

The Church in Relation to Our Salvation

David Gooding

A Myrtlefield House Transcript



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This text has been edited from the transcript of a talk given by David Gooding in Dundonald Gospel Hall in Northern Ireland.

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Published by The Myrtlefield Trust
PO Box 2216
Belfast, N Ireland
BT1 9YR

w: www.myrtlefieldhouse.com

e: info@myrtlefieldhouse.com

Myrtlefield catalogue no: cch.002/dw

The Church in Relation to Our Salvation

This morning we were considering together the authority of our blessed Lord. I was advancing the thesis that we should look upon the authority of our blessed Lord, not as some severe and rigorous demand that he's made upon us, but something of a veritable gospel of salvation. In a word, his authority *is* our salvation, as he uses his authority to put his massive shoulder under our weaknesses and infirmities and thus deliver us from powers from which we could not possibly deliver ourselves. Let those of us who preach remember it, that when we preach the authority of Christ, we are not calling people to some dismal discipline: we are offering them deliverance and salvation. Of course, as we accept his authority, we will be expected to respond to that authority by obedience, in the endless path of progressive discipleship. We tried to follow what continuance in that path of discipleship will mean for those who accept the authority of Jesus Christ.

Tonight, I want to go on to discuss a topic that is not unrelated to this matter of our Lord's authority, and that is the church and its relation to our salvation. It must be evident to us all that the church is somehow connected with this matter of our Lord's authority. Had the clock not defeated us this morning, we would have come across a portion in the gospel of Matthew that underlines this connection. As we heard our Lord saying, 'On this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it' (Matt 16:18), we would also have come across a number of exceedingly important and fundamental statements related to the power that our Lord Jesus delegates to his church. Let me just briefly remind you of some of the stories in that part of Mathew that illustrate this very thing — that being in the church of Christ means access to his power and, in some sense, employing the power that he himself possesses.

Christ's authority—in person

As you may remember, our Lord shows Peter a preparatory lesson on another sea journey in the night of the storm. The manful apostles were rowing their ship but making little headway. Becoming afraid, they saw what they imagined was a ghost coming across the water. That terrified them, but didn't surprise them altogether because, as anybody knows, ghosts are so much nothing, so they can easily walk on water! It turned out not to be a ghost, and a familiar voice cried above the noise of the wind and the waves, 'Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid' (Matt 14:27). Peter, as he listened and tried to be logical, did a curiously petrifying thing. He came to a conclusion, leaping over all sorts of logical steps in the process, and he said, 'Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.' How did that follow: 'Lord, if it is you, command me do what you're doing'? How did the conclusion follow from the premise?

Peter wasn't always worried about pedestrian logic! If he had thought, I suspect that it would have gone something like this. 'Well now, it isn't a ghost. It's the Lord himself and he's no ghost. We know that he's pretty solid flesh and blood like we are. If he can walk on water, what about me?' So he says, in a moment of enthusiasm, 'Lord, if it is you, command me come to you on the water.' I don't know whether John privately thought, 'What a ridiculous suggestion. Of course, you can't do what Christ does, Peter, what are you suggesting?' But our Lord had arranged it so that Peter should learn precisely what he was expected to do—walk like Christ. 'Come,' said the voice, which was all the authority needed to indicate that Peter's suggestion was not undue enthusiasm.

Some Christians do give way to undue enthusiasm and try to do all sorts of things in the name of faith that God never asked them to do, and they're silly things to do anyway. If you're going to do some great, bold venture of faith, you'd better have authority for it. Faith without authority isn't faith: it is presumption. A divine voice said, 'Come,' and faith responded to a word from the Lord. Peter found that, with his eyes on Christ, he could do what the Lord did. You say, 'Yes, but it didn't last long.' Well, I know that: it hasn't lasted long with me on many an occasion, and soon I find where the true authority, where the true power, lies; and it's not in me, ever. But so long as my faith is going out to the Saviour, he can give me the power to walk as he walks. Peter did it, and when his attempt broke down through lack of faith, through fear, and he began to sink, our Lord proved what a master he is in the teaching of his disciples when they fail their lessons. He's there to catch you.

