

May 2015

Editor, Keith Sharp

Designer, William Stewart



(unless otherwise noted, answers to questions by Keith Sharp)

In This Issue...

- Question from Ethiopia about Prayer
- A Young Soul Winner (Jefferson David Tant)
- "I Go to Prepare a Place for You" (Tanner Campbell)
- The Church Which Is His Body (Patrick Farish)
- Mark Well Her Bulwarks (No. 4) (Tommy Thornhill)
- No Room For Christ (Jim Mickells)
- The Importance of Words & Context (William J. Stewart)
- Elders, Take Heed Unto Yourselves (Sean P. Cavender)
- Pluck Out Your Eye (Mike Thomas)
- Why Are so Many Souls Rejecting God's Word, Who Desperately Need it to be Saved? (David L. Cooper)
- In-Law Issues (William J. Stewart)
- The Vine and the Branches (Keith Sharp)

Finally, brethren

**WHATEVER
THINGS**

are true

are noble

are just

are pure

are lovely

are of good report

IF THERE IS ANY VIRTURE AND IF THERE IS ANYTHING PRAISEWORTHY –
meditate on these things.

**PHILIPPIANS
4:8**

You can download this month's Meditate On These Things as a PDF file by clicking [here](#). Also, an archive of past MOTT issues is available at christstheway.com.

*Central to unity in Christ is honesty and integrity in all things, especially the spiritual things which we share in Christ. (C.G. "Colly" Caldwell, **Truth Commentaries: Ephesians**. 209).*

*It means that kind of talk which is insipid, senseless, stupid, foolish; which is not suited to instruct, edify, profit - the idle "chitchat" which is so common in the world. The meaning is, that Christians should aim to have their conversation sensible, serious, sincere - remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, 'that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment,' Matthew 12:36 (Albert Barnes, **Notes on the New Testament**, comment on the phrase "foolish talking" in Ephesians 5:4).*

*The book of Daniel informs us that only God holds the key to the future (Daniel H. King, Sr., **Truth Commentaries "The Book of Daniel**. 184).*

Question from Nigeria about Matthew 11:12

Question

My question is about prayer.

When Christian women perform a bible study if a Christian man is there in the midst of them for some reason, is it wrong or right a woman prays? Please let me have your doctrinal answer.

Answer

Women may not teach over or in any other way be over a man in the local church (1 Corinthians 11:3; 14:34-35; 1 Timothy 2:11-12). Everything that is done in the worship assembly is to edify (1 Corinthians 14:26) including prayer (1 Corinthians 14:15). Thus, the one who leads in prayer edifies, i.e., teaches. By definition, the one who leads is over the others. Thus, if a woman leads a prayer with a man present, she is teaching over the man. In the situation you describe, the man should either lead the prayer or leave so a woman may.

A Young Soul Winner

Jefferson David Tant | Roswell, Georgia, USA

"Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19) Nancy Harber was only 14 (well, almost 15), and at this young age had already experienced one of the greatest joys of life—something that many members of the church will not experience in a lifetime. Let me tell you about it.

Many years ago I was with the Hazelwood church in St. Louis at a gospel meeting. On Monday evening Nancy Harber invited one of her school friends over to have dinner and attend services with us. Candy had never attended services before, but she knew something about the church, because Nancy had been talking to her at school.

We had a pleasant visit at dinner (the Harbers were my hosts for the week). After church Candy expressed an interest in returning the next evening. Also at the service Monday night was Robyn, another school friend of Nancy's. Robyn had been attending services for the past few months—also at Nancy's invitation. After services Tuesday night, Candy had some questions for me concerning differences between the Lord's church and the denomination of which she was a member. We talked for a good while. In the meantime, I was also becoming acquainted with Robyn, as we provided transportation for her most every night.

Candy could not return until Friday night, but Robyn came each night. After giving careful thought to the lesson Friday night, Candy told Nancy during the invitation song that she wanted to be baptized, but wanted to wait until next week. Nancy replied, "There may not be a next week." She then turned to the song, "Why Not Tonight," and asked Candy to read the words. Candy then came forward to request baptism. There was much rejoicing, both on Candy's part and on the part of the disciples there. Many tears of joy were evident.

Then we returned to the home of Bob and Brooksie Harber to engage in a late-evening Bible study with Candy and Robyn. We had barely gotten started when Robyn expressed her desire to be baptized also. We went back to the church building to assist her in her obedience to the gospel of Christ. More rejoicing. Then back to the house for more Bible study.

You know what Nancy's great joy was, don't you? If you have never won a soul to Christ, let me tell you that it is truly one of the greatest joys you can possibly experience. There is no way to describe it adequately.

Nancy Harber was a lovely girl. Not just because she had lovely red hair and a radiant smile, but because she was a soul winner for Jesus Christ. She knew what it was to "remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth." She was not ashamed to stand up for Jesus and let others know she was a Christian. She was not afraid to talk to her friends about the Bible. She did not let school activities or social life interfere with seeking first the kingdom of God. Therefore, her example was consistent with her teaching. Thanks to this, two 15-year-old girls were cleansed from their sins by the precious blood of Christ.

Thanks, Nancy, for the encouragement you have given me, and for the example you set before all who may read this. I hope this publicity will not embarrass you too much. And thanks to you, Nancy's parents, for the example and training you have given to your children. May your tribe increase. Nancy is now Nancy Picogna, the wife of Greg. They are the faithful parents of four.

