule on the earth to the same degree that it is in the heavens. However, in the context of Jesus' teaching about the kingdom, the rule of God was not some vague petition that looked only to the distant future. God's kingdom was even then breaking into the world in the person of Jesus himself (Mt. 12:28; Lk. 17:20-21). Thus, this second part of the prayer was directed more toward the completion of this work than the commencement of it. The apostles recognized this dynamic of the kingdom in their writings (cf. 1 Co. 7:31b; 1 Jn. 2:8).

The third section of the prayer consists of two "we" petitions. The first asks for sustenance, the second for forgiveness. It should be pointed out that the term *opheilema* (= debt) used in Matthew is a synonym for sin in common Jewish parlance of the times.

The final petition has occasioned much discussion, because it might seem to imply that God is the one who leads people into temptation. James, however, strictly forbids such a construction (Ja. 1:13). Some ancient versions read, "Do not let us succumb to temptation," while a possible underlying Aramaic idiom would be, "Do not let us go under in temptation." These expressions seem to capture the intent of the request. In any case, the phrase "lead us not" seems to have a permissive sense, that is, "do not let me fall victim."[39]

Jesus also taught the importance of importunity in prayer. More than once in the Third Gospel, Jesus emphasized the need for consistent and persistent praying. Such importunity is important, especially in light of the often popular notion that divine responses to prayer are simply matters of quantitative faith. In the parable of the persistent friend (Lk. 11:5-13), Jesus gave three important lessons about prayer. First, proper requests arise from genuine needs, not out of selfish desires. There is no justification for the notion that any and all requests will be granted if

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[39]J. Jeremias, *New Testament Theology* (New York: Scribners, 1971) 201-202; C. Smith, *IDB* (1962) III.157.

only one has "enough" faith or if the method of asking is technically correct (cf. Ja. 4:3-4). Second, God wishes for us to be persistent in our praying. It is not that God is unwilling, and must be pressed into answering, for the whole context of the parable makes clear that God is eager to give. However, if what is wanted is not worth asking for with persistence, then apparently one must not want it very badly. Third, God will answer prayer in the best interests of the seeker, because the seekers are his children. Answers to prayer may be "yes," "no," or "wait," but if the answer is something other than "yes," it does not follow that there has been no answer at all or that God has not heard.

In the parable of the persistent plaintiff (Lk. 18:1-8), Jesus emphasized importunity once more. God's children are instructed to "always pray and not give up." If it seems that there is a delay (especially from our human perspective), one must still recognize that in God's omniscient viewpoint there is no delay. God answers prayer justly and at the right time.

A brief word should be said here about Jesus' insistence that prayer be offered to the Father in his name (Jn. 16:23-28). Sometimes Christians ask who should be addressed in prayers, whether the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, or whether equal time should be given to all. This was apparently a problem that the primitive Christian community did not address. In the first place, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are not three separated Beings but one God. Each interpenetrates the other so that prayer to one is sufficient (cf. 1 Jn. 2:23; 2 Jn. 9). However, one should not forget that by far the most common form of praying in the NT is to the Father rather than to the Son or the Holy Spirit. It was the teaching of Jesus that his followers pray to the Father (Mt. 6:9; Jn. 4:23), and further, that they do so in Jesus' name (Jn. 16:23-24). It is significant that the nature of Christ's mediatorship is not so much that he goes to the Father instead of us (as though he went where we cannot go), but that he goes to the Father with us (Jn. 16:26-28).[40] He has made the way open to us. To be sure, on occasion prayers were addressed directly to Jesus (cf. Ac. 7:59; 9:13-17), but while this is true, one must also concede that it is the exception and not the norm. Far more are the prayers directly addressed to the Father in the name of the Son (Ro. 8:15; 15:6; 2 Co. 11:31; Gal. 4:6; Ep. 1:17; 2:18; 3:14; 5:20; Col. 1:3, 12; 3:17; 1 Th. 3:11; Ja. 3:9).

Therefore, one cannot say it is improper to address Jesus directly in prayer, but from the evidence of the New Testament one can say that it is the norm to address the Father in prayer through the Son or in the name of the Son.

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[40]T. Smail, *The Forgotten Father* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) 170ff.

Jesus' Warnings Against the Improper Use of Scripture

Jesus also indicted the religious leaders for their handling of the Word of God. In some cases, they were simply ignorant (Mt. 22:29). More seriously, in many cases they were guilty of distorting and obscuring Scripture by adding to it long lists of authoritative interpretations (Mt. 15:1-9). In other cases, they were guilty of outright rejection of God's Word (Jn. 5:39-40, 45-47). On technical grounds, they found it convenient to look for loopholes by which to avoid God's instruction and divine will for themselves (Mk. 7:9; Mt. 19:3, 7-8), while at the same time, appealing to the authority of Scripture by which to condemn others (Mt. 12:2; Mk. 7:1-5; Lk. 11:46).

In contrast to this abuse of Scripture, Jesus displayed his high regard for the Word of God by making it his first line of defense against evil (Mt. 4:4) and declaring its infallibility (Jn. 10:35). It is obvious that he intimately knew the Hebrew Bible.

Prayer in the Early Church

Perhaps the most outstanding features of prayer in the early church can be summed up by saying that prayers were regular, spontaneous, informal and all-encompassing. During the early years of the church, especially in Jerusalem where the church was still entirely Jewish, the Christian believers continued to prayer at the formal times and places of Jewish tradition (Ac. 3:1; cf. 16:16; 21:20). They also prayed in their homes, of course (Ac. 2:42, 46). However, it is difficult to believe that after the teachings of Jesus their prayers resembled anything like the traditional Jewish prayers. We do know that they prayed privately (Ac. 10:9), corporately (Ac. 12:12; 16:25), and publicly (1 Co. 11:4-5). Paul encouraged the church to pray continually and faithfully (Ro. 12:12; Col. 4:2; 1 Th. 5:17; 2 Ti. 1:3).

Early Christian prayer seems to have a decidedly spontaneous character. These early believers, much like the ancient pillars of Israel's faith, prayed in emergencies (Ac. 7:59-60; 12:5; 20:9-10; 2 Co. 1:10-11; Phil. 1:19; He. 13:18-19), when making extended farewells (Ac. 20:36; 21:5), and when facing difficult circumstances (1 Ti. 5:5). We also know that they retained the Jewish tradition of praying before eating (1 Ti. 4:3-5; cf. 1 Co. 10:30; Ro. 14:6). They offered prayer for spiritual direction and evangelistic success. When faced with crucial decisions, they prayed and then acted in the firm conviction that God would assist them (Ac. 1:24-26). They consecrated leaders to God's service with prayer (Ac. 6:4, 6; 13:2-3; 14:23), and they petitioned God to help them in their preaching of the gospel (Col. 4:3-4; 2 Th. 3:1; Phlm. 4-6; 1 Ti. 2:1-4).