When Peter began to sink and the water gurgled around him, our Lord didn't first preach a lesson to him and say, 'You silly man, Peter, why did you doubt? Learn to have strong faith.' Peter would have sunk if our Lord had waited for any such lesson. Instead, stretching out his hand, he seized him and then he preached to him. And Peter discovered that Jesus is indeed the Son of God. What a discovery! To find that I have redemption through the blood of him in whom all the creation was made. For my salvation and eternal glory, he made this planet. That's why it's here, so that I might be born on it and in the course of life find the living God through Jesus Christ, and be taught to walk as he walked.

Christ's authority—in the church

You may remember that other passage in Matthew which is discussing the church, and what the church means. It has another incident recorded by Matthew, as he looked back in his old age or even in middle life, on many of these incidents that happened in the life of our Lord, and saw in them wonderful preparatory lessons which Christ had given them in his wisdom, as illustrations of what it would mean to live with Christ in his church. Matthew records that occasion when our Lord went up the mountain of transfiguration with his three favoured disciples. While they were gone, there came a father with his son to the remaining disciples down at the bottom of the mountain, requesting that they should cast out a demon from his son, and they couldn't do it. When our Lord came back down the mountain, he expressed his weary frustration, 'How long am I to be with you?' he said (Matt 17:17). 'Gentleman, I can't be with you physically for ever. One of these days I shall have to go up a mountain; more than a mountain. I shall have to go to glory. How long shall I be with you until you get the lesson?

I don't have to be physically here for you to do the work that I want you to do. Why couldn't you have done it even though I was up the mountain?'

We often rejoice in that wonderful promise that 'where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them' (Matt 18:20)—the Lord Jesus, ascended in glory as though he is gone, but yet in the midst. Being in the church means being in that company of people in which the blessed Lord is present. It must therefore become obvious to us, even from a superficial reading of the New Testament, that the church has some authority, and somewhere along the line, this authority gets itself involved with the matter of our salvation.

Here all sorts of difficulties begin. We must know strangely little of ecclesiastical history if we're not immediately aware that, far from helping salvation and the work of the gospel, there have been periods in the history of the church when it had been precisely the church and ecclesiastical structures that have impeded the gospel rather than helped it. It has lain like a malign influence upon the hearts and spirits of individual believers and, instead of promoting their growth, it has contributed to their being stunted. So much so that some people, in reaction to that, have become impatient with all things ecclesiastical. They see the church as though it were an expensive irrelevance, and they say that we should forget the church and get on with the work of evangelization, and not have any formal structures.

The church—help or hindrance?

That kind of situation leads us eventually to ask ourselves whether we can indeed afford to dispense with the church. Is it an irrelevance or impediment? If we can't afford to dispense with it, how shall we organize it? In our session this morning, we discussed among ourselves the related topic of the role of tradition¹. We discovered, according to the New Testament, that there are bad traditions which damage people spiritually and insult the Lord; and there are good traditions—the gospel is one and church ordinances are another—which we are expected to keep faithfully. And if we keep them, Paul the Apostle will praise us for keeping them. 'I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I delivered them to you' (1 Cor 11:2). What he had received of the Lord Jesus, he had faithfully passed on to them. So, evidently, not only the gospel but the ordinances of the church which do come to us from our blessed Lord, these are traditions which we must keep.

That leads on to the question of how then in general we should order our churches. I want to argue with you this evening that when we face that practical problem in our generation, we could follow the example of the Apostle Paul in the way that he regulated the churches of his day. My thesis will be a simple one, and it is this. The overriding basic principle that must determine the way we order the church is that the church is an institution set up by God for the furtherance of our ongoing salvation and that, therefore, whatever we do in our churches, we must see to it that nothing we arrange, no organization that we construct, impedes the work of ongoing salvation. That is going to be my general thesis, and I'm going to argue it from certain examples taken from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. But here I am aware that I ought not to, and I cannot discuss such a question of the relation of the church to our ongoing salvation without remembering certain large claims that have appeared in the course

¹ For this session please see transcript entitled 'Attitude to a Traditional Church' available to download on myrtlefieldhouse.com.

of Christendom to this day, claims that are quite false. I must mention it now because I would not wish anybody to misunderstand what I am about to say.