Young readers, truly “the fields are white unto harvest,” even among your schoolmates. Are you taking advantage of the wonderful opportunities?

"I Go To Prepare a Place for You"

Tanner Campbell | Rapid City, South Dakota, USA

"In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you." There is no doubt in my mind that the text of John 14:2 is a favorite among the saints, and without contest it is very clear from the surface that it is a verse with a very high and great theme. But what exactly is that theme? If we considered not the context of these great words, then we'd all most likely come to the conclusion that the subject of the verse is heaven. Of course, heaven is a grand theme, indeed, but is it the grand theme that the verse has in mind? Without a thought anymore to what we all have in mind about this text, let's take close consideration to what Jesus had in mind when He spoke these great words.

The Context:

The setting of these words is within the upper room, where Jesus gives His final instructions and exhortations to this apostles before He is taken into custody, crucified, buried in a tomb only to be raised from the dead three days later. His words to them reflect what He knows He must soon go through. His words are at first a very distressing shock to the apostles, as he speaks of his departure, but worse, of the fact that they cannot follow Him (John 13:33). What a depressing thought, that these apostles, who have been with Him day after day for the sum of three years, could not follow Him where He is now going. It was crushing. Jesus was their life; and their life consisted of walking in His steps literally, and leaning upon His every word. For them to hear Him say, “where I am going, you cannot come,” was no small matter of devastation for them.

Jesus, understanding the distress the apostles were in, proceeds with a purpose to comfort them. He explains to them that His leaving will not be long term, but that they will follow Him afterward (John 13:36). He tells them, in 14:1, to not be troubled about these things, but to trust Him and what He must do. The consoling words continue into verse two, where He paints a picture of His Father's house and the many mansions therein. This is not a new subject but a continuation of the context. What do these images mean? Let's break them down one by one.

In My Father's House:

What is the house of God? Heaven, of course! Where did we obtain such an answer? Was it from God's word? Friends, if we would only look to the bible, we would quickly find that the house of God is never identified as heaven. Therefore, as Jesus enters into a discussion here about the house of God, it would be a mistake for us to consider this to be a text about heaven. It's not about heaven; it's about the house of God. So then, what is the house of God?

This is not the first time that Jesus has spoken about His Father's house. In this same book of John, Jesus earlier had cast out the money changers in the temple saying “do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise.” The exact same statement: “My Father's house,” used by the exact same person, therefore this is certainly not two different houses in discussion.

The rest of the bible is in harmony with the identity of the house of God that Jesus spoke of. In 1 Peter 4:16-17, Peter says “yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter. For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?” What was once a literal structure under the old covenant, the house of God, is now inhabited by the Christians. Further, we hear from Paul on this matter, when writing to Timothy, he states: “but if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15). There can then be no doubt as to the identity of the house of God, it is without question the church. How then did this house go from a literal structure in Jerusalem to a depiction of the church? Hebrews 10:19-21 explains the answer very well. “Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest over the house of God.” Notice how the writer speaks still of the house of God in existence, however, something has changed. While under the old covenant, no man could enter into the holiest place of the temple that lay beyond the veil, except for the high priest

alone, and even he could go behind the veil only once a year and not without a blood sacrifice to sprinkle over the mercy seat. But now, the “brethren,” i.e., the Christians, have “boldness to enter the Holiest.” What is referred to in this verse is a relationship like no other found in the house of God before Christ. That even we could go behind the veil to be in the presence of Almighty God! How could we obtain such a position of holiness? By becoming holy! By having our sins washed away in order to be holy, blameless, and able to stand with boldness in such close proximity to the presence of God. The Hebrew writer is very clear as to how the “brethren” reached such a relationship with God, it was only “by the blood of Jesus,” and to pass through the veil, we must pass through by the sacrifice of His flesh. There is no other way to reach this position save through the flesh and blood of Christ.

Are Many Mansions:

If you are reading from either the **KJV** or the **NKJV**, you will see this wonderful word “Mansions,” but most other English translations do not contain this word. The Reason behind that is simple, when the **KJV** was published in the year 1611, the word “mansion” had no lofty definition but simply meant “a dwelling place.” And the word that Jesus originally used: *mone*, meant just that: “a staying, abiding, dwelling, abode; to make an abode” (**Thayer’s Greek to English Lexicon of the New Testament**). So this removes the fancy wrapping behind our heavenly fantasies of mansions, and limits our understanding of the word to a dwelling place. The Greek word that Jesus used (*mone*), is actually used only twice in the bible, here in verse 2, and one more time within this same chapter and context, in verse 23: “Jesus answered and said to him, ‘If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him.’” In this place, the word is translated “home,” and the sense of the text is that one would be able to abide or dwell with God if he loves the Lord and keeps His commandments. But how could one be at “home” with God and He with them? How is it possible seeing that we are sinners?

I Go to Prepare a Place for You:

Understand so far that the church would soon be the inhabitants, or dwellers in the house of God and that it would no longer be considered a physical structure in the city of Jerusalem and an unreachable place of holiness for us to dwell while we remain with our sins, but it would be a house where God makes His home with us and we with Him. So now we move on to the preparation phase for such a dwelling in the presence of God to be possible. Jesus’ use of the word “prepare” is most fascinating. In A.T. Robertson’s book **Word Pictures in the New Testament**, he notes that this word “prepare” used here, means “to make ready.” He goes on further saying that “it was customary to send one forward for such a purpose.” From the context, what was Jesus going to prepare? A place for them. A place for them to dwell with God in His house. A place for them in the church of the living God. A place for them to abide in holiness in the holiest place: in God’s presence. What He went to prepare was a means by which these apostles (and so many others to come) could enjoy a relationship with the heavenly Father. If that’s what He means by “prepare a place,” where then is He going?