In addition to their prayers for the work of the kingdom of God, the early Christians prayed for spiritual growth and the ability to persevere under difficult circumstances. Paul's letters to the churches abound with mentions of his continual prayers for his "children" as well as his requests for them to offer prayer for him (Ro. 1:9; Ep. 1:16; Phil. 1:4; Col. 1:3; 4:2; 1 Th. 1:2; 5:25; 2 Ti. 1:3). Paul's primary concern for these young Christians was that they would mature in their devotion to Christ, which was to be measured in terms of love, knowledge, insight, discernment, spiritual fruit, endurance and patience (Phi. 1:9-11; Col. 1:9-12; 4:12; 2 Th. 1:11).

Finally, prayers were offered for physical healing. The classic statement concerning prayer for the sick is James 5:13-16. It is certainly as appropriate to pray when one is sick as it is to pray when one faces other kinds of trouble. Several factors should be observed in this regard. First, the phrase "prayer of faith" could be offered by either the sick person or the congregational elders. While some have tried to make a direct connection between sin and sickness, as though they were simply cause and effect, here the instruction is "if" he has sinned, not "because" he has sinned. Apparently not all persons were healed, even in apostolic times (cf. 2 Co. 12:7-11; 1 Ti. 5:23; 2 Ti. 4:20), so Christians must always remember God's saving grace is sufficient, even in the midst of physical weakness (2 Co. 12:9-10). It might be well to remember that even though Paul prayed for physical protection on his last trip to Jerusalem, God still allowed him to be arrested, brought to Rome, and ultimately executed (Ro. 15:30-33).

There were some important characteristics of the prayers of the early Christians. Their prayers were to be offered in joy and thanksgiving (Phil. 1:4; 4:6; Col. 4:2). Prayer was to be made "in the Spirit," that is, with a vital union between the human spirit and the Holy Spirit (Ep. 6:18; Jude 20). At times this intense praying is expressed through inarticulate groans (Ro. 8:26-27), and in these cases, when the believer does not even know how he should pray, the indwelling Holy Spirit helps him to pray in accordance to God's will. Such help is deeply significant, since the Spirit perfectly knows God's sovereign purposes in the world. Closely related to "praying in the Spirit" is the gift of praying in other tongues, either as a public praise toward God (at which time there must be an interpreter for it to be appropriate, cf. 1 Co. 14:5-13, 16-19, 23, 27-28) or as a medium for private intercession and praise which apparently does not need to be interpreted (1 Co. 14:4, 14-15, 18).

There are also some hindrances to prayer which the Christian will do well to avoid. Of great importance is one's relationship to others. One cannot separate the vertical relationship with God from the horizontal relationship with one's brothers and sisters (1 Jn. 4:20-21; Mt. 5:23-24). The relationship between

spouses is especially important, for poor domestic relationships will undermine prayer (1 Pe. 3:7). In special times of prayer, spouses may need to adopt some special disciplines temporarily (1 Co. 7:5). In any case, effective praying comes from an uncluttered mind and a righteous life (1 Pe. 4:7; 1 Ti. 2:8; 1 Pe. 3:12; Ja. 5:16). Prayers must stem from right motives as well (Ja. 4:3-4). Ultimately, of course, prayer is an expression of faith in God (He. 11;6).

The Use of Scripture in the Early Churches

In the early years of primitive Christianity, the Old Testament was the Scripture for the followers of the Lord. The sermons and discourses in the Book of Acts bear this out (cf. Ac. 2:16ff; 4:11, 24-26; 7:42-43, 48-50; 8:32-35, etc.). Approximately ten percent of the material in the New Testament either quotes or alludes to the Old Testament. Scholars have also noted that the early Christians usually used the Septuagint Version, as is evident in the quotations of this version by New Testament writers like Luke and Paul.

It would have been a rare privilege for an early Christian to possess an actual manuscript of any book of the Old Testament. We know that Paul valued his manuscripts greatly (2 Ti. 4:13), but it is doubtful if such ownership of scrolls and parchments was very widespread. Private devotion from Scripture, then, would most often have consisted of meditations upon memorized passages heard in the synagogue or in early Christian congregational worship. Early Jewish Christians had become familiar with the Hebrew Bible in the synagogue prior to their conversions (Ac. 13:15, 27; 15:21; 2 Co. 3:15). Early Christian worship seems to have been patterned after the synagogue services, and this would have included the public reading of Scripture (1 Ti. 4:13).

Because the early church existed for a number of years without any written documents, one must not conclude that it was left without a witness to the gospel. The deposit of the gospel during this time rested in the living voices of the apostles. Jesus had left the Twelve with an authoritative understanding of the Old Testament and a divine commission to be eyewitnesses of the gospel about his person and work (Lk. 24:45-48; Ac. 1:2-3, 8). That these men considered themselves to be the divinely appointed, personal eyewitnesses of Christ's earthly ministry, passion and exaltation is evident (Jn. 21:24; Ac. 4:1820; 5:30-32; 10:34-42; 13:26-31; 1 Pe. 5:1; 1 Jn. 1:2-3). Thus, for a number of years the message of Jesus was preserved, preached, and taught within the framework of this oral stage, and it could be checked against the eyewitness of the apostles.

The writing of the New Testament did not begin until some time after 40 A.D. It was not completed until near the end of the first century. The epistle of

James might be the earliest, Paul's letters were written in the middle of the century, and the gospels somewhat later. Luke mentions that a number of documents about the life of Jesus had been drawn up, though these early accounts have not survived (Lk. 1:1-2). As the books of the New Testament were written, they began circulating among the various congregations (Col. 4:16; 1 Th. 5:27). It was up into the third century, however, before all the books were generally available to any given congregation. As those in the original body of eyewitnesses to the life of Jesus began to die, it was the common opinion of the church that the documents of the New Testament were the necessary substitute for the living voices of the apostles which were dying out (2 Ti. 3:16; 2 Pe. 1:21; 3:16).

Stewardship

> *Each one should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.*
>
> *2 Co. 9:7*

It goes without saying that parsimony is antithetic to the liberality and generosity taught by the Lord Jesus. Yet there are diverse conceptions about money and financial business in the church. Many Christians regard the Old Testament law of tithing as a binding obligation, but as John Bright has keenly pointed out, it is "....probably in the form in which it is recorded in Leviticus 27:30-33 (it is hard to imagine a church board urging the law as stated in Deuteronomy 14:22-27 as an ideal)."[41] So, what does the Bible actually say about financial stewardship?