Salvation—by grace and through faith

In more extreme days than perhaps we live in now, it has been argued by some that there is no salvation outside the church. That is not what I am preaching tonight. It is the very opposite of what I preach. It is wrong on a number of counts. It is false to claim that there is no salvation outside the church because, in the first place, it gets the true order of things entirely the wrong way round. What a mistake. The contrary is true: you can't get into the church unless you're first saved. And if there were no salvation outside it, you'd never be in it. Let me show that my contention is true to Scripture.

We read that familiar story of Peter's encounter with the Lord Jesus (see Matt 16:13–20). He came to our Lord as Simon, and our Lord, looking on him as he approached said, 'You are Simon and shall be called Cephas', which is Aramaic for *Petros*, which happened to be Greek, meaning 'a stone' (see John 1:42). That's an odd thing to say to anybody, but there it is! When Simon came to Christ, and received Christ, and Christ received him, Simon was given a name that wasn't just prettier than the one he had before, but a new name significant of a new life and character. Incidentally, that's why you have a Christian name, if you've got one. If you do have a Christian name, I hope it means what it appears to say.

When the missionaries preached the gospel to the pagans, and they received Christ and were born again, some early Christians were in the habit of giving these new converts a new name, a Christian name. Why? Because, before they received Christ, they only had one life, one ordinary human nature. When they received Christ, they received a new life and with it a new nature, and became what they never were before: children of God. In recognition now that there was something there that was never there before—a new life, eternal life—they gave them another name. And that's what happened to Peter. He came as Simon, he met the Saviour, he received the Saviour and the Saviour received him, and our Lord gave him a new name.

It is, of course, possible to have a Christian name nowadays and the whole thing be a sham, because you have never received a new life. You've never really been born. Peter, in his first letter, indicates that his experience was not meant to be unique to him. He says to his fellow Christians, 'As you come to him, [that is, to the Lord Jesus] . . . you yourselves ['ye also' in KJV and in original, meaning you as well as me] like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house' (1 Pet 2:4–5). You see, when I came to Christ, I was made a living stone. When you came to Christ, you were made a living stone. Whatever for? You were turned into a living stone so that you could then be built up as a spiritual house. God is in the process of erecting a spiritual house. Another name for it is the church. Its architect's specifications specify that every stone in the building must be a living stone.

How do you become a living stone? One theory is that you get a lot of old dead stones and you build them into this building and hope that, by being in the building, they will one day emerge into living stones. That is a fallacy. The house has got to have living stones in it, that's what it's built of. How do you get the living stones? Well, you have first to make them living stones, and then they get put in the church. To say there's no salvation outside the church is,

therefore, nonsense, chronologically speaking. If you want a simple plain statement of Scripture, look at what happened on the day of Pentecost, and thereafter. As God added to the company of the believers, who did he add? 'And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved' (Act 2:47). The people as they got saved, that's who he added. That is the process.

Salvation—the start of the Christian journey

The other reason why the notion that there is no salvation outside the church is defective is that it springs from a defective view of salvation itself. Salvation in holy Scripture is a very wide term which covers a very large area—initial salvation, ongoing salvation, final salvation. But, alas, some people have the notion that, even salvation in the sense of acceptance with God, is a thing that lies at the end of the Christian road. They imagine salvation like a university degree course. If you want to take a degree in a university—I'm not doing a little bit of surreptitious advertising!—the first thing you have to do is to get into the university. That isn't always so very easy, but you'll not get a degree from a university without first getting into the university. Moreover, I must tell you that, if you do manage to get into a university, the mere getting in is no guarantee that you're going to get the degree at the end. Of course, it's a reasonable expectation. Doing the best you can—with exceedingly indulgent and helpful tutors, patient beyond all measurement, perhaps sympathetically minded!—you might at last get through. But no university that I know of will guarantee you a degree just by getting in and you'll have to wait until finals to know whether you've got it or not.

Many people suppose that salvation is like that. Do you want to be saved? First, you get into the church, and the church being kind and indulgent—almost as good as university lecturers!—will do its best with the various courses that it will put you through, to prepare you for finals. But whether you are at last saved or not, cannot be known until you pass finals. When they say there's no salvation outside the church, it's like we would say there's no getting a Queen's University degree outside Queen's. That is horribly mistaken. Salvation in the sense of acceptance with God lies not at the end of the journey, but at the beginning. All by God's great grace, the moment, in repentance and faith, I put my faith in God and receive the Saviour, I am justified, accepted with God, with entrance into the holiest of all, now and forthwith, and immediately. And I don't have to be in the church to get it. It is because I've got it that I then become part of the church.