I Go to the Cross

Jesus has been speaking all along about the fact that He will soon be leaving them, and the way in which He was to do that was the cross. There could be no other way that these men could enter into the holiest of the house of God. Jesus must go, He must go to the cross in order “to make ready,” just as the Hebrew writer spoke of what the “brethren” now have because of Christ, and he states that it is “by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh” (Hebrews 10:20). This way to the holy relationship that the brethren share with God was only possible because Jesus went to the cross to make this way ready for us. He further states in the context: “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6).

Is John 14:2 a beautiful text about mansions in heaven? No, but it is a beautiful text nonetheless. These are the words recorded of Jesus explaining to His apostles what He must accomplish for them, and indeed for all who would love Him and keep His commandments (John 14:23).

Paul, To The Ephesians | Ephesians 1:22-23

The Church Which Is His Body

Patrick Farish | Lancaster, Texas, USA

“And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.”

The illustration here, of the church as the body of Christ, is most effective; Paul expands on it in Romans 12, and at more length in I Corinthians 12. The church is a body. Christ is its Head, and Christians its members. As the human body is composed of members who, at least theoretically, are responsive to the demands of the head; so the church's members are responsive to the directions of the Head, Jesus Christ. If the head of the human body determines to do this, that or the other, the members of that body respond to that instruction -- if they are healthy. The comparison is "spot-on", as the young folk tell us ...

We can apply this illustration to the way we treat each other. If I hit my finger with a hammer, it is not ignored, but rather soothed in the best way available. If I am trying to lift something that's too heavy for one hand, my other hand will join in to get the job done. If I have an itch, I scratch it -- without even thinking about it, most of the time. Members of the human body are sympathetic to the needs and hurts of other members. Members of the church should imitate that.

Paul writes that the Father put all things under the feet of the Son, Who had said that "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Matthew 28:18). That being so, what legislative power remains for a pope, or a cult, or any other would-be "leader" to exert? Man has not learned this lesson. What innovation has occurred apart from disregard for the authority of Jesus? He is the Head of the body, the church; and if you want to keep yourself from being cut off, you need to be listening to that Head, and complying with His wishes.

The body of Christ is "the fullness of him who fills all in all." If God the Father is the One who "fills all in all," all the things that are characteristic of the Father are found in the Son; He is perfectly and completely "God", "For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily" (Colossians 2:9); "in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell" (Colossians 1:19). In Ephesians 4:11-13 Paul writes of the provisions made for spiritual growth (apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds and teachers) in the direction of mature manhood; and then in verses 14-16 the result of these provisions, "when each part is working properly makes the body grow ...". Between the statements about the provision made, and the end sought, he speaks of the goal: "to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ".

We should try to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ.

Mark Well Her Bulwarks - No. 4

Tommy Thornhill | Etna, Arkansas, USA

After firmly establishing the central bulwark, "God's word as the church's only and final authority," we now notice a second bulwark that must be marked and protected if a church intends to remain the Lord's church. It is that of the church's organization and its work. God planned the church for a definite task -- to make known "God's manifold wisdom" to those in "the heavenly places," and to this sinful world Ephesians 3:10.

The church came from the hand of God and was established in perfection and purity Ephesians 5:25-27. He fully equipped it to do every work for which it was planned. It was, and still is, all-sufficient to do the work God gave it to do. The church of Christ is the only one planned by God and there is no scriptural authority for establishing any other organization to help in the work God assigned the church. This bulwark of God is to let the church be the church, and let the church do its own work. There is a great need to implant the truth about the work of the church today. I was amazed years ago when I first began preaching to learn that so many members of the church did not understand the true reason for the church's existence. Sadly, they still don't. Even today many members still don't understand. Some seem to believe that any good work is the work of the church - secular education, recreation, social activities for young and old, taking care of all the starving and needy of the world, etc. These are all good works of men, and can do done by Christians as individuals, but not through the church.

What is the work of the church? The ultimate, divine purpose of the church is to glorify God (Ephesians 3:21). The church does not exist to glorify men, or illuminate some human scheme or human organization. God assigned the church a fourfold work. 1. To preach the gospel to the lost (evangelism). In preaching one reveals the manifold wisdom of God using His message of salvation to save (1 Corinthians 1:18, 21), not to teach a scheme of human origin. The church is "the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:15), the guardian and protector of the truth, not the formulator of truth. 2. The church is to edify the saints (edification) (Ephesians 4:11-16). That is why we have Bible classes and teaching to encourage members to study, learn, and grow to maturity (2 Timothy 2:15; Hebrews

5:12-14). 3. To help the church to care for its own needy saints (benevolence) (1 Corinthians 16:1-2; Romans 15:26). It is not assigned the task of caring for the needy of the world. 4. To worship God in public and in private (John 4:23-24). In reality no 2 and 4 can be combined with evangelism, subdivisions so to speak (Matthew 28:19). Teach them, baptize them, teach the baptized to observe all things commanded.

