

StraitWay



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Authentic Faith

Until 1895 the United States Congress repeatedly rejected the application of Utah for statehood. When the voters changed the constitution of Utah to outlaw polygamy, a fundamental religious doctrine of a majority of its citizens, admission to the Union was granted.

Congress in its refusal had wisely rejected an idea that was contrary to the values on which this nation was built.

A question arises as a result of the adoption of a specific public policy by the voters of Utah in 1895. Who are the legitimate and authentic practitioners of a faith, those who doggedly affirm all its tenets, or those who conform to public policy and repudiate part of their system of faith?

How valuable to anyone is a system of faith if he has to reject the demands of that faith in order to have peace and acceptance?

Our peace-loving friends in the Muslim religion now face a similar quandary. Violence in defense of Islam is authorized in the Quran (Sura [Chapter] 009 Verse 29). Mohammed drove the Jews from Medina in order to form a purely Muslim society. National governments in many Islamic countries are authorized to punish, even with death, those who fail to publicly practice Islam as well as those who teach any other religious doctrine.

Who are the authentic Muslims today? Where are they?

Is it not interesting that the personal faith of a Muslim appears to survive best in a free country where democracy, tolerance, and Judeo-Christian laws prevail?

"My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight," said Jesus long ago (Jn 8:36). Violence in the name of Christianity is wrong. The Crusades fought against the Muslims were wrong.

Violence in the name of any religion is wrong, for it is a crime against the nature of man and his intellect. Those who coerce by their faith will share the dustbin of history with all tyrants. Yet many outspoken Muslim leaders envision a totally Islamic world, even if accomplished by force. Will these leaders ever realize that coercion of faith never creates true converts? And will these leaders now, finally, repudiate the calls to violence that are part of their history and sacred writings?

Christians face similar challenges. "We ought to obey God rather than men." (Acts 5:29) Yet Christians, without violence or coercion toward anyone, can always satisfy Jehovah, live at peace, prosper, and be the best citizens of any country in the world. And they do this knowing that they may receive far worse treatment than they give. How tragic it is that some religious and political philosophies that are not based on the Bible alone choose to punish Christians, who are willing to die for their faith.

Christians teach, try to convince, and then move on to others. Christians bear reproach without reprisal. Christians honor and forgive one another. Christians value life and love their enemies. For these and other reasons, the United States is still the emigration destination of choice for all the rest of the world. Unfortunately, some wish to punish the United States population for successfully creating a peaceful, prosperous society based on Christian principles.

Those principles are the product of a deep, abiding faith in God and a trust in the Bible on the part of a large part of the population of this country. Let everyone seek to have a truly authentic faith based exclusively on the Word of God.

And the authenticity of one's personal faith is best judged by its consistency, not on its adaptability.

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Bible Authority Institutionalism

We could not complete a study of bible authority without examining the question of institutionalism. Does the bible authorize the local church to support or donate to any institution to do the work that God has authorized the church to do? Another question to consider: do institutions other than the local church, which do the work of the local church, have bible authority to do that work? We have studied in previous articles that the authorized work of the church consist of preaching the gospel to the lost IThes 1:8; edifying those who are Christians Eph 4:16; and caring for saints who are in need Acts 11:27-30; ITim 5:16. The question of institutionalism then concerns organizations that attempt to do the work that God authorized the local church to do (ie-does God authorize other institutions to preach the gospel to the lost, edify saints or care for needy saints). Clearly, God only has one institution for doing this work — it is the local church!

Some complainer would get technical and say that the church is not an organization or an institution. Webster defines an institution as an organization having a social, educational or religious purpose, as a school, church etc. and he defines organization as any unified group or systematized whole. Certainly the local church fits this definition as Christians in a locality band together for work and worship! The Holy Ghost knows this as he revealed, “to the church of God which is a Corinth “ 1 Cor 1:2. Clearly, the church is organized on the local level but we find no organization for the universal church.

Do other organizations have the approval from the Almighty to exist who do the work of preaching the gospel such as World Wide Radio or Herald of Truth or others? If they do, which passage from the word of God authorizes them to do the work God gave the local church to do I Thes 1:8? Which passage authorized the church to send funds to these institutions? They have no bible authority to exist, or usurp the work and function of the local church!

