

# February 2017

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- unless otherwise noted, answers to questions by Keith Sharp -

## In This Issue...

- Question from Sri Lanka about Unclean Spirits
- A Chance Encounter at the Feed Store (Ed Lewis)
- Be Still (Jefferson David Tant)
- Worship (Pat Farish)
- Why I Believe The Church Is Essential, pt. 5 (Tommy G. Thornhill)
- Shall We Continue in Sin? (Jim Mickells)
- The Most Difficult Sermon (William J. Stewart)
- Is The Church of Christ a Cult? (Mike Thomas)
- Wonderful Counselor (Sean P. Cavender)
- Judge Not (Keith Sharp)

Finally, brethren

**WHATEVER  
THINGS**

are true  
are noble  
are just  
are pure  
are lovely

PHILIPPIANS  
**4:8**

are of good report  
IF THERE IS ANY VIRTUE AND IF THERE  
IS ANYTHING PRAISEWORTHY –  
**meditate on these things.**

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 [christistheway.com](http://christistheway.com).

## Question from Sri Lanka about Unclean Spirits

### Question

Mark 1:23 - And there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit; and he cried out, According to the Bible, what is the meaning of unclean spirit?

### Answer

The New Testament uses the term "demon" and the phrases "evil spirit" and "unclean spirit" interchangeably to speak of the same spirit beings (Matthew 8:28; Luke 8:2, 29).

They are real spirit beings. Jesus and His apostles spoke of them as real (Mark 16:17; James 2:19); Christ and the apostles spoke to them (Mark 1:23-26; Acts 16:16-18), and they acted as only real beings can act (Matthew 8:28-32). Furthermore, they knew who Jesus was and feared Him (Mark 1:23-24, 34; James 2:19).

Unclean spirits are not the spirits of lost dead people. In Luke 16:19-31, the spirit of the rich man in hades was in torment, he would have left if he could, he didn't torment anyone, and, rather than exercising power, he begged for mercy and help.

Rather, these spirits are part of the devil's kingdom (Matthew 12:22-26). They hurt people (Luke 9:38-39, 42) and work against God (1 Timothy 4:1). Some are very powerful (Mark 5:1-4).

Zechariah prophesied that demon possession and prophecy would cease at the same time (Zechariah 13:1-2). Casting out demons was proof the kingdom of God was coming and Satan's power was being curtailed (Matthew 12:28-29; Luke 10:17-18). Satan has lost the power to physically inhabit and control people through evil spirits (Ephesians 4:8; Colossians 2:15). Satan works today through deception (2 Thessalonians 2:9-10), and through Christ we have the ability to withstand him (Ephesians 6:10-18; James 4:7; 1 Peter 5:8-9).

Those today who claim to cast out ("exorcise") demons are deceivers (2 Thessalonians 2:8-12).

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## **A Chance Encounter at the Feed Store**

Ed Lewis | Currie, North Carolina, USA

Very early in October, 2016, I stopped at the local feed store to buy horse feed. The lady who owns the store with her husband was immersed in a serious conversation with a man on the subject of tithing.

"I never allow anything to interfere with my tithe," he said. "I can't get new tires for my truck because I put my tithing first every Sabbath."

Two red flags went up in my mind! I had previously discussed spiritual things with the owner of the store and she had informed me that she was "way past salvation and doctrine," and that she was now interested in the Nethinim. Or did she say the Nephthalim? It didn't really matter, really, 'cause I had no idea what she was talking about! But I was pretty sure my knowledge or lack thereof was not crucial to my salvation. But, I did know that she was going to be no help to this sincere but misguided man. So, I did what I do so well: I inserted myself into the conversation without invitation.

I inquired as to the subject at hand and the man again spoke of his dedication to tithing on every Sabbath. I complimented him on his zeal and asked from where it had arisen. In short, he and his wife had "grown up Catholic but had given up on it in mid-adulthood because it was all about a fierce and condemning God. They had been searching for answers for years but "nobody in Boston seemed even interested, much less willing to help." But, when they moved from Boston to the South, they met some people who "introduced them to the law of God as found in the Bible." And now they were studying their Bibles (actually the wife more than he) and they "felt sorry for anyone who didn't see the necessity of Sabbath-day worship."

"Why Jesus, himself, observed the Sabbath," he said. "So, why shouldn't Christians - - if they claim to follow Christ?"

I asked the gentleman if I could ask a few questions because he had aroused my interest.

"Sure."

"Well," I began, "do you know why Jesus kept the Sabbath, observed the tithe, circumcision, and the Passover?"

"I guess because it was the law of God," he answered.