As we continue to mark this bulwark, the organization of the church, we note that the local congregation is the only unit or organization through which the church universal operates (Philippians 1:1). The church universal has no function other than being the body of all the saved in the world. Some want to deny that the New Testament makes a distinction between the church universal and the church local, but those who deny it fail to study the scriptures carefully. By simple observation one notices that several of the epistles are addressed to churches meeting in various cities. This makes it clear there is a difference between the church universal which exists as a relationship, and the local congregations that function in carrying out the work God has assigned to His people. This is the only way the church (always think people) is able to function, through local groups or congregations meeting in specific locations.

And there are no arrangements for anything larger or smaller than the local congregation. Furthermore, the local congregation is autonomous (self-governing). This autonomy has three phases. Independent organization, the local congregation. Independent government, with elders in the local church, when qualified (Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-11), to take care of affairs in their own congregation. There is no extension of its leadership to govern over any other congregation (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2-3). Independent function (no other agency, be it church or organization, through which the church is to function). The church functions directly to the object of its work. If the object is preaching, support is sent directly to the preacher. If it is the relief of a congregation in want, it sends directly to the church, not another agency. This plan was devised by God and revealed to us in His word. Since God designed the church to do its own work, it is all-sufficient to do so. The church is not sufficient to do every good work in the world – it was never designed for such. But it is sufficient to do the work God assigns it to do. God help us to mark well this bulwark – no organization but the church – that you may tell it to the generation following.

No Room For Christ

Jim Mickells | Lewisburg, Tennessee, USA

"Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child. So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn" (Luke 2:4-7).

Just as there was no room in the inn for Christ when He was born, there is still little or no room for Him in the lives of many individuals today. How many people do you know that accept the historical fact that Jesus was a real person, who walked upon this earth, even believing He was the Son of God, yet they reject His word? They don't deny His deity, His power to have worked miracles, His resurrection from the dead, and the fact of His reigning in heaven at this present time. But how many individuals allow Him room to dwell in their hearts by faith, ruling over their lives, by submitting to His word?

Can you have Christ and His spiritual blessings, without being obedient to His word? No! Notice the connection Jesus made between Him and His words. "He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him—the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day" (John 12:48). If you reject what He has said, then you have rejected Him. You can't be His disciple without knowing and abiding in His truth (John 8:31-32). It is written on a level so man can know and understand what He has said to us. Yet obedience has always been required by God (Hebrews 5:8-9). Do you have room for His word in your life?

If I truly have room in my life for the Lord, it means I'm willing to give up the practice of sin. Paul, in writing to the Corinthians, commended them for no longer being fornicators, adulterers, homosexuals, etc., stating they had been washed, sanctified, and now justified through Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 6:9-11). When Peter wrote his first epistle to the pilgrims of the Dispersion (1:1), he reminded them of how they had spent enough time fulfilling the

lust of flesh, doing the will of Gentiles. The rest of their time on earth was to be expended doing the will of God (1 Peter 4:1-4). If you have room for the Lord, there is no room for the practice of sin. Light and darkness do not occupy the same space at the same time. Make room for righteous living.

Not only will one give up the practice of sin, but he will be busy growing and serving the Lord. If you don't have the time (or take the time) to grow and serve Jesus, then you have no room for Him. It takes time and effort for one to mature in Christ. Is there room in your life for Bible study (2 Timothy 2:15; 1 Timothy 4:13-15); for prayer (1 Thessalonians 5:17; Luke 18:1); for putting on the spiritual armor (Ephesians 6:11-18); for worship (John 4:23-24); and for serving our great God on a daily basis (Luke 9:23-26)? Paul said, "See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil" (Ephesians 5:15-16). Satan is trying to destroy us (1 Peter 5:8), so we need to be strong in the Lord to overcome his efforts (Ephesians 6:10-11).

Some have room, just not very much. In the parable of the sower, the seed which fell among the thorns describes the hearts of people who "when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity" (Luke 8:14). This portrays far too many Christians in churches scattered throughout the world. They have some time to assemble for worship, but not for every service (Hebrews 10:25). They can return a very small portion of what the Lord has blessed them with, but not as they have truly prospered (2 Corinthians 9:6-8). They have a feeling of sympathy for the sick, but there is no time to visit or help (Matthew 25:31-46). They know many people who are lost, even family and friends, and yet neither find the time nor are they willing to exert the effort to teach them the gospel so they can be saved (2 Timothy 2:2). Worldliness has such a prominent place in their heart and there is very little room for the Lord.

Do you have any room for Christ? What place does He occupy in your life? How much time do you spend reading about Him in His word each week? How often do you talk to Him in prayer? When it comes time to worship Him in the public assembly, where will you be? If there is a need for a good deed in your community, will you step up and do what needs to be done? When someone needs to hear about the Savior, will you be the one that speaks up? Make room in your heart and life for Him every day!

Is That Really What It Means?

The Importance of Words & Context

William J. Stewart | Kingston, Ontario, Canada

"Inconceivable!" If you have seen the movie *The Princess Bride*, you recognize this as the word used repeatedly by Viizzini, a witty Sicilian criminal mastermind. After hearing his boss use it several times, the hired swordsman, Inigo Montoya declared, *"You keep using that word. I don't think it means what you think it means."* There have been times I've had the same thought about how folks use the Bible - *"...I don't think that verse means what you think it means."*

Words are important. In fact, I'm not sure the word important is emphatic enough to convey what I'm trying to say. Critical. Essential. Necessary, Vital. Paramount. Imperative. Words are the vehicle of communication; so we must use them correctly and with integrity. What do I mean by that? You and I do not have the right to redefine a word so it will mean what we want it to mean. Doing so is void of honesty, is intentionally deceptive, and leads to misunderstanding, falsehood, and division.