The Patriarchs and Tithing

The word "tithe," at the simplest level, indicates ten or a tenth (not necessarily of money).[42] The idea of contributing a tenth to a religious institution was not unique to Israel, for it is to be found in the Egyptian and Akkadian literature.[43] Those who say that tithing antedates the Mosaic law are quite correct. There are two occasions in the Old Testament in which tithing as a form of giving is specifically mentioned. The first is in the life of Abraham (Ge. 14:17-20; cf. He. 7:4). About the tithing of Abraham, the following may be observed. There is no indication as to what prompted him to tithe to Melchizedek except the fact that Melchizedek was a priest of *El Elyon*. Since tithing was a known practice in the

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[41]J. Bright, *The Authority of the Old Testament* (1967 rpt., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1975) 54.

[42]*TWOT*, II. 702-704.

[43]*TWOT*, II.702.

ancient world, Abraham may have reached his decision accordingly. In any case, there is no indication that tithing was a regular practice of Abraham. His tithe was voluntary and without hint of obligation by law. In contrast to the Mosaic law, which would come later, Abraham did not tithe on his personal increase. Rather, he tithed on the spoils of war which he had recovered for someone else.

The second example of pre-Mosaic tithing is in the life of Jacob (Ge. 28:22). Jacob promised to God that he would tithe of his increase. We do not know to whom he paid his tithes, or for that matter, whether he actually kept his vow (though we presume that he did so). When God commanded Jacob to return to Bethel (Ge. 35:1), it is sometimes assumed that this command was a tacit reminder of his tithing vow.

The Mosaic Law and Tithing

Tithing under the Mosaic law ceased to be voluntary. The laws regarding tithing were set in a three year cycle and involved essentially two forms.[44] They were set within the framework of a semi-nomadic culture, that is, they consisted of animals and farm produce, not currency. Only under certain circumstances could animals and farm produce be converted to currency.

The first of these two forms was the celebration tithe (Dt. 12:5b-19; 14:22-27). The tithes of the first two years of the three year cycle were to be taken to the site of the tabernacle (later, the temple) for an annual celebration of God's bountiful blessings. The families of Israel were to eat and rejoice before Yahweh while being careful invite the Levites, aliens, orphans and widows from their towns to share in the family feast.

The second form, the charitable tithe (Lv. 27:26-34; Dt. 14:28-29; 26:12-15; cf. Nu. 18:21, 24-32; Ne. 10:37-39; 12:44, 2 Chr. 31:5-12), was to be offered every third year. This tithe was obligatory for the support of the Levitical clan who had no land inheritance in Israel and who, therefore, could not cultivate crops or keep herds as a source of income. However, it is to be noted that this tithe was not exclusively for the levitical caste. It was also for aliens, orphans and widows. The purpose of this tithe was charitable, that is, it was to help support those who were disadvantaged in that they had no ordinary source of income.

How faithfully Israel practiced these tithing forms during their national life, we do not know, but in the post-exilic period the nation became lax according to the prophet Malachi (Mal. 3:8-10).

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[44]H. Guthrie, Jr., *IDB* (1962) IV.654-655; P. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy [NICOT]* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976) 216-219, 233-234; J. Thompson, *NBD*, 2nd ed. (1962) 1205.

Tithing in Judaism

In the intertestamental period, tithing took on a more demanding structure so that at least two complete tithes were required[45] and possibly a third.[46] The *Mishnah* (Oral Law) increased the complexity of the tithing laws so that tithing tended to become a way to earn merit with God.[47]

Christ and the Tithing Laws

In the teachings of Jesus, one finds a marked shift from the legalism and severe demands of intertestamental Judaism. Inasmuch as Jesus was born "under law," as Paul says, we may assume that he participated in tithing. We are assured that he favored ministerial support, since he both received such support and encouraged his disciples to receive it on a voluntary basis (Lk. 8:2-3; Mt. 10:9-10). Furthermore, he remarked to the Jews concerning their obligation to keep the tithing laws, but he also made it clear that such regulations were not of primary importance (Mt. 23:23).

The Pharisees had even discovered a way to manipulate their own laws regarding tithing so that in certain circumstances they could avoid the tithe while the common person could not.[48] Jesus delivered a scathing rebuke against such practices (Mt. 23:1-4).

In his teaching, Jesus gave a higher ethic for giving than was to be found in either Judaism or the Old Testament. He pointed out that at the heart of the matter, a person's motive behind giving was all important. Tithing which was ostentatious or given as a legalistic obligation was often an expression of pride (Lk. 18:10-14; Mt. 6:1-4). Gifts must not be evaluated in terms of amount only, but according to one's ability (Lk. 21:1-4). Giving to God must be done without the selfish motive of seeking a return, and it might even involve the totality of one's possessions (Lk. 12:33; 14:13-14; Mt. 5:42; 10:8; 19:16-24). In fact, Jesus' ethic of giving is so total that the disciples asked, "Who then can be saved" (Mt. 19:25)?

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[45]Guthrie, 655.

[46]Tobit, for instance, is described as giving a priestly tithe of grain, wine, oil, figs and so forth plus a monetary tithe and yet a third tithe to the disadvantaged (Tobit 1:6-8).

[47]Thompson, 1205; J. Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*, trans. F. and C. Cave (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969) 134-138.

[48]A. Edersheim, *Sketches of Jewish Social Life* (rpt. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) 233-238.

The Early Church and Financial Stewardship

Once one moves into the early church era, Old Testament obligatory tithing can no longer be found. Two reasons, at least, may be given. First, early Christian culture was not semi-nomadic, and thus a tithing system based on agrarian life was impractical. Second, the early church, especially as it moved into the non-Jewish world, preached that the believer was free from the Mosaic legalism that dominated the previous age (Ro. 10:4; Ga. 5:1; etc.). Acts 15 is the watershed on this subject. With the increase of Gentile believers, the controversy arose as to the relationship of these "foreign" believers to the Mosaic law (Ac. 15:1-5). The apostolic leadership, after heavy discussion, handed down the decision that apart from four items, a believer was not bound to the Mosaic law (Ac. 15:6-11, 19-31). Conspicuously, the tithing laws of Torah were not mentioned.

The early Christians were conscientious about financial stewardship, however. They seem to have drawn deeply from Jesus' higher ethic of love which did not depend on the pressure of legalism. In the Jerusalem church, many believers voluntarily pooled their resources in order to be able to share with each other (Ac. 2:45; 4:32-37). This practice was not obligatory, of course (Ac. 5:1-4). It was adopted out of concern for the unfortunate victims of circumstances, such as, widows (Ac. 6:1). This motive was actually what the tithing laws aimed at in the first place, so that as Paul said, "Love is the fulfillment of the law" (Ro. 13:10). Such voluntary actions of love were encouraged elsewhere (Ga. 2:9-10; Ja. 2:14-17), and they were practiced widely (Ac. 11:27-30; 1 Ti. 5:3, 9-10). Financial support for ministry was evidently received by at least the apostles and half-brothers of Christ (1 Co. 9:1-6).