"You're absolutely right," I said. I then showed him 1 Pet 2:21-22 and told him that Jesus kept the Law of Sinai perfectly--never broke a single one.

"But there is another reason," I said. He looked at me with a blank stare. "Because Jesus was a Jew," I said. "He was never a Christian. He had to die and be resurrected so there could BE Christians."

The man was incredulous! "What do you mean?" he asked.

So, I read the lineage of Christ in Matt 1 to show that the Lord was born, lived, and died a descendant of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

"So what?" he asked "So--here's my second question. Are you or your wife Jewish?"

"Do I look Jewish?" He laughed. "Why, does it matter?"

"Yes, it matters greatly. You, like me, are a Gentile," I said.

"Yes, I guess so, but what difference does that make? Isn't the gospel for all men?"

"You're right again", I said. " The gospel is for all mankind. But we were not talking about the gospel; we were talking about the Law of Moses."

So, I let him read for himself Deut 5:1-22. Then, I explained that the Law of Moses was given only to the Jews, the covenanted descendants of Abraham to separate them from the "nations." "No Gentile was ever subject to the Law of Moses except in the case of a proselyte."

"Huh, I don't know about that," he said. So, I had him read Exod 31:16,17. Immediately, the light came on. He got it. I was stunned. Rarely does anyone understand this crucial fact so quickly.

"Can I get another question," I asked. "What did Jesus do concerning that law?"

"What do you mean?" he said. And I could tell he was still grappling with what he had just read. So, I took him to Matt 5:17 and Heb 8 to show him that Christ came to fulfill the law of Moses and the prophets and to replace it with another which offered the grace of God and the forgiveness of sins. How that no flesh can be justified by the works of the law, but Christ offered forgiveness and acceptance by God by faith in Christ and obedience to Him as king. How that being in Christ was superior to being under law. And then I asked him to read Col 2:14-17.

He looked at me as though he had been punched in the stomach.

I continued, "Christ lived under the Law of Moses, but Matt 4:17 & 23 says He preached the gospel of His coming kingdom. But these blessings of forgiveness and reconciliation, and freedom from the curse of the law, are found ONLY in Christ."

He shook his head in ascent. I wanted to go on but this poor man was overwhelmed.

"I never knew this," he said.

"Well, let's get together and study," I said. "You said you and your wife study every day, and my wife and I do,too."

"I'd like that," he said. "I'll give you a call and we'll get together."

"Great!" I said. "You'll be amazed at what the Bible says about how to get into Christ and become a Christian."

"Okay. I'll call," he promised.

So, I started to leave as we shook hands -- never expecting anything more and, frankly, wondering if I'd ever get that call.

As I was reaching for the door, he said, "can you give me a hint about the "in Christ" thing?"

"You bet!" So I showed him Gal 3, Rom 6, and Eph 1. I explained that the gospel is the DBR of Christ and that obeying that form puts on IN CHRIST. I left thinking: "maybe I will get that call."

4 days later; on Wednesday night, I had the "short talk" after Bible study. I was excited to share with the brethren my experience at the feed store and to solicit their prayers on behalf of this man, his wife, and myself -- now convinced that he would call. The saints were excited and at each assembly after that they would ask me, "has the man called?" Dejected, I would respond, "not yet."

For four weeks this went on until finally no one asked anymore.

Despondent, I went to the feed store to get his phone number -- to no avail. The owner had it but was reluctant to give it to me without the man's permission. I understood, but I was NOT happy.

Four more weeks passed and one day an unknown number appeared on my phone as it rang. I answered. IT WAS HIM!

"Can you come over? My wife and I are afraid we have made a big mistake. Will you study with us?"

"Name the date, the time, and the location, and we'll be there, I said, trying to be calm and act like it was no big deal.

"Our house, tomorrow night, 6:30," he said.

"Lord willing, we'll be there."

So, we went, after first imploring the Lord for wisdom and reminding Him of His promise to go with us. And I did something my wife had been suggesting for forty years: I let them talk, listened to their concerns, and answered only when questioned. In the process, the principles of "adding to and taking away" and speaking as the oracles of God were established. Also, we got to the "in Christ thing." Included of course the plan of salvation. 3 hours in all.

4 days later they came to our house for dinner and a study. We finally got the Law of Moses and the gospel separated and then they told us of some of the things they'd been taught. Even brought what they called "conversion materials". Then they shared their angst over the 13 vows they were required to take before they could be baptized and taken into 7th Day Adventism. We showed them in the scriptures that the ONLY public prerequisite for baptism into Christ was the "good confession." They are honest, zealous for truth, and hungry for more.