Most people in my generation will recall an infamous statement made by President Bill Clinton, when he appeared before the Grand Jury. Having been asked about an affidavit given by his attorney about Clinton's relationship with Monica Lewinsky, the President said: *"It depends upon what the meaning of the word 'is' is."* You don't have to be a linguistic expert to see that he was playing word games in an attempt to avoid the question posed to him.

Sadly, such dishonest use of language happens in religious conversations as well. Now, don't mistake what I am saying. There is nothing wrong with basing an argument on the meaning of a word. In fact, Jesus' case for being deity in John 10:31-36 relies on the meaning of a phrase in Psalm 82:6. In Matthew 22:29-32, the Lord affirmed life after death based on the tense of a word used in Exodus 3:6. Words are important. Arguments, biblical and otherwise, depend upon words and their meaning.

When people redefine words and base arguments on their own definitions, it's difficult, dare I say, impossible to

have a reasonable conversation. Several words are often misused by religious folks today. We'll not take the time to delve into the misuses here, but simply give a short list of examples: church, baptism, faithful, pastor, elder, saved, Sabbath, priest, anointing, elect, calling, etc.. It will be hard to agree on what the Bible says if we cannot agree on what the terms used in it mean. It's time to stop redefining terms, and to seek to know how they were used by the Bible writers.

As important (critical, essential, necessary, etc. - you get the picture) as the meaning of words are, we must also respect the context in which words or statements are found. When someone feels compelled to ignore context, they have opened the door to deceit and falsehood.

In May 2013, a website associated with Sri Lanka's president quoted The Guardian US as saying, "Sri Lanka has everything to offer perfect holiday." Makes you think Sri Lanka might be a great vacation destination, right? But the original article reads like this: "Sri Lanka has the hotels, the food, the climate and the charm to offer the perfect holiday, says Ruaridh Nicoll. It's just a pity about the increasingly despotic government."

Context is key! Not a word was added to the original quote; but the words that were ignored make a huge difference. The same type of thing happens in Bible discussions. A number of doctrines find support by simply taking a single verse (or section of a verse) and building a case on it. Never mind the fact that the context might be saying the exact opposite, or that the original writer did not really support the resulting doctrine.

There are all kinds of examples to look at; and that is the very thing we will be doing in our series of articles. Some of the context capers we will look at are used to support various denominational teachings; some will sit a bit closer to home, as they have been misused by our brethren, possibly even we ourselves.

Sources:

- [The Guardian](#)
- [PresInform](#)

Elders, Take Heed Unto Yourselves

Sean P. Cavender | Raymore, Missouri, USA

As the apostle Paul was on his third preaching trip, he stopped to speak with the elders of the church in Ephesus. He warned those elders to "take heed," first and foremost "unto yourselves, and to all the flock." It is important to note that Paul was not only warning of dangers from within the church, but also from within the eldership!

Elders are to "take heed unto yourselves" just like preachers are commanded to take heed unto themselves and what they teach. Paul told Timothy, "Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine..." (1 Timothy 4:16). Sometimes churches have elders that are led astray, "falling into the condemnation of the devil" (1 Timothy 3:6).

It was at Ephesus that the apostle Paul left Timothy to work and exhort the brethren, not allowing any other doctrine to be taught (1 Timothy 1:3). He continued to warn Timothy of how to deal with elders who might sin. "Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses. Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear" (1 Timothy 5:19-20). Perhaps the qualifications that Paul gave Timothy in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 were given to serve as the litmus test to Timothy and even to faithful brethren of what an elder ought to be and continue to be. Those qualifications should give us an idea of what an elder is supposed to be and how he should behave himself in the household of God (1 Timothy 3:15). More often than not, we only examine these qualifications when churches are trying to find men that are qualified to serve as elders. We all but abandon the given qualifications to consider whether or not elders remain qualified to serve. Just as Paul wrote to Timothy, if an elder brings blame to himself, that accusation should be brought before witnesses and all of the congregation.

Something of importance to make mention of is that just as members of the local flock are to be in subjection to the elders (Hebrews 13:17) and the elders should receive support from the local church, that position of rule should never be abused. When communication is cut off, then elders cannot possibly expect the church to "jump on board" without any hesitation. Shepherds and bishops might complain or be disappointed that the flock does not submit to their rule as they ought to. Perhaps elders should consider if they communicated their thoughts to the congregation. Did they teach the church what the church ought to be doing? An elder must be "apt to teach."

He must be able to communicate!

Just as elders are given the position of authority and rule in the local church, when and if they sin, the sin is to be confirmed by witnesses and rebuke is to be public. The honor of having a position of rule also brings about times of public rebuke.

Peter warned of how elders would be in a position to become lords over the flock (1 Peter 5:3). What Peter reminds us is that shepherds are merely tending what God owns. They are stewards; they are servants (Titus 1:7). Bishops are in an important office, no doubt. They have heavy responsibilities. They are burdened with difficult tasks of teaching and defending the truth. They are even to use “sharp words” from time to time (Titus 1:10-13). Elders in the Lord’s church are also charged with encouraging brethren to be faithful. They are to be “lovers of good men” (Titus 1:8). They are to also be kind, given to hospitality (Titus 1:8).