Having said that, let me now emphasize the fact that, having received initial salvation—in terms of acceptance with God, entrance into the holiest of all, having been born again—I am alive with a new life. I am a living stone, I am now built in the building, that spiritual building. It is evident from Scripture that the church will now be used by God to further my ongoing salvation. Now I'm using the term 'salvation' in the sense in which Paul would talk in his Epistle to the Ephesians. We are in the body of Christ, and we are to grow up 'to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ' (Eph 4: 13). How shall we grow? 'The whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love' (v. 16). It is the plain fact that, having become a child of God, I shall find that some of God's grace comes to me directly. A great deal of God's grace comes to me indirectly through other

people—my fellow believers, the other members in the body of Christ. It is thus ordained of the Lord that it shall be so. I cannot say—or if I say it I’m foolish—that I do not need the church. God has set some in the church as apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers, for building up the body of Christ (see Eph 4:11–12). If I am to grow as God intends, much of the grace that he gives me, by which means I grow, will come to me indirectly through other members of the body of Christ. Then how shall we order the church so that it may fulfil its functions, and save it from imbibing all sorts of traditions that are harmful and would impede the very work it was meant to further?

To ask the question is, in part, to show the lines upon which the answers must go. In considering how we ought to run the churches, and to correct them when they’ve gone astray, we have to ask whether this structure or that arrangement fits in with God’s design for the ongoing salvation of his people. Does it fit in with God’s purpose in having a church? Consider that purpose how you will. Perhaps you say there are many such purposes. One of them is that we shall act as a dwelling place for God, a temple for his praise. The church must be organized so that it does not impede the purpose for which the church is constructed. Rather than theorize, let me take some examples, and what I propose to do is to look at some of the problems that afflicted the church at Corinth, so extraordinarily early in its history. I will not only remind you of the solutions—for I am persuaded you know off by heart both the problems and the solutions—but in reminding you of the problems and of the solutions, I want to point to the principles that underlie what Paul is saying, the kind of consideration he brings to bear upon the problem, that we might learn not only to obey what he says, but to copy him in our approach.

The importance of avoiding divisions in the church

In the first four chapters of his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul turns to that scandal that was beginning to develop among the Christians—that they were calling themselves after sundry, prominent Christian apostles and preachers, and thus dividing the believers into factions, each carrying the label of the name of a different preacher. I do not propose to talk at length on the wrong of it, though I have to confess to you that when I have been tempted at times to talk at length on this matter, good Christian friends whose judgment I, on the whole, admire, tell me that this is such a silly little matter that you waste your breath on it. ‘What’s in a name?’ they say, quoting Shakespeare or somebody to that effect. Now, listen, I want to come to the things of God. We’re prepared to dismiss this matter as a simple problem, but we wouldn’t dream of dismissing it at another level. What’s in a name? ‘Nothing much,’ some will say, ‘it doesn’t matter what you call yourself.’

Did I ever tell you—I suspect I did because I’m getting old and I repeat myself!—about that good woman, Mrs Smith? Excellent woman, she was. One night sitting by the fire with her husband, and cleaning out her handbag, she accidentally tipped the contents of it on the carpet. Mr Smith, being a gallant gentleman, rushed to help her to gather up the contents of this handbag and put them back. Presently, he came across what looked to him like a visiting card, and being rather rude, he read the name on it. It read ‘Mrs Fitzgerald-Smith’. ‘That’s interesting, my dear. She’s Fitzgerald-Smith, a double-barrelled Smith. Must be an important

Smith, I should think, not like us ordinary, plain Smiths. May I ask who this Mrs Fitzgerald-Smith is?’

‘Oh, it’s me,’ she said.

‘You? I didn’t know you were Fitzgerald-Smith.’

‘I’m not Fitzgerald-Smith.’

‘How then did you come to be Fitzgerald-Smith?’