**Worthy Is the Lamb!**

**ADDENDUM:**

Both man and wife baptized into Christ two weeks ago. And there's more! They have arranged classes with two people from the 7th day group. Start Saturday!

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## **Be Still**

Jefferson David Tant | Roswell, Georgia, USA

As these lines are being written, I am surrounded by the Nantahala National Forest, close to the community known as Shooting Creek, North Carolina. Tents and campers surround me, and behind me is a 12-pole teepee, capable of sleeping 10 people. A thought has run through my mind today as some of

us walked along the thick forest alongside Buck Creek. This good-sized creek eventually runs into the Nantahala River. The thought in my mind? I wonder if the ancients who inhabited this land before the Europeans came had a greater sense of the Creator than many have today. Oh, they may have been misguided in their search for the Great Spirit, but who can help but be in awe at the creation that surrounds us. We have shared the land with bears, boar, deer, ducks and who knows what other creatures inhabit this forest. The majestic trees, the beautiful blooms and the towering mountains fill one with a sense of wonder and awe.

The gurgling of the steam just a few feet away is soothing. We are miles from the hustle and bustle of city life, with time to reflect on the wonder of God's creation, and the wisdom and power of the One who spoke, and all this came into being. How ludicrous to think that all this came from some chemical reaction to some primeval substance in some swamp zillions of years ago.

It is good to pause at times and reflect. "Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth" (46th Psalm, 10). As David considered God's creation, he was humbled at man's own insignificance in light of all that surrounds us. "When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, The moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man, that thou art mindful of him? And the son of man, that thou visitest him. For thou hast made him but little lower than God, And crownest him with glory and honor" (8th Psalm, 3-5).

The occasion that brings us to this wonderland is a family camping trip. We are on land owned by Charles and Lucille Nicks, a great couple who have contributed much to the Lord's work over the years. He is 90, and she 88, but both are still very active in the little church at Shooting Creek. My son-in-law, Bill Moore, and I preached Sunday. With our family and a few other visitors, they had 37 present at the afternoon service. A large crowd for them. The Nicks' have lived and worked in various parts of the world—Costa Rica, Equador, Madagascar. They have helped countless churches in various ways. They loaned money for the church building in Roswell.

Family is important. God's arrangement includes married fathers and mothers raising children and teaching them about God and life. Fathers are instructed "to nurture them in the chastening and admonition of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4). Mothers are to "train the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be sober-minded, chaste, workers at home, kind, being in subjection to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed..." (Titus 2:4-5).

"Except Jehovah build the house, They labor in vain that build it: Except Jehovah keep the city, The watchman waketh but in vain...Lo, children are a heritage of Jehovah; And the fruit of the womb is his reward" (127th Psalm, 1, 3). We often get so caught up in the busy-ness of life that we let the children raise themselves.

Last night we sat around the campfire visiting and telling stories of past years—stories that some of the younger grandchildren had never heard. And granddad, "Papa," read a story from "The Book of Virtues." "Mimi" took time to talk to each of the grandchildren. It was a time to connect, a time to strengthen family ties and a time to talk about values that make us what we are—children of God. God has blessed us with a good family—five children and 16 grandchildren. Most of them were able to be here for this gathering. Parents, take time for your children. Take time on occasion to "Be still." They will be gone before you know it.

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## Worship

Patrick Farish | Lancaster, Texas, USA

There is no confusion about the need to worship; as the angel told John more than once, we must "worship God" (Revelation 19:10; 22:9). Most everybody is willing to worship Him, but many do not understand what that requires. How we worship, when we worship, and what we do in worship, are essentials. When Jesus

said that acceptable worship must be “in spirit and truth” (John 4:24) He was directing our attention to the right attitude (in spirit) and the right practices (in truth).

Jesus wants us to understand that not everything we might offer in sacrifice to Him is acceptable. We have all met those who think that whatever they give God is OK, if they like it. A neighbor told me that the trombone solo he was going to render in a Baptist church would please God because it pleased him and because it was his talent. Shortly after that a lady (?) was reported as planning to offer her talent in the worship service – she was a strip-tease artist. By this time I had lost touch with the trombone player, which was a shame because I knew he would have been delighted to hear from me with this news.

This point is driven home by Jesus in Matthew 15, when He said worship which is the teaching of men is vain – “in vain do you worship me.”

With worship we intend to praise God – but we only praise Him as we obey Him. King Saul is a splendid example of one who, claiming to obey God, actually ignored the instruction given him. Told to slay the Amalekites and all their livestock, he killed all the commoners, and all the flawed livestock; but he saved the good livestock and the king. Hear God’s judgment on such sacrifice:

Then, Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 10) offered to God a sacrifice “which he had not commanded them”; the result was God sent fire and it “consumed them” (Leviticus 10:2-3).

