

# March 2017

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

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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 VIRTURE 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).

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*"Proverbs puts a high priority on tradition and age, while the modern prizes change and youth. Proverbs admonishes parents not to spare the rod, but the state's welfare workers want to jail those who obey it"*  
(Bruce K. Waltke, **The Book of Proverbs**. 1. xxii)

*"... Proverbs characterizes the wise as living by faith entirely ('with all your heart,' 3:5), exclusively ('do not lean on your own understanding'), and exhaustively ('in all your ways desire his presence.' 3:5-6a)"* (Ibid. 109)

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## Correspondence with South African

### Message from South Africa

I'd appreciate it if someone could help me study the Word of God. I do study it on my own but I feel the need for the guidance of a seasoned man of God.

My parents are both born again Christians and my dad is a Pastor. I turned away from Christ due to a couple of factors, namely 1) Witnessing people calling themselves Christians indulging themselves in all sorts of sins, 2) The difficult circumstances of my upbringing brought about by my parent's choice of a lifestyle, 3) Witnessing criminals and corrupt people prospering in life, 4) Witnessing the Church persecuting my father in unspeakable ways and 5) My father's ill temper when I decided to ask him any scripture related question.

I decided to stop asking questions and try liberating myself through studying other religions. I first became

drawn towards Islam because it spoke about the same monotheistic God Principle. After attending the mosque for about a year; I decided to backslide because they taught us Arabic but then spoke in Urdu whenever they discussed matters of importance. I felt extremely alienated and offended by their actions. I then decided to abstain from Church and God and went on to indulge myself in alcohol, fornication, crime, etc. In all that I never found satisfaction as deep inside I've always known right from wrong.

I then started reading a lot on magic/k, philosophy and a whole host of religious texts such as Satanism, Hinduism, Christianity, Bhuddism, Judaism, Egyptology, Hermetism, African Traditional, Paganism, the New Age, etc.. That study has gone on for the past 3 years. I found a lot of information but, none of them were fulfilling enough for me.

The reason for the most part was that I believe in Moses's concept of one God. I believe in Jesus Christ's teachings of Truth, that He is God's only Son and I believe in The Holy Trinity. I believe in the Prophets and I've learnt to Seek and decipher the Esoteric message of the Scripture.

I now need to re-establish that personal relationship with my Creator in all of His manifestations. I need to re-learn how to pray and to live in unison with my Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. I very much long for His presense in my life. I wish my whole family could see Him through me and for my sons to grow up knowing Him and feeling His constant presence in their lives.

I believe your course and you guidance can lead me to growing back that Love I long for. I pray that I learn to repent and all my sins to be forgiven. I know God doesn't hear a sinner's prayer and I don't deserve His mercy but, I cannot harden my heart. I Love Him dearly.

### **My Reply**

Thank you for your request for our Bible correspondence course. We will be sending it to you by mail.

But I also want to write a proper reply to your very thoughtful message to me.

Everyone could use the guidance of a "seasoned man of God." When the eunuch of Ethiopia was returning from worshiping God in Jerusalem, Philip was divinely directed to go to him. The eunuch was reading Isaiah chapter 53, and when Philip asked him, "Do you understand what you are reading?", the eunuch responded, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" (Acts 8:26-31)

I suppose I qualify as a "seasoned man of God." The first Sunday of May will be my fifty-second anniversary of preaching the gospel. And preachers of the gospel are men of God (1 Timothy 6:11; 2 Timothy 4:1-2).

But just because someone claims to be a man of God does not mean you must accept whatever he says uncritically. The apostle Paul and Silas were certainly men of God, but when they preached in Berea, the Bereans "were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so" (Acts 17:11). It is absolutely essential to your salvation that you make me or anyone else seeking to teach you prove beyond doubt all our teaching by clear Scripture used in proper context.

As a youngster, you ran against many of the same stumbling blocks to faith that all encounter. There are many hypocrites, who "say and do not" (Matthew 23:3, 13). These hypocrites will be lost unless they repent (Matthew 23:33), but so will those who stumble at their sins and do not follow Christ (Matthew 18:6-7; 1 Peter 2:7-8).

All our parents made mistakes common to people, even as I did with my children (Hebrews 12:10), and hardship is a part of serving Christ (Acts 14:21-22), but our own choices determine our salvation or condemnation (Revelation 22:17).

Indeed, the prosperity of the wicked can be a great stumblingblock. Asaph, the ancient psalmist reflected, "But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled; My steps had nearly slipped. For I was envious of the boastful, When I saw the prosperity of the wicked" (Psalm 73:2-3). He thought, "Surely I have cleansed my heart in vain, And washed my hands in innocence. For all day long I have been plagued, And chastened every morning" (verses 13-14). But finally he declared, "When I thought how to understand this, It was too painful for me— Until I went into the sanctuary of God; Then I understood their end. Surely You set them in slippery places; You cast them down to destruction" (verses 16-18). The clever, unscrupulous wicked sometimes prosper throughout life and die of old age surrounded by adoring children and grandchildren without ever suffering (Job 21:7-15). But their end is destruction.

Do not forget that "all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution" (2 Timothy 3:12), and perhaps the hardest persecution to bear is from false brethren (2 Corinthians 11:26).

