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Limiting God in the Church

By Oran Rhodes

We read in Psalm 78:41: "Yea, they turned back and tempted God, and limited the Holy One of Israel." They pushed God into a corner! God was powerful enough to have overcome anything, but His people purposely chose to limit Him. They limited God in what He could do for them, and they limited what God could do through them.

An example of limiting God is given in Matt. 17:16-20. An epileptic was brought to Jesus to be healed. The disciples had tried to cure the man, but were unable. When they asked Jesus the reason for their failure, he said, "Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain: Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you." We can learn from this that a lack of faith will limit God, but faith, even small faith, will give God opportunity to exert His power and influence in our life. All things are ours in Christ, but like the Israelites of Psalm 78, we, too, limit God.

There may be many ways through which we unknowingly limit God, and make our religion a "Wilderness wandering" type of Christianity. One of the greatest weaknesses of the church today is seen in the quality of our living. We are taught, "As he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation." (1 Peter 1:15). The reason that there is weakness instead of holy living lies in a two-fold responsibility: (1) that of the individual, and (2) that of the church.

We need to consider where the church has failed to fulfill its responsibility; because every time it does, God is limited in the good he can do for and through Christ's bride.

If the life of the individual is not what it should be, the church has failed in teaching and training that person in how he should live. God teaches every member of the body of Christ to grow into active service. In Eph. 4:11-16 we read, "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of

the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love."

Too, the church may fail to discipline the disorderly in order that he might be saved. In 2 Thess. 3:6 Paul wrote, "Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us." May we all strive to live up to the plea of Paul to Timothy, "Keep thyself pure." (1 Tim. 5:22).

God is limited many times by the procrastination of either the leaders or the members of the church. Going back to the Old Testament, we find the people returning to Jerusalem following the long years in Babylonian captivity (Ezra 1). When they returned, they began to restore the worship that God had commanded. In the second year after their return, they began to rebuild the temple (Ezra 3:8). Shortly after this work was started, the enemies also began to work. They obtained a decree from Darius, king of Persia, to bring the work of rebuilding to a halt. Eighteen long years passed by without any work being done toward rebuilding the temple. The former enemies had long since passed from the scene, but even when times were ripe, the people said, "The time is not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built." (Haggai 1:2). This certainly has a lesson for us today. These had been a people who had set out prepared to do God's bidding, but they failed to remain true and steadfast. In their failure, they limited God in what he had planned to do for and through them.

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Caleb, An Example of Faith and Courage

By Leslie Leonard

Two things which are needed by many today are: loyalty to God and faith in his ability to help us. Many who claim to follow Christ are willing to turn back when the going gets difficult. This indicates a lack of loyalty and a failure to trust in God.

In Numbers 13:25-33 we have an excellent example of a man who was in a situation very similar to ours. Caleb, with the rest of the Hebrews, had just come out of Egyptian bondage, and had passed through the wilderness. They were now standing at the border of Canaan ready to enter and possess the land. However, because of the report brought back by the twelve spies the people were overcome with fear, and were ready to return to slavery.

Caleb was among the few who remained loyal to God in full assurance that God could deliver them from all the dangers that lay ahead. In full opposition to the fearful, Caleb stood firm, fully convinced that they could, with God's assistance, go in and take possession of the land.

With everyone else turning away in fear; with unbelief all around him, Caleb continued to remain loyal to his God, and believe. He said, "Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it."

Of course he was unpopular because he was not in harmony with the others. He was disliked, I'm sure, because he persisted in standing firm on his convictions when others considered him wrong. He did not seek the approval of the majority, or even a select few. All he wanted to do was remain on the Lord's side and trust his God.

We can be like Caleb; because we are also human with fears and doubts assailing us, but we also can have God as our helper. He will do great things with us if we will only remain loyal to him, seek his ways, and have faith that he can do what we cannot do.

We may also be unpopular with the crowd if we refuse to compromise, and they may disapprove of us, but we must remember that God approves of our loyalty and faith, and that is what is important.