God does not want our originality: He wants us to speak where He has spoken, and be silent where He has been silent.

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## **Why I Believe The Church Is Essential (5)**

Tommy G. Thornhill | Etna, Arkansas, USA

This The church is essential because it is the body into which those who have been saved are added by God (Acts 2:47). He has added them to His house (family)/church because they are now His adopted children (Ephesians 1:5), His redeemed heritage (Ephesians 1:11,14). So we view the church as containing all those who have been made alive in Christ (Ephesians 2:5), a saved and sanctified people over which Christ is the head (Ephesians 5:23-27). So, while the church does not save, no one outside the church is saved.

As we continue to search the New Testament, learning how the church fits into God’s scheme of redemption, we find that the church’s existence was not limited to a certain geographical area, or to a certain historical culture of time. Ever since it was founded in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost it has continued to function, fulfilling the purpose for which it was brought into existence, that of proclaiming God’s promise of salvation to the world. Under the guidance of the apostles, the church, through its members, carried the great commission to the world in ca. 35 years, following the plan of action Jesus stated in Acts 1:8. In doing this the church designed by God and built by Jesus, was perfected and propagated just as God intended for it to do.

From its beginning the church multiplied exceedingly (Acts 2:47; 4:4, 32; 6:7), as the apostles preached Jesus Christ and Him crucified, a gospel which magnified and perpetuated the name of Jesus, the church’s founder (Acts 4:12; Philippians 1:17-18, 20). While preaching the saving gospel, the apostles also instructed those converted to be faithful and to teach others what they had learned (2 Timothy 2:2), so the gospel could continue to be spread throughout the world.

Think about it. The first century world witnessed an amazing spectacle, unequalled since. The church, starting on the day of Pentecost, with a small group of believers who were despised and uneducated in the eyes of the world (Acts 4:13), unendowed with material goods, preaching a gospel the world considered foolish (1 Corinthians 1:18-23), increased so quickly that in ca. 35 years they performed a most amazing phenomenon. They rocked entire communities and countries with the gospel of salvation through Christ, turning the world upside down as they carried the gospel to the whole world (Acts 17:6; Colossians 1:5-6,

23; Romans 1:5, 8; 10:18). During that time the world saw a glorious church, functioning the way God intended for it to function, and it will always remain the glorious church, from the heavenly side.

But, because the church was made up of imperfect human beings, the church will always be imperfect from the human standpoint. And this imperfection of the church is what the world sees. The world sees the church's glory dimmed by religious leaders who seek to exalt themselves as they introduce human organizations and human doctrines and practices into the church, all in the name of the Lord, while ignoring Colossians 3:17. The Lord's church has also been disgraced by some who know what God intends for His church, yet they neglect their personal responsibilities and compromise the truth for the sake of making the church more popular with the world. If we want the world to see God glorified in the church, from both the divine and human sides, we have to understand where men have gone wrong and correct their errors and innovations.

Historically, something happened after the church was planted. Even while the gospel was being spread, and churches established in the 1st century, the devil was putting his disciples to work defiling the church. The devil knew he could not hurt the church from its divine side, which was perfect. But, he knew the church was weak from the human side, since it consisted of imperfect people, many of whom could be influenced by his lies. So, the devil set about to destroy the church from within, to stop the spread of the gospel by corrupting the members of God's tool of evangelism (2 Corinthians 11:2, 13-15). As long as the apostles, who had laid the foundation lived, and the church adhered to their teaching, the church remained what God wanted it to be (Ephesians 2:19-20).

The inspired apostles knew what the devil was doing, and they continually warned the saints that the devil's false teachers were already at work, seeking to corrupt the true gospel with their false teachings and ideas (2 Thessalonians 2:7-12; 2 Peter 2:1-2; 2 Corinthians 4:3-4; Romans 16:17-18; 2 John verses 7-11; Jude verse 3). The apostles knew an apostasy was coming and they tried to prepare the brethren, warning them that it was going to come from among their own leaders (Acts 20:29-31). In fact, when he wrote Timothy it was already manifesting itself (1 Timothy 4:1-4). So he encouraged Timothy, and all Christians since, to preach the true gospel plainly and clearly at any and every opportunity, for there would always be those who would rather hear words that tickle their ears instead (2 Timothy 4:2-4). We must hold to the pattern of sound words, and not the fables of men (2 Timothy 1:13). Even though the people were warned, they wouldn't listen. And many still don't.