‘Oh, you’ve forgotten who Fitzgerald was, I suppose. Don’t you remember when I was first introduced to you at that dance years ago? It was a man called Fitzgerald that introduced me to you.’

‘Well, so what?’

‘Oh, well, there are lots of Smiths about and I thought it would be nice for people to know which Smith I am, if I also took the name of the man that led me to you. So I called myself, not just Mrs Smith, but Mrs Fitzgerald-Smith.’

What do you suppose Mr Smith would say? ‘Oh, excellent idea, my good, dear wife.’ No, he wouldn’t, or if he did, he’s a weakling of a husband. But if he were jealous, he’d tear the card up and put it in the fire and forbid her to print another such.

And I tell you, the Lord our God is a jealous God and he won’t have you putting somebody else’s name alongside his, not even to distinguish you from some other Christian. How will Paul answer the problem? ‘This isn’t a little matter,’ says Paul, ‘because allowing yourself to take all these names conflicts with the very basis of the gospel.’ First of all, it detracts from the unique glory of the Lord Jesus and from what is the basis of salvation. If I asked you to tell me what the basis of salvation is, you would immediately say, ‘It is that Christ was crucified for me’. Was Paul crucified for you by any chance? No, but you would say that it was Paul who brought you the gospel message and told you about the cross. So he may have done, but telling you about the cross is one thing, being crucified for you is utterly a different thing. If you called yourself after Paul, it clouds the unique glory of Jesus Christ as our Saviour.

Assurance of salvation

What else does it do? It conflicts with the deliberate strategy of God that is aimed at our salvation. Tell me, how did you manage to get into Jesus Christ. You are in Jesus Christ, I hope. How did you manage to get into Jesus Christ? You say, ‘I’ll tell you, actually. There came to the place where I live a very clever man. He had such a logical brain, and he argued so finely and insistently that he destroyed all my doubts, and he put me in Christ, and I’ve been a Christian ever since.’ Well, I’m very sorry to hear that, for one simple reason. One of these days there’ll come to you a cleverer brain. He’ll have what seems like even better logic, and he’ll be an atheist or agnostic, and he’ll take you out of Christ. So if one person puts you in and another will take you out, how are you in Christ? The apostle says that it is because of God that you are in Christ Jesus (see 1 Cor 1:29–30). God put you in, and for that reason God will not share his glory with anybody else. It is basic to your salvation that you should see that you are in Christ, not because of somebody’s wisdom or because of somebody’s riches, or because of somebody’s anything. No flesh shall have the glory of having put you into Christ, only God himself—that your faith might be in the power of God, and in nothing else. Don’t you go and confuse it by labelling yourself after some Christian teacher.

To organize our churches under some label—whether of some man or some doctrine or whatever—other than the name of Christ, conflicts with what the Holy Spirit is trying to do. ‘Why are you so like babes,’ says Paul, ‘when it comes to spiritual things. You’re like a lot of little infants, instead of having grown able to take solid food for your spiritual diet’ (see 1 Cor 3:1–3). What went wrong with you? You began to put your faith in men, brilliant preachers and teachers. You’ve got your eyes off the only true source of spiritual growth, which is the Holy Spirit himself.

No one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. (1 Cor 2:11–12)

We shall only understand them as the Holy Spirit takes the things of God and reveals them to us. Sure, he will use brilliant preachers and, otherwise, he will use veritable donkeys. (Don’t ask me how I know, but I do know! But then also it is written in Scripture that on one occasion God did use a donkey, so I take courage!) Whether we put our faith in the donkey or the brilliant preacher, we lose that sense of immediate dependence upon the Holy Spirit and we are on the way to spiritual poverty and stunted growth. ‘It matters,’ says Paul. You mustn’t go and organize your churches even in such an apparently innocent thing as the taking of names. You mustn’t organize them in such a way as derogates from the unique glory of Christ or stands opposed to God’s deliberate strategy, or takes people’s attention from the blessed Holy Spirit.

The importance of church discipline

Then let’s take another problem that arose in this church. Immorality, so we are told in chapter 5, broke out in the church of Corinth. So much so that the Gentiles living around were absolutely shocked—such immorality as was not heard of even among the Gentiles. What is to be done and why should you do it? Well, what is to be done, according to chapter 5, is that the sorry man who had done this thing was to be delivered unto Satan. Such people were to be judged.