The local church is responsible for the edification of Christians Eph 4:16. Some brethren seem to think that we must have edification institutions to do this work. Some seem to believe that a Christian simply cannot be trained properly to preach and teach the gospel of Christ unless he has attended some institution that does the work God gave the local church to do. (ie. teach Christians the word of God). The one true church has no edification institutions to do the work that God gave the local church to do. The local church is God’s institution to teach people the word. Other organizations that do the work simply are not authorized from the Word of God. If so, where are the passages? The local church can do all that God has assigned it to do and can do it well. We do not need edification institutions which are not authorized from the word of God.

The local church does the work of caring for saints in need Acts 11:29-30; 2 Cor 8, 2 Cor 9, Rom 15:25-31. Can the local church support another organization to do this work? Benevolent institutions have been built and maintained for a number of years by those who call themselves brethren and local churches. This many times involves one church sending funds to another church who “sponsors” the outside institution. But in the bible remember one local church sent to other local churches to care for their saints in need Acts 11:27-30. Another example teaches several local churches sending to one local church to care for its own needy – not the worlds needy or needy from other churches Rom 15; 1 Cor 16; 2 Cor 8; 2 Cor 9.

We have no bible authority to build, maintain, or support in any way institutions to do the work that God has authorized for the local church. We must have bible authority for all we do Col. 3:17; 2Jn 9; 1 Pet 4:11.

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Church History "Future History?"

History is made up of past events. However, one of the reasons we are so interested in history is so that we may learn from the past. The old axiom, "May we learn from the mistakes of history, lest we be doomed to repeat them" is still very true.

Having learned some things by observing events of history, is it possible to know much about the future of the Lord's people? Let me offer some predictions that I don't have any doubt will come true. What things are true of all times and so we can therefore conclude these will also be evident in the future?

1. **Persecution.** Throughout history the Lord's people have known persecution just as the Scriptures indicate can be expected, 2 Tim 3:12, "*Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.*" The suffering of Christians will always be there but is not so burdensome as to keep us from focusing on eternal life, 2 Cor 4:17, "*For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.*"
2. **Apostasy** has also been a constant, II Th 2:3, "*Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition.*" From among our own brethren, those who desire to do what they will instead of God's word, will never cease to amaze us, sadden us, and serve to strengthen our resolve.
3. **Joy** at the realization of being saved will never diminish, Acts 8:39, "*And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing.*"

Yes, these three items are constants, but can we know how large and influential the faithful and the cause of Christ will be in the future? I think there may be a pattern observable in the growth of the Church of Christ down through time.

The first dispersal of Christians happened after the death of Stephen, Acts 11:19, "*Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only.*" As time passed history also tells us that there were other persecutions that caused Christians to scatter wherever they could. Persecution aided the cause of Christ by forcing believers into places they never had been before. Believers used their misfortune to bring the gospel to more and more people as time went on. Eventually, the gospel was preached in every part of Europe and by the 13th and 14th Century was well rooted in Britain. Britain rose to become an imperial power and Christians rode the waves in her ships to reach every shore but particularly what would become America. As apostasy grew in Britain, Britain began even then to wane in her power. As the influence of Christians in America began to be felt and the country was blessed by our presence, America grew in power and world influence. Where there are concentrations of Christians, the country or land they dwell in prospers and this can literally be observed to be so, James 5:16, "*...The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.*"

Could secularism and apostasy bring on the downfall of the power and might of America? If it does, those being taught the gospel in fresh places afar, even now, may be the nations that will be future great powers. Rom 12:12, "*Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer.*"

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Genesis Key To Understanding God's World

The relevance of a belief system is found in its influence on behavior. Charles Darwin got it right when he said, "A man who has no assured and ever present belief in the existence of a personal God or of a future existence with retribution and reward, can have for his rule of life, as far as I can see, only to follow those impulses and instincts which are the strongest or which seem to him the best ones" (*The Autobiography of Charles Darwin*, 1887, as republished by The Norton Library, p. 94). Similarly, Solomon wrote long ago, "For as he thinks in his heart, so is he" (Prov. 23:7). Clearly what we believe affects our behavior. If one believes that he is a product of chance and random processes, why should one place any value on life? He is simply guided by the strongest impulses and his choices are based on such (rape, euthanasia, abortion, etc.). Adolf Hitler could be justified by evolution! On the other hand, with the Creator and the subsequent creation as our platform, we can develop a world view that holds life as a precious gift from God, and since life is from God, we will seek to become good stewards of it as those who will have to give an account. Genesis 1:27 teaches the distinctive difference of mankind from the rest of creation as being in the image of God, and with such an image comes responsibility. "Surely for your lifeblood I will demand a reckoning: from the hand of every beast I will require it, and from the hand of man. From the hand of every man's brother I will require the life of man. Whoever sheds man's blood by man his blood shall be shed; for in the image of God He made man" (Gen. 9:5,6).