Paul and the Churches

Paul's approach to money is unique, even in the New Testament. He practiced for himself an ethic which he did not demand of others, yet at the same time, which speaks very seriously to modern Christians. His approach arose out of the principle of freedom. For Paul, the believer is free from legalism, and of course, such freedom included obligatory tithing (Ga. 2:1-16). However, such freedom from legalism is not the same as freedom from the intent of the law, even the tithing laws (cf. Ga. 2:10). The believer is free yet responsible.

Observe how Paul guarded against abuse in the ethic of giving. Because believers have liberty and the gospel is free, Paul forfeited his rights to receive money so that he might offer the gospel "free of charge" (1 Co. 9:12b, 18-23, 2 Th. 3:9). He consistently refused to receive offerings in the churches while he was with them, frequently supporting himself by his tentmaking trade (Ac. 18:3; 20:34;

1 Th. 2:9; 2 Th. 3:9). However, he graciously received offerings from congregations whom he was not with at the time (Phil. 4:15-16). This practice ensured that he did not become a financial burden to his congregations (2 Co. 12:14-16; 1 Co. 9:15; 1 Th. 2:7). At the same time, he maintained the right of the ministry to be supported (1 Co. 9:6, 11-12; 1 Ti. 5:17-18).

While Paul was reluctant to receive offerings for himself, he encouraged monetary gifts for the sake of others. He solicited an offering for the poor from the churches in Achaia, Galatia and Macedonia (1 Co. 16:1; 2 Co. 8:1-4; Ro. 15:25-27). In doing so, however, he allowed the members of the assemblies to oversee the collection and distribution of the money (1 Co. 16:2-4; 2 Co. 8:16-19). The offering for the poor was not obligatory, but strictly voluntary. It was, as he said, a "grace of giving" (2 Co. 8:1-8; 9:5b-7). The motivation for such giving was the selfless gift of Christ (2 Co. 8:9) and the desire for equality (2 Co. 8:12). The administration of the offering was conducted in a sensitive and highly ethical manner (2 Co. 8:20-21).

Pertinent Questions about Personal Finances

What does the Bible say about our attitudes towards money?

The Bible teaches that everything we have ultimately belongs to God, since he is the Creator of heaven and earth (Ecc. 5:19). As such, then, our attitude toward money should be one of stewardship over the resources which God has committed to us (Mt. 6:25-32). When we look at money from a selfish vantage point, we do so at great spiritual risk (Mk. 10:23-25; 4:7, 19; 1 Ti. 6:7-10). Wealth is temporary (Ja. 1:10-11; 1 Ti. 6:17), and the ones whose obsession with wealth leads them to exploit others will be condemned by God (Ja. 2:6; 5:1-6).

What does the Bible say about debt?

The Bible discourages debt (Pro. 11:15; 17:18; 22:7, 26-27; Ro. 13:8), and if one is in debt, it advises the faithful to free themselves from this bondage as quickly as possible (Pro. 6:1-5). The problem with lending and borrowing is that such practices are highly susceptible to exploitation, especially in ancient cultures, where interest ran from 20-50%. Hence, Torah's warning against loaning at interest (Ex. 22:25; Lv. 25:35-38). In our modern culture, there are many laws designed to protect the public from loan-sharking and exploitative business practices. Nevertheless, while the biblical culture was different than our own, the wisdom of the biblical warnings is still valid.

What does the Bible say about giving to God/church?

Clearly, the Christian's responsibility is to put God first (Pr. 3:9; Mt. 6:33). God is displeased when his people put their own interests before the house of God (Hg. 1:7-9). Christians should give to God/church first, rather than simply leave him whatever is left over (Mal. 1:8, 13-14). Of course, the Christian ethic of giving is to be voluntary and generous, not legalistic and oppressive (2 Co. 9:7). However, a Christian's giving to the church is a test of his/her love for God (2 Co. 8:8-9). The Old Testament economy mandated tithing, that is, the system in which 10% of one's increase belonged to God's work (Ne. 10:37-39). Not to pay one's tithes was tantamount to robbing God (Mal. 3:8-9). Such mandatory tithing is not repeated in the New Testament. However, voluntary tithing is certainly appropriate. It seems that those who have received the gift of God's grace in the New Testament should not wish to do less than those who knew only law in the Old Testament. Some Christians in the New Testament went so far as to voluntarily surrender their entire wealth to God's work (Mt. 19:27-30; Ac. 4:32-37).

What does the Bible say about maintaining balance in regard to money?

A good principle to follow is not too little, not too much (Pr. 30:8-9). The Wisdom Literature acknowledges that there can be a certain amount of security in wealth (Pr. 10:15-16), but wealth must not be one's priority (Pr. 22:1; 23:4-5; Ecc. 5:10; cf. Lk. 16:13). It is appropriate stewardship to save toward the future, however (Pr. 13:11). Generosity is encouraged toward the needy (Mt. 5:42), but not to those who are idle and lazy (2 Th. 3:6-12; 1 Ti. 5:3, 8-13).

How do our attitudes and practices of handling money affect our growth as Christians?

Our attitudes and practices of handling money will reveal our basic value system about other things as well (Mt. 6:19-21; 1 Ti. 6:17-19). Christians who become obsessed with money-making hamper their own spiritual growth (Mt. 13:22). One cannot serve God and money (Lk. 16:13-15; Ja. 4:13-15)! Rather, the Christian ethic, in the words of Paul, is that each believer should "work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need" (Ep. 4:28).

What does the Bible teach about interest?

The question arises as to whether or not Christians should charge interest in loans or take out loans which demand interest. The Old Testament words which are relevant are *nesek* (= interest on money) and *marbit* and *tarbit* (= interest on grain or other produce). The *KJV* rendering of the terms is "usery," but in modern English, the term "interest" is more common. Several observations are appropriate. In the Sinai covenant, national Israel was forbidden to charge interest of their fellow-Israelites (Ex. 22:25; Dt. 23:19; Eze. 18:18). Foreigners, however, were subject to interest on borrowed money and goods (Dt. 23:20; cf. 15:6). How much interest was charged is unknown. In neighboring cultures, it was 20% on silver and 33 1/3% on produce (law codes of Eshnunna and Hammurabi), and in some cases even more. It is the exorbitant interest rates and abuses which more than likely led to the ban of usery in Israel among fellow-citizens.