Sadly, the devil has done his devious work well. Because people would not listen to the warnings of God's inspired men, the devil has convinced religious people that his counterfeit churches, built on sand are just as good as the one you read about in the New Testament. Truly, denominationalism is an invention of the devil, but people don't care.

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## Shall We Continue in Sin?

Jim Mickells | Lewisburg, Tennessee, USA

*What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?*

*Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? (Romans 6:1-2).*

Paul asked and then answers the question posed to those at Rome about continuing in sin. They had died to their transgressions, being separated from them, and were raised to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:4). He fully expected them to no longer have the love of sin in their hearts nor to practice sin in their lives. If they remained slaves to sin it would lead to their spiritual death (Romans 6:16). He further reminds them that they had obeyed from the heart the doctrine delivered to them and had become slaves of righteousness (Romans 6:17-18).

Let me also suggest to you some other reasons why we should not continue in sin after receiving forgiveness that is offered through the blood of Christ.

Shall we continue in sin knowing the price that was paid to redeem us from it? It cost God His only begotten Son (John 3:16). Think of the pain that the Father must have experienced upon hearing Jesus utter the words, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46). Jesus paid the ultimate price, His life. Before having the nails driven through His hands and feet, He was mocked, ridiculed, spit on, beaten, and scourged. Surely, we don't want to continue in sin knowing what the Father and Son endured so that we might be forgiven. This should motivate us to live better.

Shall we continue in sin knowing that it might lead others to sin as well? The Lord tells us to be the salt of the earth and lights to the world (Matthew 5:13-16). As Paul told Timothy to be an example in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, and in purity (1 Timothy 4:12), we likewise must live so that our influence for good will affect those that we come in contact with. Especially think of the consequences that a sinful life can have on our children. If they see parents who are not devoted to God and who are hypocritical, they will likely follow in their steps. Jesus warned that if we cause others to sin that we would lose our souls as well (Matthew 18:6-7).

Shall we continue in sin knowing what it will cost us? Remember the words of Paul, "Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?" (Romans 6:16). The death spoken of by Paul in this verse is spiritual. We will be separated from God throughout eternity and will be sentenced to eternal misery. Hell, is an awful place that we must avoid at all cost. We cannot continue in sin and be saved.

May we not let sin have dominion over us (Romans 6:14), using our members as instruments of righteousness (Romans 6:13), so that God will be honored and glorified by our lives. We cannot afford to continue in sin.

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## The Most Difficult Sermon

William J. Stewart | Kingston, Ontario, Canada

What do you think is the most difficult sermon to preach? A host of topics might be suggested, but I doubt what I have in mind is one of them. The book of Revelation can be intimidating, but that's not it. Refuting Premillennialism, Calvinism or some other false doctrine effectively demands a lot of preparation, but none of those are the most difficult sermon to preach. So, what is it? What is the most difficult sermon to preach? This may surprise you, but it is attendance.

Shocked? Confused? Not sure how that could be? Certainly there are topics that are much more challenging so far as the content and complexity. That is not the problem. Neither is it a topic that preachers are tentative to speak about. So, what's the problem?

It is simply this - the people who need to hear a sermon on attendance the most are rarely at the assembly! A sermon on attendances usually ends up being a "preaching to the choir" situation, unless the preacher tucks away a lesson to be pulled out on that special Sunday when the largest number of irregular attendees show up.

A capable brother wrote about attendance:

*Preachers should never have to preach on attendance. It should be obvious that when a Christian does not care to attend all the services, his interest is elsewhere. It is foolish to assert that we have a passage which pronounces anathema on those who don't come on Sunday and Wednesday nights. We don't need one. All we need show is that interest and attendance are connected and that a person who is truly interested will attend.*

*Now you can try to explain that away all you want and when you are finished it will still say the same thing: a person who is able yet does not attend the services is not interested in*



*what is going on at the services. Bring your excuses, pronounce your justifications, and rationalize all you want. And when you are done, the parable of the sower will still affirm the same thing: prepared soil is the only kind which results in good fruit.*

(Dee Bowman, via [www.aubeacon.com](http://www.aubeacon.com))

I'm not sure it could be stated any plainer than that. If an individual has the ability to be at the assembly but chooses to be elsewhere, where is that person's heart? Also, if an individual, despite physical ailments, has the fortitude to go here and there during the week, then the same is able to be at the assembly of the saints. If not, why not?