Elders are those who have “been taught” (Titus 1:9). Just as important it is for elders to recognize that they are in a position to teach and defend the truth, it is equally important for them to remember that they were and continue to be learners. They have been taught by others. They are to treat their teachers with respect. And if they want to be given respect as a teacher, then they should “take heed unto thyself and unto the doctrine” (1 Timothy 4:16). If they “love good men” (Titus 1:8) as they should, then they will be influential on a whole other generation or two of elders, deacons, preachers and Christians.

Those who become “lords of the flock” will prove themselves to be self-willed (Titus 1:7). They will stop at nothing to get their way. If they are not satisfied with how things are going, then they will seek to turn the tables to their advantage. Their methodology will be to strike out against those who oppose them, or just those whom they perceive as a threat. Paul told Timothy a bishop was not to be “a striker.” That word means to be violent or a bully. Elders in the Lord’s church are never to become a striker, or a bully. When they do, it is certain that they have forgotten that they are a steward of God’s heritage, and they are no longer qualified to serve in this office.

Shepherds in the Lord’s church will always remain in a place of subjection and judgment by the Chief Shepherd. The Chief Shepherd will either grant unto all men, elders in the Lord’s church included, a crown of life, or everlasting destruction (cf. 1 Peter 5:4; 2 Corinthians 5:10).

Pluck Out Your Eye

Mike Thomas | Beaver Dam, Kentucky, USA

Jesus told people, “If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell” (Matthew 5:29). He said the same things regarding the hands and feet. From His perspective, it is “more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell” (verse 30). What did He mean by these statements?

For one, we can know He was not referring to actual body parts because these are not the problem with sin. A blind or physically impaired person can be just as immoral as a person with eyesight and full mobility. Physical dismemberment, especially of just the “right eye,” does not remove temptation and desire. Jesus said elsewhere: “For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies” (Matthew 15:19). Plus, our physical bodies will not be rewarded or punished with heaven or hell since they are temporary (1 Corinthians 15:50; 2 Corinthians 4:18). Obviously, then, Jesus had something else in mind when He encouraged us to lose one eye to save our body from hell.

Jesus was using our body to represent the liberties we have in life and the temptations we may face as a result of these abilities. Before He said to pluck out the eye, He said that “whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matthew 5:28). That is a very strict yet appropriate way to respond to sexual desire. It is a serious matter to God that we each learn to possess our own vessel and not be given to sexual immorality (1 Thessalonians 4:3-5). Since He expects us to control our heart and live holy as He is holy, we must give all diligence to remove anything that corrupts our heart or tempts us to sin — even if removing that influence will be as inconvenient as losing an eye, hand or foot. For some, it may mean a loss of internet service or certain cable channels. For others, it may mean avoiding particular people, getting new friends, or not taking certain jobs. We should remove anything that is a source of temptation or a stumbling block to holiness. It

may seem impossible at first to make these changes, but it is better to go through the difficulty of losing these liberties than to hold on to them and continually sin. "Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness" (Colossians 3:5). In plucking out these influences from our life, we will actually see more clearly and feel less enslaved to temptation. We will find true knowledge (Proverbs 1:7), health and strength (3:7-8), and come to understand that "the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding" (Philippians 4:7) is far more rewarding than the entanglements of sin.

Why Are so Many Souls Rejecting God's Word, Who Desperately Need it to be Saved?

David L. Cooper | Evening Shade, Arkansas, USA

I am saddened to tears, perplexed and amazed, horrified for consequences, and sometimes filled with godly indignation when I consider the lack of respect for God's Holy Word. It is the only way men can learn of their hope for eternal salvation, yet apathy, ignorance, and outright scorn are everywhere prevalent.

I am saddened to tears when I think of our Lord's ordeal to bring the Gospel to fruition for the salvation of mankind while that same mankind treat his word with loathing and contempt. I am further saddened when I consider the many souls that are never allowed to hear the true Gospel because of personal complacency (2 Timothy 4:3) or because they are trusting leaders who have no concept of the Word (2 Timothy 3:1-9).

I am perplexed and amazed when I consider the great love our Father exhibited in the sacrifice of his one faithful Son (John 3:16) or Christ's love in giving himself for us (John 15:12-13), yet I see those who cannot be touched by such love (1 John 4:19).

I am further horrified by the eternal consequences that people ignore with their disdain for God's saving text (2 Timothy 3:15). By rejecting our Lord's words they reject the only authority that can save them eternally. John the Baptist testified to this (John 3:31-36). Jesus proclaimed the same of himself (John 5:22-29). Jesus is alone the savior and judge of mankind (John 14:6; Acts 4:12; 17:30-31).

Like Jesus who twice cleared the Temple of God out of righteous indignation (John 2:13-17; Matt 21:13), I too burn with zealous indignation when I hear those who proclaim my Lord and teach that which would make him weep as he did for Jerusalem (Matt 23:37-38).

My friends, I believe this conundrum may be Satan's greatest tool to date. It is not new. He tricked Eve into believing God was wrong (Genesis 3). The Jews were quick to return to man-made gods (Exodus 32:1-6). Even Peter went fishing (John 21:3). The last statement about Peter was somewhat facetious, but it does illustrate how quickly the human mind may return to what comes naturally. Only with a steady diet of God's word can we hope to remain acceptable in his eyes (2 Timothy 2:15). People nibble at the edges of God's feast divine and never taste the meat that can assure their eternal life. Jesus said, "It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matt 4:4). He further stated, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (Matt 7:21-23).