Due to these Old Testament laws, some Christians today believe that they should not charge interest or engage in transactions which will necessitate paying it. Larry Burkitt, a widely known evangelical financial advisor, suggests as much, citing particularly the proverbial wisdom which warns against the dangers of credit (Pro. 22:7). While this posture may be admirable, and any Christian is free to follow it, such a practice does not have the force of law for the Christian for three very good reasons. First, Christians are not under the Sinai law which was created for Israel bound in solemn covenant with Yahweh. Second, the surrounding modern culture is much different with respect to lending today than in ancient times. In ancient times, there was no inflation. Today with a steady inflation rate, interest is necessary if one is not to lose the value of an investment. Furthermore, in ancient times there was little regulation of interest rates so that the lender held virtually absolute power over the borrower. Today, federal agencies protect the borrower. Third, that transactions with interest are not necessarily wrong is evidenced in the New Testament in the parable of the talents, in which the Lord advised that an interest-bearing account would be an acceptable way to invest (Mt. 25:27; Lk. 19:23).

At the same time, the principles behind the Sinai laws on interest still should exert an ethical influence upon Christians. If Christians should become a lender, they must remember that to refuse to show love to one's neighbor is to reject Christ. The lender must never be hard-hearted and merciless. People are more important than money. If Christians should choose to borrow, they must remember the sage advice of the Bible that borrowing can become a trap. Credit must be carefully controlled.

It would seem that transactions involving interest fall into the range of Christian liberty. Still, while Christians are not under Mosaic law, they are obliged to hear the message of what the law says -- and it warns against both

stinginess and falling into the power of a creditor.

Christian Liberty

The holiness concept in the New Testament is grounded in Christian liberty. To fail to understand the liberty of the Christian and its attendant truths is ultimately to fail in the task of living a holy life.

> *For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life.*
>
> *1 Th. 4:7 (NIV)*

> *For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another.*
>
> *Ga. 5:13 (KJV)*

> *But the man who looks closely into the perfect law, the law that makes us free, and who lives in its company, does not forget what he hears, but acts upon it; and that is the man who by acting will find happiness.*
>
> *Ja. 1:25 (NEB)*

The parallels in the above passages are unmistakable. Christians are called to holiness, and they are called to liberty. They are not called to uncleanness nor are they to abuse their liberty in the interests of self-indulgence. The New Testament concept of holy living is more than just law. It is the law which sets one free. It involves obedience, yet not a cold, formal obedience. Rather, it is obedience which ends in happiness, a result of being able to make right choices.

The Liberty Concept

Christian liberty is not the right to do what you want, but the freedom to do what is right. To fully understand this concept, it will be helpful to survey the human race's inability outside of Christ, which inability Martin Luther described as the "bondage of the will," and compare it with the freedom one has in Christ.

Luther, commenting on Paul's teachings about the human dilemma, begins with the fact that all humans are sinners. To be a sinner means not only that one

has sinned, not only that one is in sin, but that one is dominated by sin and is helpless to rectify the situation. Humans are not capable of saving themselves, and neither are they capable of coming to Christ in their own time or at their own choosing. They are, in the words of Paul, truly "dead" in their trespasses and sins (Ep. 2:1-3). The person outside of Christ does not have total freedom of choice for good or evil. The prophets say that the human heart is "deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it" (Je. 17:9)? All have "gone astray," each has "turned to his own way" (Is. 53:6). Thus, outside of Christ, one's will is in bondage. Choices inevitably lead to evil, and one cannot ultimately choose otherwise (Ro. 3:10, 23).[49]

Some theologians in the past proposed that humans had completely lost the image of God in the fall and were in their very substance nothing but sin. This concept of human worthlessness dominated much of the Dark Ages. However, such thinking has in more modern times been reevaluated so as to affirm that the image of God in humans was marred, though it was not altogether ruined. To affirm human depravity in this way is not to deny human nobility. Certainly natural humans are capable of goodness, as is evidenced by the words of Jesus himself when he mentioned that even evil men are capable of giving good gifts (Luke 11:13). At the same time, the Scripture asserts the sinfulness of humans and their consistency in choosing evil. Although their goodness may be worthy of human admiration, it is worthless to God who demands perfection.[50] This human dilemma is in a real sense the grandeur and tragedy of the human race. Humans are able to transcend themselves but are subject to the power of sin and the weakness of the flesh (Is. 64:6).[51]

Thus, humans in themselves are not free to do what is right. They have an overpowering tendency toward sin. The first step toward liberty and holiness is to take sin seriously--it is to understand that outside of Christ one will not, and indeed cannot, consistently make right choices.

Into this state of helplessness came Jesus Christ. At Calvary, the Lord Jesus effected atonement for sin and reconciliation between humans and God (Ro. 5:10-11). He provided freedom for all who come to him in faith and obedience. Thus he says, "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (Jn. 8:32). Christian freedom may be properly understood only when one recognizes from what he or she has been liberated. Briefly, there are four special categories in which the Christian has

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[49]J. Gonzalez, *A History of Christian Thought* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1975) III.46-50.

[50]D. Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978) I.88-92.

[51]B. Patterson, Makers of the Modern Theological Mind: Reinhold Niebuhr (Waco, Texas: Word, 1977) 63-100.

been made free.

The Four Christian Freedoms

The first freedom is freedom from sin. In the New Testament sin is understood to be both an act and a state, that is, it is not only something one does, it is also an environment and a sphere in which one lives. Stephen speaks of sin as an act when he prays for his murderers, "Lay not this sin to their charge" (Ac. 7:60). Later, however, Paul discusses sin in a broader context when he warns against "living in sin" (Ro. 6:2). Furthermore, sin is to be viewed as both an outside force and an inward impulse. Paul refused to allow sin as an external force to dominate him (Ro. 6:4), yet he also recognized that the principle of sin was still in him (Ro. 7:20). Christ freed the believer from sin, called him unto holiness and assured him of eternal life (Ro. 6:22).

The second freedom is freedom from the flesh. The word flesh takes on special meaning in the writings of Paul. When he speaks of the flesh, he is not simply referring to the body. In fact, Paul uses a different word for body (*soma*) than for flesh (*sarx*). Although the word flesh may be used to refer to the material side of human nature, Paul also uses it in an ethical sense to refer to the side of human nature which is an accomplice to sin. Human flesh, then, is an arena of weakness, that is, it is that side of humans which gives sin its chance (Ro. 7:25).

Christ freed the believer from the dominating power of the flesh. By so speaking, one must not think that the flesh has disappeared altogether, for Paul makes it abundantly clear that the believer still struggles with it. However, the flesh must now submit to the godly choices which the believer makes.[52] A concluding caution is in order here. The believer must take care not to equate the flesh with the total self. As Bruce Narramore and Bill Counts have pointed out in their stimulating analysis of guilt, "what we should be calling for is death to our fallenness and sinfulness, but not death to the self. Those who are overly sensitive and prone to depression immediately pick up these teachings. Thinking God wants them to hate themselves, they attempt to endure life as a kind of experiential suicide."[53] One must have proper self-esteem as well as a healthy regard for the weakness of the flesh. No one should think that the body is evil in itself.