### **The Cost of Poor Attendance**

None of us are in a bubble. What we do will have an affect on others. And so it is with poor attendance. Not assembling with the church will have negative consequences for the one who is absent, but also for the local church and the family and friends of the one who is not assembling: Consider:

- The one who is not present cannot grow in faith as they otherwise might have;
- The more one misses the assembly, the easier it becomes to miss the assembly, until eventually, they don't go at all;
- If one has little or no interest being with God's people here and worshiping God now, they'll not be interested in heaven (nor will they have an opportunity to go);
- A local church needs its members, all of them. A church with absent members is like a body missing limbs;
- Your absence discourages those who have assembled together (NOTE - I used to assemble expecting to see all my brethren; sadly, now I tend to expect some will not be there);
- Your absence makes inviting folks from the community difficult. What message do we give visitors when our own members are irregular in their attendance?
- Your absence affects the church's ability to meet it's financial obligations;
- Your absence tells your family, friends, and neighbours that assembling with the church really isn't that important. And if the assembly isn't important, they are also learning from you that the Bible isn't important, and that God isn't important;
- Your absence will have negative results in your life - you'll start going places you ought not go, you'll start doing things you ought not do, you'll start saying things you ought not say.

I'm sure there are a number of other things we could include in this list, but we'll let the above suffice. Absenteeism has bad results.

### **The Benefits Of Assembling**

Let's close with a focus on good things. There are several good things that will come from the choice to assemble with the local church on every occasion available:

- God will be glorified. He is our Creator, our Sustainer, our Father, and our Saviour. We ought to take every opportunity to give glory to God;
- You will be encouraged. I've never heard anyone walk away from an assembly with God's people saying they were discouraged;
- The work of the church will not be hindered. Your free will offering will be used with the free will offerings of others to meet the financial responsibilities of the local church;
- The spread of the gospel will be affected for good. When visitors see the enthusiastic interest of all the members of the local church, they will truly see the love of Christ in us and the concern for souls;
- You will influence your family members, your friends, and your neighbours. They will see how important godly things are in your life, they will see your growth in faith, they will see the changes in your life, and their interest may be perked - and maybe they too will come to the assembly.

Friend, we look forward to seeing you at the assemblies of the local church, this week and every week.

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# Is The Church of Christ a Cult?

Mike Thomas | Beaver Dam, Kentucky, USA

I have an article from Gerald Johnson, former Director of Watchman Fellowship, in Dalton, Georgia, who taught publicly that churches of Christ are a cult. Notice a few of his comments:

*The Church consists of all those who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, are redeemed through his blood and are born again of the Holy Spirit. This means that Pentecostals, Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, Nazarenes and a host of others who simply said 'Lord Jesus, I'm yours. Do with me what you will' are Christians.*

*The Churches of Christ, on the other hand, make the claim that they are the only Christians, and that if you do not belong to their church (denomination) you are headed for hell. This type of exclusiveness is one of the primary marks of a cult* ("Why Churches of Christ are a cult," July 21, 1991; Daily Citizen News).

I imagine there is no other word in religious terminology that conjures up more fear than the term "cult." The very sound of it resurrects images of Jim Jones, Charles Manson, and other murderous leaders. Perhaps this is why the term is used—to create an emotional bias against the church of Christ without fully examining it. This is nothing new. God's people have been accused of sect-like behavior in other places simply for following the truth. The apostle Paul had it said of him, "For we have found this man a plague, a creator of dissension among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes" (Acts 24:5). Even Jesus was accused of acting by the power of Satan in performing miracles (Luke 11:15), so it is no small wonder that His followers will receive similar treatment. "If they called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more will they call those of the household" (Matthew 10:25). Thus, good brethren, the charge of belonging to a cult should not intimidate or weaken us in our effort to serve God sincerely. If Jesus, Paul and other teachers of truth were accused of those things, we will certainly receive the same treatment in our stand for God and His gospel. "Therefore do not fear them. For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known" (verse 26).

On the other hand, I have no doubt that there are churches of Christ that behave like a cult in going along with the errors of charismatic men. I have seen churches of Christ engage in religious error (institutionalism, instrumental music, unscriptural divorce, etc.) simply because of the influence of human opinion. Perhaps it could be said they are behaving like a cult in blindly following the blind. Error is error regardless of why a person practices it. However, not all who bear the name Christ are doing so at the direction of a cult leader. There is such a thing as belonging to the church of Christ because of the teachings of the Bible.

## Jesus claims one church

Jesus said He was only going to build one church (Matthew 16:18). If the definition of a cult is a church that believes people must be a member of it to go to heaven, what does that say about Jesus and His church? Would Mr. Johnson agree that a person must be in the body of Christ to be saved? If so, does that make him a cultist? Nevertheless, it was Jesus, and not churches of Christ, who taught men to view the path to heaven as narrow path that few will take (Luke 13:22-33). It was the apostles, and not churches of Christ, who taught people that there is only one church, which is the body of Christ (Ephesians 1:22; 4:4). Does that make Paul guilty of cultism? Would Mr. Johnson assign to Paul the teaching "that if you do not belong to their church...you are headed for hell"? Chances are he would not, though he is inadvertently condemning Paul, who said the only ones going to heaven are those in the Lord's body (Ephesians 5:23; 1 Corinthians 15:24). The unlearned will classify this strict teaching as cultic doctrine, but he who has an ear to hear let him hear!