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EDITORS: Erwin Cowen
and Harrold Turner.

The Need for Involvement

Someone has said, "That which is prefaced by prayer should be punctuated by practice." How often we fail to apply this principle in the church. We pray for an unsaved loved one; yet we never go to him with the word. We pray for God to bless the work of the church and give us a great harvest of souls; but when we are asked to help in some way we suddenly find a dozen excuses not to do so. We bend our knees in prayer for one who is in need, then promptly refuse to give of our own abundance to help provide the necessary relief. We pray that the Lord will "Send forth labourers into His harvest", but we are not willing to be one of the workers ourselves. We ask in faith that a brother who has become unfaithful might be brought into the loving fellowship of the Lord; yet we seldom go out of our way to say a kind word, or outwardly manifest any love toward him.

It is good for us to pray for a great harvest, but the Lord's petition was for willing workers. He said, "Pray ye therefore the Lord of Harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest." There is a time for prayer, and there is a time for action. Prayer was never intended to be a substitute for meaningful Christian action, rather a necessary adjunct.

The church must confront this impasse of personal reluctance. Somehow, we must help our people regain spiritual concern and the desire for personal involvement. There is only one cure for our epidemic of good mannered apathy. That is to deliberately, prayerfully, and obediently involve ourselves as the Lord directs.

"Correct thy son, and he shall give thee rest: yea, he shall give delight unto thy soul." Prov. 10:17

Why Men Are Lost

By Ordell Heavin

Undoubtedly one of the saddest words in the English language is the word lost. In the temporal realm we consider it a tragedy for a small child to become lost from its family. It deeply grieves many of us when we lose something of sentimental value. But, friends, if these illustrations convey sorrow they cannot compare with the emptiness that shall be ours in judgment if our souls are lost forever. Our Lord once asked a penetrating question; "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matt. 16:26). Yes, to be lost eternally is the most tragic dilemma of all.

But, did you know that the majority of men have always been lost? In Noah's day, only eight souls were saved and multitudes perished. In the time of Abraham not even ten righteous ones could be found in Sodom and Gomorrah. During the life time of Moses thousands of the Israelites were destroyed by sin. In the era of Christ the masses rejected him and helped to crucify the Lord of hosts. Only a very small number of faithful servants followed the Savior.

With the large number of people in the world today, the number hasn't changed very much. Millions are fascinated by the "Pleasure of sin" only a few truly seek God's kingdom first (Matt. 6:33). Perhaps many excuses will be used in the day of judgment by those who are lost, but there are four of those excuses that will not sound at all convincing. If we are lost it will NOT be because -

(1) God's grace proved ineffective. In Titus 2:11 we learn that "The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared unto all men." The word 'grace' refers to the unmerited gift of salvation which God extends to man. All people have access to it.

(2) If we are lost it will not be because Christ failed to die for us. In Heb. 2:9 we learn "That Jesus tasted death for every man." Paul informed the Corinthians that "One died for all." He gave himself for our sins and the iniquity of the whole world (1 John 2:2).

(3) If we are lost it will not be because the plan was imperfect. The word of God is able to save our souls and to give us eternal inheritance (James 1:21, Acts 20:32). The law of Christ is indeed the "Perfect law of liberty." (James 1:25). If we are lost it will be in spite of a system perfectly adapted to our needs by God.

(4) If we are lost it won't be because the way was too narrow. Even though our Lord taught that "Narrow is the way that leadeth unto life," He invited all men to come unto him (Matt. 11:28). In fact, in

the last paragraph in the Bible we read; "Whosoever will, let him come." So, when men are lost in the final judgment scene it will not be due to a way that was too narrow to accommodate all who will surrender to Christ.

Salvation is a life of forgiveness, peace, and joy. All right thinking people should yearn for that relationship with Christ. No one, thinking sensibly, desires to spend eternity with Satan. But living forever with the Redeemer in glory is one of life's happiest assurances. A Christian is a three-time winner: He not only lives the best life here on earth, but he misses hell, and gains heaven. In view of these truths it is indeed sad to consider the plight of the wicked. The words of an old gospel song very appropriately fit these thoughts - "I was lost but Jesus found me, found the sheep that went astray, threw His loving arms around me, Drew me back into His way."