The third freedom is freedom from the world. In the English Bible, the word "world" is translated from three different words in the Greek. One, *oikoumene*, refers to the earth (cf. Lk. 2:9). A second, *aion*, signifies an age or an indefinite

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[52]A. Hunter, *The Gospel According to St. Paul* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966) 16-19.

[53]B. Narramore and B. Counts, *Freedom from Guilt* (Santa Ana, California: Vision House, 1974) 57-58.

time period (cf. Mt. 28:20). The third, *kosmos*, is especially significant to our discussion. Although this latter word is at times used to refer to the world in an earthly sense, as in the great commission (Mk. 16:25), it often takes on a special meaning, much as does the word flesh. This special meaning has its clearest expression in the epistles of John where it indicates the system of evil which pervades the earth. It is with this connotation in mind that John says, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world" (1 Jn. 2:15-16).

The Christian's freedom from the world is affirmed in two ways. First, it is stated as an accomplishment--something that has already happened in the work of Christ at Calvary (Ga. 6:14). Second, it is stated in a progressive sense as the believer's continuous victory over worldly elements (1 Jn. 4:4).

The fourth freedom is the freedom from the despair of condemning law. The phrase "despair of condemning law" might sound like so much theological jargon. However it, too, contains a dilemma from which the believer must be freed. The New Testament writer who puts the law in perspective for us is, of course, Paul. Paul sees the law in an active as well as a static form, that is, he views not only what the law is in terms of rules, but also what the law does. To Paul, the law is God's holy demand. For the most part, Paul addresses the law as that which was given to Moses, and as such, that which defines sin (Ro. 7:12-13). The weakness of the law was that although it demanded perfection, it lacked the power to produce it. Because it could not effect righteousness, it provoked the helpless Paul to sin even more. Thus Paul says, "Therefore by the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin" (Ro. 3:20; 7:7b-8).

What a wretched dilemma! Paul is required by the law to be perfect, but is completely helpless to become so. He daily faces the demand of God, but just as frequently fails to live up to the requirement. Such frustration is what is meant by the phrase "despair of condemning law." No wonder Paul said that when he heard the law, sin came alive and killed him (Ro. 7:9-11). That the believer is free from the despair of condemning law is affirmed by Paul again and again (cf. 2 Co. 3:15-17). This freedom comes through the fact that Christ has acquitted believers of their unrighteousness in spite of the law (Ro. 7:6; 8:2; 10:4; Ga. 2:21; 3:2-5, 13, 14-15; 4:30; 5:4; etc.).[54]

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[54]Hunter, 18-19.

One further word concerning law is appropriate, and it comes from Martin Luther as he interprets Paul. Although the believer is free from the despair of condemning law, such freedom does not eliminate law itself. Luther pointed out that just as there was "gospel" in the Old Testament (i.e., the good news of Christ's saving grace, cf. Ga. 3:8), there is "law" in the New Testament.[55] The pitfall for the Christian to avoid is the attempt to be righteous by legalism, that is, through obedience to the law. There is only one way to be truly righteous, and that is by accepting the righteousness of Christ. One can never merit salvation by self effort. Paul summarized his life's goal in these terms when he said, "....I have suffered the loss of all things and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith" (Phil. 3:8b-9).

This, then, is the New Testament concept of Christian liberty. It is freedom from sin, from the flesh, from the world and from the despair of condemning law. Christian liberty insures the believer's power to make right choices! Such liberty is not the right to do what one wants, but the freedom to do what is right!

Thus, Paul emerges as the great champion of Christian liberty. Throughout his writings, he comes back again and again to this basic premise. In fact, one famous theologian aptly described Paul as the "apostle of the free spirit."[56] To better understand how Paul expounds Christian liberty, it will be helpful to examine his treatment of it in a biblical and expository way. To do so, we shall observe his handling of Christian liberty in three of his epistles, Galatians, 1 Corinthians and Romans.

Christian Liberty and the Galatians

The occasion of the Galatian epistle centered around Paul's refutation of a group which has come to be called the Judaizers. This faction, spearheaded principally by Palestinian Jews, contended that although Christianity was right, it was not sufficient without a scrupulous observance of Moses' law. Such a position was a return to the despair of condemnation from which the believer was free, a lapse which Paul was not about to permit. This approach to the Christian message Paul labels as a perverted gospel (Ga. 1:6-7).

The emphasis of the Judaizers was on circumcision, but it should be understood that the issues at stake were more than just the observance of a

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[55]Gonzales, 46-48.

[56]F. Bruce and J. Douglas, "A Man of Unchanging Faith: An Interview with F. F. Bruce," *CT* (October 10, 1980) 18.

physical ritual. The ritual was only the "tip of the iceberg." What was underlying this demand for circumcision was the equal demand for a full observance of all the Jewish laws and a conviction that only by such observances would one be truly righteous. Circumcision was the customary practice which bound Jewish children as well as gentile proselytes to the Mosaic law (Ex. 12:43-49; Lv. 12:1-3; Jn. 7:22-23, etc.). Thus, as Paul mentions later in the epistle, the person who is circumcised is responsible to keep the law at every point (5:3). Such a demand was a violation of the Christian's liberty and, as Paul explains it, an underhanded attempt to bring the believer once again under the bondage of condemning law (Ga. 2:3-5).

A short summary of the contents of Galatians is in order. In the first two chapters, Paul discusses briefly how his knowledge of the gospel of grace came to him by divine revelation rather than by tradition. To establish the fact that he did not learn the gospel from the Jerusalem apostles, he emphasizes the brevity of his visits to Jerusalem after his conversion. He only visited Jerusalem twice during the first seventeen years of his Christian life. On the first of these visits, he only stayed fifteen days and saw none of the apostles except Peter and James (1:15-19). On the second visit, fourteen years later, he met the Judaizing faction head-on with a test case, the Greek convert Titus, and scored a convincing victory. Titus was not forced to be circumcised, and Paul with Barnabas received the full support of James, Peter, John and the Jerusalem church to preach unto the gentiles without law (2:1-10).

Sometime after this last visit to Jerusalem, Paul had another confrontation over the issue. This one, although not directly concerning circumcision, nevertheless reached the same conclusion, that is, that gentiles who did not observe the law were somehow inferior to Jews who did. The conflict arose through a segregationist action of Peter. Peter, during a visit to Antioch, was at first quite comfortable in the fellowship of this predominantly gentile church. However, when a Judaizing group from the Jerusalem church appeared, he suddenly developed an acute case of racial prejudice and separated himself from the gentile believers during the fellowship meal, eating only with his fellow Jews (2:12-13). Besides violating the underlying purpose of the fellowship meal, Peter presupposed three things by this course of action. First, he exhibited his belief in the superiority of the Jewish nationality. Second, he admitted to a belief in the necessity of Jewish and gentile ethnic division according to Mosaic law. Finally, he implied the necessity of being bound to the Mosaic covenant (by circumcision) before Christian fellowship could be extended. In contrast, Paul stoutly defended the unity of the believers over against racism as well as the liberty of the believers over against law by rebuking Peter publicly for his hypocrisy. And hypocrisy it

was, too, for Peter had been one of the pillars of the Jerusalem church who earlier had supported Paul's gentile mission without law (2:11).