## Apostles taught unity

Mr. Johnson said the body of Christ is made up of all denominations, but the inspired apostles disagree with him. Paul said the church is made up of saved people, not churches (1 Corinthians 12:12-13). In the

New Testament, these saved people grouped themselves into local churches with other saved people in their community (1:2) and were known as “churches of Christ” (Romans 16:16), “church of God” (1 Corinthians 1:2), and similar terms. But there is no mention in the Bible of manmade denominations like Mr. Johnson defends (“Pentecostals, Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, Nazarenes and a host of others”). In fact, whenever New Testament Christians tried to classify themselves in the names of men, they were rebuked (1 Corinthians 1:11-13). The Lord and His apostles taught religious unity among saints (verse 10), as Jesus and the Father are one (John 17:21). Does Jesus teach a different plan of salvation than His Father? Do they oppose one another in whether or not to call Jesus’ church by the names of men? Are they divided in how local churches are to be organized and what work they are to engage? God forbid! So how can those who serve God through manmade denominations claim adherence to New Testament Christianity? How can Catholics, Mormons, Presbyterians, and the like be considered members of the Lord’s body when each denomination has unique teachings that condemn one another? Is there one hope, one faith and one baptism taught among denominations? Can we take the creed book of one denomination and give birth to a different denomination? Of course not. Each denomination is distinct in doctrine and fellowship. How then does such division demonstrate the unity taught by the apostles? Paul taught the same truths “everywhere in every church” (1 Corinthians 4:17). Christians are to do the same today by following the teachings of Jesus and His apostles (Acts 2:42). If that level of commitment makes the church of Christ a cult, then true Christianity is a cult! Nevertheless, let God be true and every man a liar.

### **New Testament Christianity is distinct**

The first saints were saved when they obeyed a plan of salvation that included water baptism (Acts 2:36-40). They were not Christians until they obeyed this baptism (Galatians 3:27), as defined by Jesus (Mark 16:15-16; Matthew 26:26-29). We cannot, however, find statements like Mr. Johnson’s, “Lord Jesus, I am yours. Do with me what you will’ are Christians.” Where is that found in the Bible? Why didn’t the apostles teach such things (Acts 8:12-13; verses 35-38)? From whence came this philosophy: heaven or men? Honestly, which teaching is more in line with a cult and which is a true reflection of trust in Jesus?

### **Conclusion**

In light of such facts, it should be obvious to any sincere person that those who most emulate a cult are those who blindly follow the teachings of men like Gerald Johnson and not those who adhere to just the Bible. The Scriptures give us everything we need to know about life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3; 2 Timothy 3:16-17). Anyone who follows it will see a distinct pattern in religion that will not always be received by the majority of people. Those who want the truth will see which teaching is of the word of God and which is not (John 7:17). And when it is not received, it should be no great surprise that those who reject it will accuse believers of acting contrary to God (Acts 13:44-50). Such scare tactics have been around since the days of Christ and will continue until the end of time.

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## **Wonderful Counselor**

### *Names of the Messiah*

Sean P. Cavender | Bald Knob, Arkansas, USA

One of the most prominent and recognized prophecies of the Messiah that is found in the book of Isaiah is found in Isaiah 9.

*“For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will accomplish this” (Isaiah 9:6-7, NASB).*

Most often when this prophecy is quoted or read, the emphasis is on the birth of the child and our Savior

Jesus Christ. While that certainly may be an implication of the passage, this text of Scripture is a prophecy of the Messiah's kingdom! Isaiah proclaims that He will reign on the throne of David, ruling with justice and righteousness. In fact, Isaiah 9:1-2 refers to the people who walk in darkness are given a great light to see and the nations (Gentiles) are able to have their eyes opened to the light. Those verses are applied by Matthew to the beginning of Jesus' preaching ministry, when Jesus was preaching "the kingdom of heaven is at hand," (Matthew 4:15-17). Therefore, not only is Isaiah 9 looking to the establishment of Christ's kingdom, but the increase of it, welcoming Gentiles as citizens of the kingdom of heaven.

This prophecy of Isaiah's is helping us conceive of the future Messiah and how He will rule. His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, and Prince of Peace. With each of these royal titles, it emphasizes a role that Christ fulfills in the kingdom as our King. Christ has the unique role of serving as the Counselor of the kingdom. He reveals the wisdom and plans of the eternal God.