When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord. . . . now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard or swindler—not even to eat with such a one. (1 Cor 5:4–5, 11)

Now there are some people that have argued very sincerely that church discipline and ex-communication is a thing that oughtn’t to happen. They have argued this on the basis of our Lord’s famous parable of the weeds and the wheat, in which our Lord likened the kingdom of God to the fields in which God planted good seed. But when the good seed was sown, the enemy sowed weeds, and presently they both began to grow. The servants enquired of the Master, ‘Lord, shall we root out the weeds?’ He said, ‘No, let them both grow together until harvest. Don’t try and root out the weeds lest in rooting them out, you root out the wheat as

well' (see Matt 13:24–30). Many have sincerely thought that that is a direction for how we ought to behave in the churches: we should not attempt to ex-communicate people whose lives are in this grievous state, lest in rooting out, we root out genuine believers.

In such a context, I must speak with all reverence and humility. I shall take a view that that is a misinterpretation of the parable. First of all, our Lord wasn't talking about the church, he was talking about the world. 'The field,' said he, as he interpreted the parable, 'is the world,' not the church. Secondly, his prohibition, 'Don't root out the weeds,' was addressed not to elders of the Christian church, but to the angels responsible for the final judgment. When, at last, command is given that the weeds be rooted out, it will be the angels that come and do the rooting out, not the elders of the church. And when they're rooted out, they're consigned to the furnace. What our Lord is saying is that in the field of this world, there are genuine believers. Yes, there are other hypocrites, but the final judgment is not yet. The final judgment shall not come until the end of the age. God does not propose to institute the judgment now. They'll both go on together until the harvest.

In contrast, Paul is not talking about the world. In fact, he expressly excludes it. 'For what have I to do with judging outsiders? . . . God judges those outside' (1 Cor 5:12–13). Our responsibility, he says, is to judge those inside the church. Why must we do that—sad and sorry thing as it is? Paul answers it by appealing once more to an aspect of our salvation. He reminds them in verses 7–8 that Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed for us. He is, of course, referring by analogy to the Passover in ancient Israel when Israel were delivered out of the land of Egypt by being sheltered from the wrath of God through the blood of the Passover lamb. In similar but higher fashion, we too have been delivered: we too have a Passover lamb, our blessed Lord Jesus Christ who died for us, that by his blood we might be saved from the wrath of God. Yes, but in Israel that wasn't the whole story. In Israel, if you were true to God's directive, you could not be redeemed unless simultaneously you were prepared forthwith to keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread. There was no Passover redemption that left it as an option whether you would keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread or not. To this day, Jews who observe the regulation keep the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread together, without a gap between them. And that, Paul indicates, is a divinely given parable as to how we are to behave.

Redemption through the blood of Christ brings with it immediately—not as an optional extra, but as an integral part of the deal—that we keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread, not now literally, purging literal leaven from our houses as do the Jews, but spiritually, from the church, as indeed from our lives, seeing to it that the old leaven is cast out. Why is that important? I submit to you it is for the very sake of the gospel. You're a Christian church, you preach the gospel, you profess to get folks converted. Here is a man in your church—not in your church for your church would never have any such person—in this hypothetical church, who, it's rumoured about town, makes his money out of keeping a brothel. Well, if he's a big boy in the business community who has a lot of money to spend, and he supports the church, you say, 'We can't turn him out.' Well, you'd better stop preaching the gospel then. For if the gospel your church—this hypothetical church—preaches is that being redeemed by the blood of Christ permits church members to indulge in such anti-social sins, who's going to believe your gospel?

That's why Paul was getting so very upset. They were allowing immorality in the church such as even shocked the Gentiles. How many Gentiles were going to get converted after that and listen to the gospel, if that's what the gospel meant? The church discipline is there, not to reinforce some exclusive, rigid, heartless regime, but first for the sake of the gospel, and then for the sake of the man who is dealt with. For if he is a believer, then if all else has failed, may this succeed: the discipline might lead to the destruction of the flesh that his spirit be saved in the day of the Lord (see 1 Cor 5:5).