Genesis is key to understanding the world that we live in. Why is there pain, suffering, sorrow and death in the world today? Genesis shows the curse and consequence of the death grip of sin. Here are a few: sorrow and pain (Gen. 3:16); toiling (Gen. 3:17); death (Gen. 3:19); brotherly animosity and hatred of righteousness (Gen. 4:1ff; 1 Jn. 3:12); enmity with the natural environment (Gen. 3:17, 18; 6:13ff); confusion (Gen. 11); etc. If we look at the world through evolutionary glasses, we may conclude that some of these things are stepping stones for survival. The essential elements of Darwin's gospel of evolution are time, chance, and bloodshed. The death of a weaker kind is replaced by a stronger kind over time. Death and mutations should be considered a friend to the survival of life, ironically. Yet with Bible glasses on, we see that we live in a sin-cursed world. Death is not a friend but the enemy (1 Cor. 15:26). Indeed the Christian's hope is that someday, upon Jesus' return, death will itself die and be swallowed up in victory (1 Cor. 15:54). With Bible glasses on, we understand that God once destroyed this world with water because of man's wickedness (Gen. 6-8; II Pet. 3:6). So when we find billions of dead things buried in rock layers that were laid down by water, we suspect the flood. When we see oceans that are over 35,000 feet deep and mountains that are nearly as high (i.e., Mt. Everest at 29,028 feet), we conclude that these vast structures were made during the flood and not by slow uniformitarian processes. "The mountains rose; the valleys sank down to the place which thou didst establish for them. Thou didst set a boundary that they may not pass over; that they may not return to cover the earth" (Ps. 104:8, 9; NASB).

What is scary is that evolution has been so invasive that many Christians have been evolutionized and do not even know it. For example, when one asks what the original diet of a lion was, many will answer, "carnivore." But when we look at God's word, we see that ". . . every beast of the earth, to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, in which there is life, I have given every green herb for food. . ." (Gen. 1:30). It wasn't until after the flood that God placed a chasm of fear and dread between man and beast, thus "wild animals" (see Gen. 9:2). This change could certainly produce violence and death (*ibid.* 5). The simple point is, "What we read in God's word fits with what we see in God's world.

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"If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?" Psalm 11:3

Trends Among Conservative Brethren “Fellowship”

In this my last contribution to this paper in 2001, may I devote just a brief word to express my appreciation to brother Glenn Melton, the editor for the invitation to write this column the past year, and to wish Glenn the very best of health in a full measure in years to come. I am praying to this end. If someone has been drawn closer to God or helped in some way spiritually through my efforts on these pages, my purpose has been served and to God be the glory.

In this my last effort, I would like to briefly address a subject which is much in vogue today. Much has been, and is now being said and written about the subject of FELLOWSHIP. It is the conviction of this writer (?) that humanly-influenced concepts held by many brethren today make this subject more difficult than it is in reality.

A good place to start (as is the case of any subject) is to define the term, and remain within the confines of that definition. FELLOWSHIP from KOINONIA has been defined as “sharing in common.” Other terms which relate to this subject are: communion, communication, contribution, and distribution (I Cor. 10:16; Rom. 15:26; II Cor. 8:4). From all of these passages and the definition of the word then, we see that fellowship depends on an action within a relationship. The horde of “fellowship halls” which have sprung up in the last four decades among churches of Christ were appropriately named within the general definition of the term fellowship. However, this is not the kind of fellowship which is defined in the word of God. For this, we turn to I John 1:7: *“But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.”* Therefore, the physical food and the partaking of it in the multitude of churches today, in no way, conforms to the Bible definition of fellowship. Two boxers in the ring (a crude illustration) may be having fellowship as boxers, but who would say that is the kind taught in the Bible? In the matter of fellowship, as well as other matters, we need to get back to spirituality. I know of no one who has been converted by eating a hamburger and drinking a coke. It is folly to refer to such as Bible fellowship!