"The Spirit of the Lord will rest on Him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and strength, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord" (Isaiah 11:2).

Jesus Christ has wisdom, understanding, and knowledge that is imparted to the citizens of His kingdom if we will have ears to hear (Matthew 13:8). In fact "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" are hidden in Christ (Colossians 2:3). It is through Satan's influence that he wants our hearts to be closed to receiving Christ's instruction (Matthew 13:19) and to be blinded to the gospel (2 Corinthians 4:4).

Modern and popular psychology and counselors want to erase the words like "guilt" and "sin" from our vocabulary. They want to promote self-esteem and an attitude which is accepting and tolerant of any activity that might bring pleasure and satisfaction, even if it is against the will of God. However, the Lord is the Wonderful Counselor. He only counsels in what is wonderful, good, and pure. As the Lord and King seeks to establish His kingdom in righteousness part of His counsel tells us to "go and sin no more" (John 8:11). He points to the word of God as inspired, necessary, and authoritative when He says "it is written..." (Luke 4:4). Those who are the sheep of His pasture must hear and heed His voice (John 10:14-16). Jesus does not depend on humanistic philosophy to promote ungodliness. Instead, Christ advocates repentance from sin, belief in God and His word, and we must be ready to receive with meekness the implanted word which is able to save our souls (James 1:21).

The Lord teaches us what we must do to be right with God and to be a member of the kingdom of heaven. He has taught us what qualities and characteristics we must have as citizens of the kingdom (Matthew 5:1-10). Will you listen to the Wonderful Counselor?

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## Judge Not

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

*Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye'; and look, a plank is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye. Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces (Matthew 7:1-6).*

Have you ever tried to reason with a friend or brother about a sin in his life only to be rebuked, "Don't judge me"? Is all judging sinful or are only certain kinds of judging wrong?

The Master's very warning against judging implies that some judging is required. How can we refuse to give holy food to dogs or pearls to swine if we can't judge whether people are hogs or dogs?

In the immediate context of his prohibition of judging, Christ Jesus reveals the kind of judging He means. The **International Standard Version** translates the prohibition thus: "Stop judging." This correctly indicates it is present tense. In essence the Master is forbidding us to be constantly passing judgment on others. This is the fault finding attitude that always looks for something to condemn in others.

*And as He said these things to them, the scribes and the Pharisees began to assail Him vehemently, and to cross-examine Him about many things, lying in wait for Him, and seeking to catch Him in something He might say, that they might accuse Him*  
(Luke 11:53-54).

The fault-finding attitude that is just looking for something to pounce on is a sin. That is **hypercritical judging**, trying to catch someone in a fault.

If you have a speck in your eye, do you want someone with a rafter stuck in his eye trying to remove it? That's **hypocritical judging**, condemning others for small faults when we have big sins. The Jewish leaders pronounced the common people "accursed" because they had less knowledge of the law (John 7:49), whereas the scribes and Pharisees themselves taught the law but did not keep it (Matthew 23:2-4). They were hypocrites (Matthew 23:13-15, 23, 25, 27, 29).

Some judging is sinful. Besides not being guilty of hypercritical and hypocritical judging, we must be merciful in our judging of others (Luke 6:36-37; James 2:13). We must judge righteously rather than just according to outward appearance (John 7:22-24). We should hear both sides before passing judgment (John 7:51). We must not use a false standard, whether it be our opinions (Romans 14:1-3, 10-14), human standards (Galatians 2:3-5), or the law of Moses (Colossians 2:13-17). We must not impute wrong motives to others when we don't know their motives (1 Corinthians 2:11; 4:5; 1 Timothy 6:4). We must not show favoritism in judgment (1 Timothy 5:20-21; James 2:1-9). We do not have the right to pass judgment on anyone's eternal destiny, because Christ has reserved that judgment for Himself (John 5:22-23, 1 Corinthians 4:3-5; James 4:12).

But some judging is required. How can we lead a brother from his sin if we cannot judge that he has sinned? (Galatians 6:1; James 5:19-20). How can we oppose a false teacher if we cannot judge that he is teaching damnable error? (Romans 16:17-18; Titus 1:10-14; 2 Peter 2:1-3; 2 John verses 9-11). How can we reject a divisive man if we cannot judge he is divisive? (Titus 3:10-11) How can we exercise discipline in the local church if we cannot judge that a brother is in sin? (1 Corinthians 5:1-5, 12-13; 2 Thessalonians 3:14)

"Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment" (John 7:24).

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