After this short historical narrative, Paul builds his argument for Christian liberty on the foundation of salvation by grace and faith. True justification comes only by faith in the work of Christ, not by observing the Mosaic law (2:16). Justification is by grace alone. It cannot be merited or earned by works. To revert back to the law with its condemning despair and lack of justifying power was to deny the sufficiency of the death of Jesus which alone could justify. Thus Paul determined, "I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain" (Ga. 2:21).

Chapters 3 and 4 of Galatians are largely an argument on the sufficiency of Christ to save as opposed to the insufficiency of the law. Paul marshals several arguments to his defense. Christian experience bears out the superiority of grace over law (3:1-5). The promise to Abraham, which was given before the law (and, therefore, which has precedence), is fulfilled in Christ, not Moses (3:6-18). The nature of the law was only temporary as a disciplinary exercise between God's promise to Abraham and the fulfillment in Christ (3:19-4:7). One cannot be a slave and be free at the same time, that is, one cannot be under law and grace simultaneously (4:21-31).

After firmly establishing the doctrine of justification by grace and faith alone over against law, Paul reaches the practical implications of his argument.

> *Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.*
>
> *Galatians 5:1*

Justification by grace through faith guarantees Christian liberty; circumcision is worthless (5:2, 6)! However, Paul is very careful to point out that liberty does not mean that the Christian is without responsibility. Christian liberty requires, indeed demands, responsible living (5:13). True, Christians do not have a code of laws written in tables of stone by which they must live, but they have the universal law of God written in their hearts by the Holy Spirit (cf. 2 Co. 3:2-3; Ga. 5:14).

In the exercise of his liberty and its consequent responsibility, Paul calls Christians to holiness in two broad areas: individual maturity and a concern for the welfare of all believers. In striving for maturity, every Christian struggles with the tension between the flesh and the Holy Spirit (5:17). Liberty in Christ frees believers from the bondage of the will so that they may make right choices. At the same time, these good choices are not automatic. Liberty demands serious ethical

decision making. Whether believers exhibits fleshly works or the fruit of the Spirit in daily life is largely a matter of how they exercises their liberty. This, Paul makes a strong call for responsible living (5:16, 24-25).

Next, Paul commands the believer to be responsible to the church body as a whole. If a believer falls into error, fellow-believers ought to take the initiative to gently work with him or her toward restoration. At the same time, those who are involved in such restoration must be clearly aware of their own susceptibility to error (6:1-2).

In summary, the implications of the Galatian problem are extremely relevant. Firstly, holiness can never be effected by law. Legislated holiness, at best, takes a weak view of the power of sin as well as a weak view of the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. The one who legislates holiness is naive in assuming that he or she can produce righteousness before God by law. At the same time, legislating holiness is a refusal to trust the Holy Spirit to do the work of producing maturity. Secondly, liberty is the natural result of justification. Any encroachment into the Christian's liberty by legalism constitutes a perversion of the gospel. Thirdly, Christian liberty presupposes Christian responsibility. To contend for liberty without responsibility is equally a perversion of the gospel. Every believer is called to serious ethical decision-making, or, in the words of Paul to the Philippians, is called to "....work out his (your) own salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil. 2:12). The call to liberty and the call to holiness are one!

Christian Liberty and the Corinthians

The Corinthian problem can be summed up in one word--carnality. Whereas the Galatians had fallen prey to a legalistic perversion of the gospel, the Corinthians were nurturing a perversion in the other extreme. Some of their loose living was no doubt due to the cosmopolitan but culturally corrupt atmosphere of the city itself. In fact, the term *korinthiazomai* (= to Corinthianize) meant to engage in prostitution. The pagan temples catered to sacred prostitution, and in the old city, the shrine to Aphrodite provided a thousand female prostitutes for the "free use of visitors." Excavations have uncovered taverns and an abundance of drinking vessels on the south side of the city. Suffice it to say, Corinth was a generally recognized city of sin.[57]

While Paul wrote to the Corinthians more than once, it is in 1 Corinthians, especially, that one sees him again wrestling with the principle of Christian liberty.

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[57]D. Hiebert, *Introduction to the New Testament*, (Chicago: Moody, 1977) II.106-107; C. Ryrie, *The Ryrie Study Bible* (Chicago: Moody, 1976).

The general issue with which Paul comes to grips is the presence of divisions in the church which had been reported to him by the house of Chloe (1:10-11). Actually, the divisions in the church came from a variety of sources. Some were caused by favoring one leader above another, some by personal quarrels and some by sheer prejudice. As a background for dealing with these problems, Paul first of all shows the weakness of human reasoning as compared with the wisdom of the mind of God. Arguing from a variety of angles, he concludes "....the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men" (1:25). Then, he attacks the problems with vigor.

A contention over personalities was the first reason for church factions, and Paul labels such partisanship as evidence of carnality (3:3-4). Perhaps a little closer look at Paul's use of the word carnality is here in order. Essentially, the word carnal means to be under the power of the flesh. Paul uses it in contrast with the word spiritual.[58] Thus, to be carnal, in light of our discussion of liberty, is to refuse to accept Christian responsibility. It is to live without serious ethical decisions. This kind of carnality, which was characteristic of the Corinthians, was rooted in worldly wisdom rather than godly wisdom, that is, a fleshly set of values rather than Christ-like ones. Paul shows a person's ministry cannot be evaluated by the ordinary set of criteria one might think. In fact, Paul's own pulpit mannerisms were weak by ordinary standards (2:1-5). The real worth of a person's ministry is to be evaluated along the lines of preaching content (2:6-16; 4:1-2) and the long range influence of one's ministry is in the power to change lives (3:5-15). The final judge of any minister's effectiveness is ultimately God (4:3-5).

The second major problem with which Paul deals is a moral one. Here again the Corinthians had failed to understand the responsibility of liberty. It was bad enough that they had fallen back into fornication, but they had allowed a case of incest to exist within the very fellowship without rebuke. Worse, they had adopted a false pride in their tolerance of this obvious sin (5:1-2, 6). Paul orders immediate action by commanding that the culprit be disfellowshipped (5:3-5, 7-13). The liberty of the believer does not extend to the point of sanctioning this kind of serious error.

A third problem which contributed to disunity in the Corinthian assembly was the occurrence of lawsuits between believers. Paul rebukes this fault and in doing so points out another principle of liberty. The boundary of liberty ends when it results in enmity between Christian brothers. In fact, it would be better to go ahead and suffer loss rather than contend for one's rights at the expense of unity (6:7-8).