I am a pretty lazy person myself. I am trying to reinvigorate my zeal by doing this and the articles to follow. Within the following few lessons, I will attempt to reveal some of the reasons for mankind's apathy toward God's Holy Script.

My lessons will not be scholarly from a worldly standpoint, for which I thank my God. I have a great deal of human education with letters to show it. That is, as Paul stated, dung to me. My truly great education has come from the Scriptures and those so kind to help me understand them. The list of wonderful Bible preachers and teachers is too vast to recount. The greatest I learned from them and my godly mother was to always put God's word first. Paul said it succinctly in Rom 3:4, "Let God be true and every man a liar."

In-Law Issues

William J. Stewart | Kingston, Ontario, Canada

But from the beginning of the creation, God 'made them male and female.' For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, 'and the two shall become one flesh'; so then they are no longer two, but one flesh. (Mark 10:6-8)

The Blessing Of In-Laws

Though there are only two people in the marriage relationship, it is understood that many others are affected by the joining of man and woman together. Not only does a man receive a wife, and the woman a husband; both receive a second set of parents, the in-laws (not to mention siblings, if there are any).

The in-law experience is often characterized as a horrific thing. Though it can be, it need not be. It is important to realize, in almost every case, your in-laws are interested in the success of your marriage. Your spouse's parents can be a huge blessing to your marriage; in fact, they have been already. Were it not for these people, you would not have your spouse. We would do well to remember this.

In-laws can be the source of valuable advice. They may have a fresh perspective on things; and perhaps have experiences which will help us. Consider a couple of examples of the in-law experience as recorded in the Bible:

Moses & Jethro

- Jethro helped guard Moses' family (Exodus 18:1-7)
- Jethro rejoiced over Moses' success (Exodus 18:8-11)
- Jethro was concerned for Moses (Exodus 18:13-18)
- Jethro gave Moses advice (Exodus 18:19-23)
- Moses implemented Jethro's advice (Exodus 18:24)

Ruth & Naomi

- There was a sense of being family among them (Ruth 1:8-10)
- Naomi wanted the best for them (Ruth 1:11-13)
- Naomi had a spiritual influence (Ruth 1:16-17)
- Naomi knew when to "drop it" (Ruth 1:18)
- Naomi gave Ruth sound advice (Ruth 2:22; 3:1-5)

In both cases, we see mutual respect and love. Of course, it would be naive to think that Moses & Jethro and Ruth & Naomi saw eye-to-eye and agreed upon all things; but what is recorded no doubt characterizes their relationships. We should do our best as in-laws, to build productive and mutually rewarding relationships.

The Challenge Of In-Laws

It would be great if everyone's in-law experience was like Moses and Ruth experienced. Unfortunately, some in-laws are not helpful, but controlling and unreasonable. Think of David's in-law experience! His father-in-law was obsessed with killing him (1 Samuel 18:9-13, 17, 20-25; 19:1, 9-12). Recall that Jacob's father-in-law was controlling, consuming twenty years of Jacob's life (Genesis 31:38), and disregarding Jacob to the degree that he even referred to his grandchildren as his own children (Genesis 31:28). Jacob even feared that Laban would take his family away from him (Genesis 31:31). There are some in-laws whom it is impossible to please or deal with.

Maybe your negative in-law experiences are not so drastic as David's or Jacob's, but they are no less real. It is unfortunate that some in-laws are controlling, manipulative, meddlesome, cold, and any number of other adjectives. What do we do if this is our situation?

It is essential for the sake of the marriage, that both spouses acknowledge the problem. If this is not the case, then it is not just an in-law issue, but a spousal problem. It is essential that we examine our own heart. Are we part of the problem? Are we overly sensitive? Are we making a mountain of a molehill?

If there is indeed a difficulty with your spouse's parents (or siblings), and your spouse realizes the trouble, I believe it is essential that the child of the problem-parents take an active role in initiating a solution. It needs to be understood by the in-laws who are causing troubles that their interference is not welcomed by both parties to the marriage. In David's case, Michal did not help the situation, essentially adding fuel to the fire of Saul's hatred for David (1 Samuel 19:17). Jonathan, David's brother-in-law sought to intercede for David, at times with momentary success (1 Samuel 19:4-7) and at other times, placing his own life in peril (1 Samuel 20:32-33). Rachel and Leah were upset at their father's conduct (Genesis 31:14-16), but there is no indication that they had expressed this concern to him.

It is unfortunate, in some circumstances, due to the character of our in-laws, a resolution may not be found. Sadly, the best we might be able to do in such cases is to minimize contact, for our marriage's sake. Yet, we need to guard our character and our influence; always seeking to be an influence for good, even upon our unruly in-laws.

Always keep in mind God's plan for the marriage relationship. In-laws are not excluded entirely from our lives, but the focus needs to be on the husband and wife. Both must be willing to leave their family to unite with their spouse.

Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. (Genesis 2:24)

Then they called Rebekah and said to her, 'Will you go with this man?' And she said, 'I will go.' (Genesis 24:58)

Parables of the Master

The Vine and the Branches

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

I like to go on the walking trail in our local park for exercise. Sometimes the people I meet are wearing shirts that have a religious message, such as "I love Jesus." I'm not impressed. How is this different from the first century Pharisees? "But all their works they do to be seen by men. They make their phylacteries broad and enlarge the borders of their garments" (Matthew 23:5). Wearing clothing with a religious message doesn't prove one is a disciple of the Master. The proof of discipleship is the fruit we bear. "By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples" (John 15:8). How can we be true disciples of Christ?