Let us always sing the wondrous story of God's saving love. Paul spoke for all of us when he said in 1 Tim. 1:15, Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief." It was not works of righteousness on our part, but by His mercy that saving grace was offered. (Titus 3:3-7).

"Oh, the love that drew salvation's plan,

Oh, the grace that brought it down to man,

Oh, the mighty gulf that God did span

At Calvary."

Truly when we were yet sinners, God commended his love toward us (Rom. 5:8). He sent his Son to save us, not condemn us (John 3:16-17).

But, what must one do to be saved? Not every one who has access to redemption has availed himself of it. Some today stubbornly refuse the pardon Jesus offers. Such people remain unforgiven due to continuing in their sinful conduct. But salvation can be obtained by all who earnestly and honestly seek for it. In Acts 2:36-41 we have an example of unsaved men coming to the Master for remission of sin. He alone can forgive sins. A sermon on the risen Lord had convicted them of their guilt. They asked the apostles what to do in order to be saved. The Bible answer is: "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins." Those "Who gladly received the word were baptized." And the Lord added them to the church (Acts 2:41-47). Are you honest enough to obey those same commands? If you will, and

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Are We to Break the Bread?

By Harold Turner

One of our readers has inquired about the breaking of bread in the Lord's Supper. Some churches have begun using small individual wafers, which are not broken apart by the one partaking of the Lord's Supper. The inquirer is concerned about the meaning of "breaking bread." Does it mean to break apart the bread before eating, or does it simply mean to eat the bread with no significance to literally breaking it apart?

The expression "Breaking of bread" is used in connection with two things in the New Testament. It is used with the common meal (Acts 2:46, 20:11, 27:35), and with the Lord's Supper (Acts 2:42, 20:7, 1 Cor. 10:16, 11:24).

It has been suggested that since this expression is used in connection with the common meal that it carries the idea of eating rather than a literal breaking apart of bread. From this it is concluded that to break bread in the Lord's Supper means to eat the Lord's Supper.

Let's first look at the three above mentioned Scriptures where breaking of bread is used in connection with a common meal. Acts 2:46 states, "And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart." Acts 20:11 states, "When he therefore was come up again, and had broken bread, and eaten, and talked a long while, even till break of day, so he departed." Acts 27:34-35 states, "Wherefore I pray you to take some meat; for this is for your health. . . And when he had thus spoken, he took bread, and gave thanks to God in presence of them all; and when he had broken it, he began to eat." In each of these it is obvious that there is a clear distinction between breaking bread and eating. In Acts 2:46 we notice (1) "And breaking bread. . ." (2) did eat their meat. . . In Acts 20:11 we notice that Paul (1) "had broken bread, (2) and eaten." In Acts 27:35 Paul (1) took bread, (2) gave thanks, (3) broke the bread, (4) and began to eat.

In each case mentioned above breaking bread preceded the eating. It seems to have been customary for one to give thanks, take bread and break it, and then for all to eat the meal. The significance for breaking bread at the beginning of a meal is not stated, but the above Scriptures show that this was the practice.

Now let's look at the references used in connection to the Lord's Supper. When Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper, the Bible states, "Jesus took bread, and blessed, and brake it, and gave to them, and said, Take, eat; this is my body."

(Mark 14:22). Did Jesus take literal bread? Did he break this bread into parts? Was there a significant reason for Him doing this? I am sure that most of us believe that the answer to each of these questions is, yes.

When Jesus instituted the Supper, he broke the bread himself. Obviously signifying the giving of himself to be broken in death on the cross. But did Jesus intend that we break the bread when keeping this memorial? In 1 Cor. 10:16 Paul stated, ". . . The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?" Too, in 1 Cor. 11:24 he wrote, "and when He had given thanks, He brake it, and said, Take, eat; this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me." In the command, "This do" did Jesus mean that we were to both break and eat the bread? In Acts 20:7 the disciples came together to "Break bread." In Acts 2:42 the disciples "continued steadfastly in . . . breaking of bread. . ."