Bought with a price

Talking about things less severe but serious enough, Paul continues the same thesis in chapter 6 on this same matter of immorality. It is a mark, perhaps, of how the gospel has progressed in our country—or used to progress, or once did progress, I don't know how to put it—that in these parts everybody recognizes that fornication is wrong. Or do they? Well, I say that because in Greece, they hadn't a clue it was wrong and the apostles had to tell converts in the church that fornication was wrong. People had never heard such a thing, half of them. They had to be told. On what grounds would Paul forbid it? Again he would take the thing back to the principles of salvation themselves. 'Have you been redeemed by the blood of your great Passover lamb?' Listen to what happened at the exodus when Israel was redeemed. At that time the wrath of God hung over the head of every firstborn in Egypt. If an Israelite firstborn had not been protected with the blood of the Passover lamb, that night he must have perished under the wrath of the angel of God. He was as good as dead, had it not been that the lamb died instead of him. Said God, 'From now on, I claim that firstborn as my own. He owes his life to me. I claim then every firstborn that opens the womb as mine on the grounds of redemption' (see Exod 13:2). Why may I not commit fornication? Why must the church take a tough line on this? 'Because,' says Paul, 'if you have been redeemed, you are not your own. You have been bought with a price.' The body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. You are a living stone in the very temple of God (see 1 Cor 6:12–20).

One body

Let us not dwell merely on negative things. Let us dwell on positive things. How shall we order our churches? When it comes to the ministry of the church, does it matter? Well, yes, of course it matters, because the church is meant to reflect what the salvation of God has achieved and is achieving. No organization, therefore, of my church ought knowingly to impede what God himself is doing. What did God do when he saved us? Well, among all the other things, he did this.

For in one Spirit you were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. (1 Cor 12:13)

Thus, you were implanted into the very body of Christ, that wonderful, glorious reality that God is in the process of making these days. A new thing, that marvellous thing that you will not read of until the day of Pentecost, in which real human personalities are taken up into the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit is put into them—so they are in the Holy Spirit and the

Holy Spirit is in them. By that means, they are formed into one body, still being individual personalities, but now part of something that is more than an individual personality. Just as my members form one body because they each share the same life, so you and I are in the same body, whether you like it or not. You can't do anything about it for Christ has put you in his Holy Spirit, and his Holy Spirit in you, by his grace. That is astounding but it is a fact. By his grace he has taken me up into his Holy Spirit and put the Holy Spirit in me. Between me and you, and around me, and in us both, is that same life of Christ.

That's what salvation has done. And why did God do it? Because he wanted a body through which Christ could express himself, through the members. He who made our human bodies with the intention that each member should function, has created the body of Christ with that same intention that each should function according to his gift. And thus, I suggest we must see to it that, in the organization of our churches, we encourage and do not impede the function of each gift, and each member according to his gift.

Conclusion

My time is gone, but I trust I have made my general thesis clear. To dwell a fraction longer on that last observation, my being a member of the body of Christ is a direct and immediate result of my salvation. My functioning as a member of the body of Christ is important to my spiritual growth and, therefore, to my ongoing salvation. If I don't function, I shall be stunted, just as my right arm would be stunted if I never used it. My thesis, therefore, is simply this. If we would be true to God's word and our Lord's example, we must in these days examine our traditions again, and hold fast those traditions that come to us from the Lord himself through his apostles: hold them fast and tenaciously. And, on the other hand, any traditions that we find do not come from him, and go against his word or even contradict it, must resolutely be put aside. Then, in that context, as we come to face the matter of our churches in our modern century, we will order them in such a way as to ensure that they fulfil the glorious purpose God intends for them.

About the Author

DAVID W. GOODING is Professor Emeritus of Old Testament Greek at Queen's University, Belfast and a member of the Royal Irish Academy. He has taught the Bible internationally and lectured on both its authenticity and its relevance to philosophy, world religions and daily life. He has published scholarly articles on the Septuagint and Old Testament narratives, as well as expositions of Luke, John, Acts, Hebrews, the New Testament's use of the Old Testament, and several books addressing arguments against the Bible and the Christian faith. His analysis of the Bible and our world continues to shape the thinking of scholars, teachers and students alike.