To the Philippians, the apostle shows that “sharing” (fellowship) was in two directions; a giving and receiving, and each of these depends on the other. One cannot receive if it isn’t given, and one cannot give if it isn’t received. Paul shared in their bounty as they gave unto his necessity. To the same people, he speaks of *“knowing the fellowship of his (Christ’s) suffering”* (3:10). We experience the blessedness of that in eating the Lord’s Supper; the Lord has given and we receive the blessings.

Sometimes we hear brethren speak of “withdrawing fellowship” from brethren who are walking disorderly. This proposed action is meant to be in keeping with Paul’s direction in II Thessalonians 3:10. However, this misses the point. The apostle instructs those who are walking in the light to *“withdraw yourselves from every brother who walks disorderly.”* The brother who walks disorderly has already withdrawn the fellowship, and you cannot withdraw that which isn’t there. Consequently, the apostle admonishes to *“withdraw yourselves.”* Within this context also, we hear brethren speak of “extending fellowship” to the disorderly. How could this be done except to share in his disorderly walk? We need to understand that there can be no fellowship between the righteous and the unrighteous. Paul clearly shows this in II Corinthians 6:14-17. If we fail to fulfill our responsibilities to withdraw from the disorderly brother, then, we become guilty of his evil deeds, and share with him in his disorderly walk, and become a transgressor. In this way, we are “having” (the N.T. concept) fellowship with him. As long as I “walk in the light” (This I intend to do, God being my helper.) I cannot have nor extend fellowship to those who walk in darkness. We have fellowship with others by “sharing in common.”

The apostle Paul had fellowship with his brethren as demonstrated in several different terms: 1) Urbanus, our fellow-worker in Christ (Rom. 16:9). 2) Andronicus and Junius, my fellow-prisoners (Rom. 16:7). 3) Timothy, my fellow-worker (Rom. 16:21). 4) Epaphroditus, my fellow-soldier (Phil. 2:25). 5) The Ephesians were fellow-citizens with the saints, as a result of their being in the kingdom of God. Let us be content to have fellowship with Christ and each other by walking in the light.

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Church Origins The Assemblies Of God

Many denominations which call themselves “Church of God” --excepting the one headquartered at Anderson, Ind.--(which number their members at less than 2,000 all the way up to over half a million), and those with “Pentecostal” in their name (which number their members at less than 2,000 all the way up to nearly half a million), and the “Assemblies of God” (which claim in excess of one million members) are all “Pentecostal” churches. The claim to receive, or to be all able to receive, “baptism in the Holy Spirit” (as on Pentecost of Acts 2) which they maintain is always manifested by “speaking in tongues” (to them unknown languages). They believe that all the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit (I Cor. 12:4-11 lists them, nine in all) are still available and are being dispensed by God among their members. They believe that Jesus died on the cross, not only to effect the saving of our souls, but the healing of the bodies as well. So they believe that miraculous divine healing of the body is available to every believer. They Believe in what they call “entire sanctification,” following regeneration. And they believe in a millennial, earthly reign of Christ at His second coming.

The “Assemblies of God” (or “Assemblies of God, General Council”) have been the most successful of all of these in terms of growth and total membership. (Some of their famous “electronic evangelists” have had much to do with this.) This denomination is the result of an aggregation of Pentecostal churches that was formed by a number of Pentecostal preachers in 1914 at Hot Springs, Ark. In the matter of who can be saved and how, they are more “Arminian” than “Calvinistic.”

Headquarters have been established at Springfield, Mo. Church government is a mixture of Presbyterianism and Congregationalism. Local churches are given much independence, but not complete autonomy. Local churches are divided into 46 districts (most of which follow state lines), and each district has a “presbytery” which examines, licenses and ordains all “ministers.” The “General Council” is composed of all ordained ministers and one “lay” delegate chosen by each congregation. This body “elects all general officers, sets doctrinal standards, and provides for church expansion and development” (Handbook of Denominations, by Frank S. Mead, 4th edition, pp. 30-31). “The overall operation of the denomination is under the supervision of a general superintendent and four assistant general superintendents” (newspaper article by C. L. Musgrove, an Assemblies of God pastor). There is a central missionary committee over all “missionary” work. There is a church press and an official weekly periodical, “The Pentecostal Evangel” with a large circulation. The denomination has nearly a dozen “Bible institutes and colleges” in the U. S. and an official international broadcast, “Revivaltime.”