In the above mentioned Scriptures, are we to understand the expression, "Breaking of bread," to be literal or figurative? Some suggest that the expression is to be taken figuratively. That the expression is using a part of the meal to refer to the whole. That when 'break bread' is used with a common meal it simply meant to eat the meal, whatever it consisted of. But where is the Bible proof for this? In Acts 27:35 we noticed that Paul took bread, gave thanks, brake the bread, and then after breaking the bread, began eating. Too, in Luke 24:30, Jesus "Sat at meat with them, he took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them." The bread was broken before it was given to be eaten. In verse 35 it states that "He was known of them in breaking of bread." Nothing about eating would have made him known. But when those nail pierced hands broke apart that bread and handed it to them, they could have seen something that opened their heart to understand who he was.

If the expression, "Breaking of bread," is totally figurative, how do we know that only unleavened bread is to be eaten in this memorial? If, as some suggest, a part of the meal is used to represent the whole, how do we know that we are not to eat a roasted lamb, and bitter herbs? These were a part of the passover supper, which was being eaten when Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper. In Exod. 12:8 states that they were to eat the flesh of the lamb, "roast with fire, and unleavened bread; and with bitter herbs they shall eat it." To take the argument that "To break bread" is a figurative expression, which uses a part to

define the whole, is to leave one helpless to prove that only unleavened bread and fruit of the vine are to be used in the Lord's Supper. Because the "Breaking of bread" would envelop the whole meal.

There is a great significance in breaking the bread. The bread, when broken, signifies the broken body of our Lord. What does the bread 'unbroken' signify? Eating unbroken wafers is not breaking bread. How can eating unbroken wafers "Show the Lord's death till he come?" The breaking of the bread signifies the breaking of His body. Following which we drink the cup, signifying His blood, which was shed in His death.

The New Testament seems very clear that the early church literally broke the bread apart before eating it. This is the only teaching, which provides us authority for what we do. We have the choice of either following the pattern or abandoning it.

I ask that you study this article carefully and prayerfully. But, above all else, study God's word, which is the only authority for what we do.

CONTRIBUTIONS

Individuals:	
A Member of the Church	\$ 5.00
Victoria Stark	1.00
Brooks & Ollie Hobson	5.00
Vada Woten	2.00
Claud Cole Crabtree	25.00
Hazel Jackson	5.00
Inez Myers	5.00
Olen & Azna Slinkard	10.00
A Friend	2.00

Churches of Christ:	
Williford	\$ 5.00
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Elizabeth	5.00
Viola	5.00
Jeff	5.00
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"Every word of God is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him." Prov. 30:5

"The rod reproof give wisdom: but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame." Prov. 29:15

An angry man stirreth up strife, and a furious man aboundeth in transgression." Prov. 29:22

Limiting God In The (Cont.)

even though they might have lived a life pure and separate from the world. They had put off the Lord's real work, and had spent their time on things which would pass away. Haggai stated, "Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes." Is this an apt description of today?

How many times do we put off changing some program of work because of this or that; How often is it that the neighbor, who needs to be taught, is once again neglected? And what about that unfaithful brother? How often do we say, "We need to talk to him before too long?" How many good works go undone because we talk about the need instead of getting up and doing it? What about the missionary who needs help? Do we say that next year when one comes around maybe we can afford to help? Yet, how often we fail, and put off. Frequently we see ourselves portrayed in Haggai 1:6. We refuse needed help, and hassle about material things, which are not even necessary. The admonition of Paul is applicable for good works as well as for giving, when he said, "Now therefore perform the doing of it: that as there was a readiness to will, so there may be a performance also out of that which ye have." (2 Cor. 8:11).