Meaning of the Figure

Of course, the Master drew this lesson from one of the most widely cultivated crops in Palestine, grape vineyards. The figure has three elements: the vine, the vinedresser, and the branches on the vine.

There is first the vine itself. Old Testament Israel was the vine the Lord planted in the land He had promised to the descendants of Abraham (Jeremiah 2:21). But Israel was just a figure of the true vine, as all the Old Testament is to the New (Hebrews 9:24). Christ is the "true vine" (John 15:1), that is, the "real, ideal, genuine" (Vine. 645). "True" here is not fact opposed to fiction, but real contrasted with figure, substance contrasted with shadow. Citizenship in Old Testament, national Israel brought blessings from the Lord (Exodus 19:6; Romans 3:1-2), but, both then and now, all fellowship with God in reality comes through Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 10:1-4; Hebrews 9:13-15).

Christ calls His Father "the vinedresser" (John 15:1). "He describes his Father, not as the ordinary 'vinedresser-husbandman' (*ampelourgos*) who was usually a servant, but as the 'landowner-husbandman' (*georgos*)" (King. 301). The Father in heaven is the one who cares for both the vine and the branches (John 15:2).

Protestants claim the branches are denominations and employ this passage as a defense of denominationalism. The first denominations of Christendom were the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches, which took over 500 years to reach maturity after Christ spoke this lesson. The Protestant denominations began to come along another millennium later. Did it take 500 to 1500 years for the vine to grow branches and produce fruit?

I fail to comprehend how the Master could have made it clearer that the branches are individual disciples of Christ. "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.

"If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather

them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. "By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples" (John 15:5-8).

It would take the help of a theologian to misunderstand that the Lord is comparing individual disciples to branches.

Rather than justifying denominations, the passage implicitly condemns them. There are not various kinds of branches growing from the same vine. The grape vine doesn't have plum, apple, peach, orange, and apricot branches. All of the branches are of the same kind as the vine and each other. And all the branches attached to Christ are Christians (Acts 11:26), nothing more or less, not Catholics, Baptists, Presbyterians, Lutherans, Pentecostals, *ad infinitum* (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:10-13)

How We Bear Fruit

The vinedresser prunes the branches, cutting them back so strength goes to producing fruit rather than growing longer branches. The Father prunes us to produce fruit by the cleansing of our sins through His Word.

"Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you" (John 15:2-3).

The pruning of verse two is the cleansing of verse three. We are cleansed of our sins through the word Christ received from His Father (John 12:49) when we are baptized in water (Ephesians 5:25-27).

The branches receive all strength to bear fruit from nutrients that flow to them from the vine. Thus Christ exhorts:

"Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing" (John 15:4-5).

Apart from Christ we cannot bear the fruit that glorifies the Father. To be in Christ is to be in His body the church (Ephesians 1:22-23).

We abide in Him by allowing His word to abide in us. "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you" (John 15:7). The strength from Christ to enable us to bear fruit is His word dwelling in us.

We abide in His love by obeying His word, just as His obedience to the Father enabled Him to abide in the Father's love.

"As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love" (John 15:9-10).

The Fruit We Bear

I lived in Central Florida several years, where there are extensive groves of citrus trees.

All citrus trees look alike to me. But there is one way I can surely tell them apart. If the tree has oranges on it, it's an orange tree; if it has grapefruit, it's a grapefruit tree.

We are known by the fruit we produce. If we produce good fruit, we belong to the Lord; if evil fruit, we are Satan's (Matthew 12:33-35). The fruit of this passage is our speech. Our speech reveals whom we serve. Furthermore, our lives must be "filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God" (Philippians 1:11). And the fruit of the Spirit, "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Galatians 5:22-23), must characterize our lives. We must bear fruit by leading the lost to Christ (Romans 1:13).

Consequences

What if we fail to produce fruit for God? "Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away..." (John 15:2).

"If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned" (John 15:6). Friend, do you not understand what that fire represents? How could a passage more forcefully warn that a child of God can be lost?

But this is not just a theoretical consideration, a debater's proposition. If the fruit of our lips is evil, if our lives are unrighteous, if we produce the works of the flesh rather than the fruit of the Spirit, if we do not seek to lead lost

sinners to salvation, we are barren branches. We will be cut off and cast into the fire.

But if the word of Christ abides in us, if we obey His word, if we speak what is good, live righteous lives, produce the fruit of the Spirit, and endeavor to save the lost, God will hear our prayers (John 15:7), we will abide in the love of Christ (John 15:9-10), the joy of Christ will remain in us, and our joy will be full (John 15:11).

“By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples” (John 15:8). Are you truly a disciple of Jesus Christ?

Works Cited

King, Daniel H., Sr., **Truth Commentaries: The Gospel of John.**

Vine, W.E., **Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words.**



If you no longer wish to receive these emails, please reply to this message with "Unsubscribe" in the subject line or simply click on the following link: [Unsubscribe](#)

[Click here](#) to forward this email to a friend

Meditate On These Things (MOTT)
2950 Hwy 5 S
Mountain Home, Arkansas 72653
US

[Read](#) the VerticalResponse marketing policy.

vertical DELIVERED BY
response
Try It Free Today!