The “Assemblies of God” denomination had its beginning almost 1900 years after the Lord Jesus Christ began His church, and is quite different in teaching, worship, organization and work from the church one reads about in the New Testament of Christ.

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Note: These articles on Church Origins were written by brother Bill Crews of Baton Rouge, LA. They first appeared in the church bulletin he edited. Later, The Preceptor Company of Beaumont, Texas, published them in a booklet titled CHURCH ORIGINS which is still available (409) 866-3598. This is copyrighted material and is being used with the permission of bro. Crews and bro. Danny Brown, editor of The Preceptor. Please, do not reproduce this material without their consent. This one article is not in the booklet but should still be considered copyrighted material. Brethren, thanks for the use of this material. -- Editors

"Sirs, What Must I Do To Be Saved?"

The above question was asked by the Philippian Jailer nearly 2000 years ago and has been a question that has departed from the mouths of not a few souls since then. But the answers given today are often not the answers that were given then, resulting in much debate. Will those who claim to be "of Christ" today get back to preaching the gospel as the primitive church of Christ did?

Our question shows a lot:

- **"What"** shows that it is a question.
- **"Must"** shows that it is a question of imperative necessity. He did not ask, "What may I do?"
- **"I"** shows that it was a question of personal responsibility.
- **"Do"** shows that there was something that must be done. *"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven"* (Matt. 7:21).
- **"To Be"** shows that it was a question whereby something was to be attained.
- **"Saved"** shows that he was **lost!**

The answer given was, *"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household"* (Acts 16:31). However, what is Bible belief and when does it occur? Is it a mental acknowledgment only? Unfortunately, most denominational preachers end at verse 31, but the Bible doesn't. It continues to define what *"believing on the Lord Jesus"* is. Here is that which often goes unmentioned in many pulpits across America, *"Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized. Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, **having believed in God with all his household**"* (Acts 16:32-34).

Note that they first spoke the word of the Lord to him. He could not have believed before this since *"faith comes by hearing"* (Rom. 10:17). After such he showed genuine repentance by washing their stripes that his institution wrongly placed on them (Acts 16:23, 24). Next he and his family "immediately" were baptized. Baptism was not to be put off or delayed. Why? Because that is where the faith of man meets the grace of God! Only after this fellow and his household repented and were baptized does the Bible say that they believed. Again, *"he rejoiced having believed in God with all his household."* (Acts 16:34). His action defines what the commandment was. He was commanded to believe but his action was repentance and being baptized. Thus the "word of the Lord" which this jailer heard included the necessity of baptism. Why was he baptized? Because, *"He who believes and is baptized shall be saved"* (Mk. 16:16).

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UNTO SALVATION

Faith is unto (eis) righteousness. **Romans 10:9,10**
Repentance is unto (eis) life. **Acts 11:18; Luke 13:3**
Confession is unto (eis) salvation. **Romans 10:9,10**
Baptism is unto (eis) remission of sins. **Acts 2:38**
Have You Been Saved? Obey The Gospel Today!

Thank You

This issue concludes three years of publication for StraitWay. The majority of your comments have been positive throughout this time. We appreciate the encouragement you have given. On behalf of Glenn and myself, I want to express our gratitude to our writers for 2001. Richard Fox, Marc Smith, Steven J. Wallace, and Leslie Sloan have written useful, informative articles. We also want to thank Bill Crews and Danny Brown for the use of the copyrighted "Church Origins" material previously published by The Preceptor. I hope you have learned much from studying with us this year. We would be remiss if we did not express our thanks to Jimmy Crews and Pete Scalise in Colmesneil, TX for their work in mailing out and printing StraitWay.

Usually this thank you message would be written by Glenn Melton. Due to deteriorating health he has not been able to help with StraitWay during the last few months of this year. While StraitWay will remain Glenn's paper, at his request, I am now responsible for the editing duties. We all owe Glenn our thanks for seeing the need and taking action to get StraitWay published. The writers and subjects for the new year were selected by Glenn and will be helpful to anyone willing to "*Study to shew thyself approved...*". We look forward to working with Micky Galloway, Darrell Shaw, Ray Wilson, Wayne Goforth, Carey Scott, Hiram Hutto, and Richard Sims in 2002. --The Editors

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Enter ye in at the **strait** gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because **strait** is the gate, and **narrow** is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it. **Matt 7:13-14**

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