It would appear that there is a direct connection between procrastination and a lack of faith. An example of this is indicated in Psalm 78. God had delivered the Israelites from Egyptian bondage; He cared for their needs; He protected them; He had promised them his presence and power, but they still turned back, thereby limiting God in what He could do for and through them.

Much of the time this is the reason works are put off. We simply cannot see how we can accomplish it by ourselves, and we forget God's part in accomplishing it. Notice these promises: "What shall we say then of these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31). "For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." (1 John 5:14). The assurance that Paul felt should also be ours, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." (Phil. 4:13).

Each of us must grow and work to see that the church does not limit God. Much more can be accomplished, when we cooperate with God.

"A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour rather than silver and gold. Prov. 22:1

That He Might Have the Preeminence

By James Knight

In Colossians 1:18, Paul wrote, "And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence." There are several things that we can, and should, learn from this passage. (1) That Christ is the head of the church. (2) That he is the beginning. Christ is said to have been with God in the beginning, and the creator of all things that exists, both in heaven and on earth (John 1:1-3, Hebrews 1:1-3, Colossians 1:15-17). (3) That he is also the firstborn from the dead. While he was not the first one to be raised (Lazarus being a case in point) he is the only one who has been raised from the dead never to die again. (4) And that all these things happened in order that he might have the preeminence in all things.

I wonder how many of us have read this passage over many times and missed the real significance of it. Normally we use the passage to prove that Christ is the head of the church, and that the church is the body of Christ. While these two things are true, this is not where the real emphasis lies. The emphasis is on Christ having preeminence in all things. Let us observe some of the places where this is to be true.

CHRIST IS TO HAVE THE PREEMINENCE IN OUR HOME. What a difference it would make in the majority of homes if Christ was allowed to have the place that he deserves. If he was permitted to be preeminent there would not be so much arguing between husbands and wives; homes would not be broken by divorce; children would be more respectful and obedient to their parents, and we would see a deep spiritual renewal in all of our homes.

CHRIST IS TO BE PREEMINENT OVER OUR JOB. I believe that this is one thing that we need to realize today. So many allow their job to take precedence over everything else, including Christ. This is often excused lightly because we feel that we must take care of our family, and while the Bible teaches this, it nowhere teaches that our responsibility here is to take preeminence over our service to Christ.

CHRIST IS TO HAVE PREEMINENCE OVER OUR RESPONSIBILITY TO THE GOVERNMENT. Suppose you were faced with doing what some governmental official demanded knowing that your response to this demand would involve disobedience to Christ? While the Bible teaches us to be obedient to the government (Rom. 13:1), it also teaches that our loyalty to God must come first.

CHRIST IS TO HAVE THE PREEMINENCE IN THE CHURCH. The Bible teaches that he is the head of the church (Eph. 1:22-23). He has all authority in heaven and on earth (Matt. 28:18). This simply means that the church is not to be run by the preacher, Bible class teachers, or the elders and deacons. The church is to be under the direct control of Christ, it's head, and is to follow his instructions as given in the Bible. Elders are charged with the responsibility of overseeing the church, but they must do so under Him, who has preeminence in all things.

CHRIST IS TO HAVE PREEMINENCE IN OUR FINANCIAL AFFAIRS. We are to give to God first that which rightly belongs to him (1 Cor. 16:1-2, 2 Cor. 9:6-7). We have no right to take what belongs to God and use it for ourselves. When we do, we are robbing God.

Are we allowing Christ to have the preeminence in all things? We must if we are to please him in anything.

Why Men Are Lost (Cont.)

then live a devoted life as a Christian, one day this joyous salvation will find its eternal blessing in heaven.

"We have heard the joyful sound,
Jesus saves, Jesus saves,
Spread the tidings all around
Jesus saves, Jesus saves."

Salvation is in Christ (2 Tim. 2:10) and Jesus alone is the Savior of the world (1 John 4:14). Would you not accept his saving grace, then love and serve him the rest of your life?

Mammoth Spring, Arkansas
 Route 3
 OLOVIS Ragsdale