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[58]F. Grosheide, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians [NICNT]* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979) 77-80.

After providing an answer to questions concerning marriage, separation, divorce and celibacy which the Corinthians had raised in their own letter to Paul, Paul addresses the Corinthians' insensitivity to the convictions of others. The crux of the issue was the practice eating of food which had been dedicated to idols. Although the problem is largely an ancient one, the implications are as modern as this morning's newspaper. Here is a clear case of pushing liberty too far, and Paul shows that the guiding factor in exercising liberty is an interplay between Christian knowledge and Christian love.

In Corinth, as in most other cities of the Roman world, the practice of sacrificing animals to heathen gods was common. The remains of these sacrifices would be taken home by the pagan worshipper to eat, or if the sacrifice was public, to be sold for food at a reduced price in the market.[59] The Christian was as eager as anyone for a "good buy." Knowledge said that idols were not real anyway, and the meat was no different after it was sacrificed than before. Therefore, the eating of such meat was not a moral offense to God. Liberty was indeed an advantage! However, the exercise of such liberty, though well-founded, created another problem which could not be ignored, and that problem was the misunderstanding such an action could cause. If a pagan observed the Christian eating such meat, he might very well come to the conclusion that the Christian recognized the idol as real. If so, his potential faith in Christ would be obstructed. Paul reasons that the Christian's knowledge must be tempered with Christian love. The Christian's liberty must be restricted if such liberty would impede the conversion of an unbeliever (8:1, 7, 10-13).

In summary, then, liberty may only be exercised if it does not destroy faith. If none will be offended, one may exercise liberty freely (10:25-26). If one is in a situation where it is uncertain whether liberty is appropriate, then he or she may go ahead and exercise it without asking embarrassing questions (10:27). On the other hand, if liberty is obviously a problem, liberty should be restricted while in the company of the weak individual (10:28-33).

A major problem among the Corinthian saints, in addition to the ones already cited, was their abuse of worship. This abuse came in three forms, one in regard to the wearing of veils, one in the observance of the fellowship meal, and the other in the misuse of spiritual gifts. The issue over veils, like the issue over meats, involved exercising liberty beyond the bounds of expediency. When the Corinthian Christian women appeared unveiled for public worship, they created a stumbling block for the faith of the unbeliever, since to be unveiled in public was

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[59]J. McPheeters, Proclaiming the New Testament: The Epistles to the Corinthians (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1964) 43; L. Morris, The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians [TNTC} (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958) 123-124.

to imply a promiscuous lifestyle. Paul admonishes them to respect the cultural and moral expectations of the community (11:5-6). The issue over the fellowship meal divided the church inasmuch as the Corinthians were not showing love for each other. What was intended to be a symbol of unity turned into an exhibition of selfishness (11:17, 21-22). Finally, a failure to recognize the importance of all members of the assembly by exalting certain spiritual gifts over others contributed to disunity. A special gift of the Spirit did not elevate the recipient to some sort of spiritual plateau (12:22-25).

The implications of the Corinthian problem may be summarized as follows. First, liberty is not license! Although God is the final judge of every person, the church is responsible to take action in the case of obvious sin among its members. Second, liberty is not without restriction. Although the believer is not under law, the believer is guided in ethical decisions by the principle of love. Divisions in the church are to be avoided. The believer must not act in such a way as to offend the faith of either a Christian brother or an even an unbeliever. Superior knowledge is not necessarily a sign of Christian maturity; love is the evidence of maturity (8:1; 12:1-13). Not only legalism is to be avoided if Christian liberty is to be maintained, as in the Galatian problem, but carnality is to be avoided as well.

Christian Liberty and the Romans

The Roman letter is unique, for unlike other epistles of Paul in which he addresses specific problems of which he was aware, this letter is to an assembly that Paul had never visited and knew of only by word of mouth. The origin of the church in Rome is debated among scholars, but the one thing which is clear is that Paul did not personally found it. Several explanations have been offered as to the occasion of the epistle, but for our purposes, it is sufficient to recognize that in the letter Paul gives a powerful doctrinal discourse which, like his other writings, emphasizes Christian liberty.

Although the Roman epistle may not be a "systematic theology," at least in the modern sense, it is perhaps more systematic than his other writings. In it, Paul deals quite straightforwardly with the problem of sin, God's solution of salvation by grace through faith, and the application of righteousness to the believer's life.

Paul's treatment of sin is in universal terms. It had obviously affected the gentiles, who were outside the Jewish fellowship (1:20-21); it had also affected the Jews who were recipients of special revelation in the Old Testament (2:17-23). Paul's conclusion is that all have sinned, Gentile and Jew alike. All the world is guilty before God (3:19, 23).

After clarifying the human dilemma in such graphic terms, Paul proceeds to

describe God's remedy--justification by faith. His prime example is Abraham who discovered that faith alone was sufficient for justification (4:3, 20-25; 5:1-2). Paul's treatment of sin and justification sets the backdrop for his dealing with Christian liberty.

First, Paul addresses what has been termed "the antinomian question." Antinomianism is living without ethical demand, or to put it another way, without moral obligation. Paul raises the question and responds with an emphatic negative! Christian liberty is certainly not the freedom to sin. The Christian is dead to the realm of sin (6:1-2). In contrast to antinomianism, the Christian is to live a godly lifestyle, and Paul calls for this lifestyle in three strong imperatives. The believer should, "Reckon himself dead to sin" (6:11). He must, "Not let sin reign over him" (6:12). He must, "Not yield his members as instruments of sin" (6:13). The implication here is the same as it was to the Galatians and the Corinthians. Liberty demands personal responsibility! Liberty is more than living without law--it is a call to serious ethical decision making. It is not the license to do what one wants, but the freedom to do what is right! The godly lifestyle of the believer is produced by properly exercising the liberty and power one has in Christ.

From these imperatives, Paul proceeds to discuss the tension in the life of the believer who struggles with sin and righteousness. This struggle is depicted in Romans 7:14-25. Paul, like every other Christian, experienced both the frustration of such a struggle as well as the victory and freedom from guilt that is in Christ (7:24-25). The believer is responsible! He is free, yet he struggles. He is without law, yet he lives by a higher principle. He may not trust in legalism, yet he must not abandon himself to sin, either. He is free from guilt and the dominion of sin, but not free from conflict with sin. He is commanded to "....put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof" (Ro. 13:14).

In conclusion, one must see an interplay between holiness, liberty and maturity. Holiness cannot be achieved by legalism, because legalism does not allow for personal ethical decision. On the other hand, holiness cannot be maintained if one lives without moral obligation. Practical holiness can only come about as one sees the relationship between liberty and maturity. Liberty leads to maturity, and maturity leads to a responsible lifestyle (He. 5:13-14; Phil. 2:12-13).