I am sorry your father was not gentle and patient as a teacher. "And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth" (2 Timothy 2:24-25). I promise to be diligent to be gentle, patient, and humble.

There is nothing wrong with investigating other religions. The apostle Paul could quote pagan poets (Acts 17:28). I have tried to study the various major religions and denominations of Christendom with an open mind.

But do not just look for what is personally fulfilling. That is looking within yourself for guidance and is doomed to failure (Proverbs 14:12; 16:25; Jeremiah 10:23).

Look for the truth. "Buy the truth, and do not sell it, Also wisdom and instruction and understanding" (Proverbs 23:23). Jesus is the truth (John 14:6), and the word of God is truth (John 17:17).

Jesus does not ask you to believe in Him because you find Him fulfilling. He asks you to believe the evidence (John 5:39,46; 10:37-38; 20:30-31; Romans 1:1-4; 1 Corinthians 15:1-8). The religion of Christ is the only religion that appeals to unassailable historical evidence to prove it is true.

I would like to add that the Scriptures are not "esoteric" ("understood by or meant for only the select few who have special knowledge or interest"). There are difficult parts of Scripture (2 Peter 3:14-16), but the gospel is for all (Mark 16:16), and the message of Christ is for the humble and lowly (Matthew 11:25).

I visited your beautiful country in 1995. I have several friends there who preach and teach the word of God. Would you like to be in contact with one?

I am delighted that you want to return to the Lord. It will be my privilege to assist you. May the Lord richly bless your search for truth.

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## **Question About the Sabbath and Clean and Unclean Animals**

### **Question**

Please if you have any information about the Sabbath and clean and unclean animals. We can eat now. Please help. I'm confused about the Sabbath. I think God cleansed all animals to eat now?

### **Answer**

Thank you for your good question. The Sabbath and laws concerning clean and unclean animals were part of the Law of Moses God made with national Israel (Deuteronomy 5:1-3, 12-15; 14:1-20). When Christ died on the cross, He removed this law and replaced it with His own (Colossians 2:13-17). The Sabbath has

been done away with (Colossians 2:16-17), and we have the liberty to eat any kind of meat (1 Timothy 4:1-5).

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## Jacob Blesses His Sons

(Some thoughts on Genesis 49)

Jefferson David Tant | Roswell, Georgia, USA

Prophecy and its fulfillment present some of the strongest evidence of the inspiration of the Scriptures. This presents a strong challenge to those who seek to deny that the Bible is of Divine origin. The apostles also recognized the significance of prophecy, as so often they referred to this in their preaching.

Genesis 49 is a most interesting chapter, wherein the dying Jacob called his sons together to pronounce his blessing and prediction upon each of them. It is revealing to note the statements he made, and then to look to their fulfillment.

*"Then Jacob summoned his sons and said, 'Assemble yourselves that I may tell you what will befall you in the days to come. Gather together and hear, O sons of Jacob; And listen to Israel your father' (verses 1-2).*

***"Reuben,** you are my firstborn; My might and the beginning of my strength, Preeminent in dignity and preeminent in power. Uncontrolled as water, you shall not have preeminence, Because you went up to your father's bed; Then you defiled it --he went up to my couch" (verses 3-4).*

None of Reuben's descendants ever had a position of prominence—no judge, priest, king, etc. Reuben had a sexual relationship with his father's concubine—Bilhah (Genesis 35:22) and thus suffered for that sin.

***"Simeon and Levi** are brothers; Their swords are implements of violence. Let my soul not enter into their council; Let not my glory be united with their assembly; Because in their anger they slew men, And in their self-will they lamed oxen. Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce; And their wrath, for it is cruel. I will disperse them in Jacob, And scatter them in Israel" (verses 5-7).*

These brothers had the same mother—Leah. They slaughtered all the Shechemite men following the rape of their sister, Dinah, in Genesis 34. They had tricked the Shechemites into being circumcised, and then came upon them while the men were recovering. Levi received no land inheritance—only the cities of refuge. Simeon evidently received only a small allotment in the midst of Judah, as shown in Joshua 9:1.

*The tribes of Simeon and Levi were scattered and dispersed in Israel, in conformity with the prediction of Jacob, on account of their sacrilegious and piratical revenge of the outrage committed against Dinah their sister (Genesis 34:1-31; 49:5). Levi had no compact lot or portion in the Holy Land; and Simeon received for his portion only a district dismembered from Judah, with some other lands the tribe overran in the mountains of Seir, and in the desert of Gedor (**American Tract Society Dictionary**).*

***"Judah,** your brothers shall praise you; Your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; Your father's sons shall bow down to you. Judah is a lion's whelp; From the prey, my son, you have gone up. He couches, he lies down as a lion, And as a lion, who dares rouse him up? The scepter shall not depart from Judah, Nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, Until Shiloh comes, And to him shall be the obedience of the peoples. He ties his foal to the vine, And his donkey's colt to the choice vine; He washes his garments in wine, And his robes in the blood of grapes. His eyes are dull from wine, And his teeth white from milk" (verses 8-12).*

We see fulfillment in the success of the kingdom under David and Solomon, and thus the "father's sons bowed down" to the kings over the tribes. The latter phrases would refer to the richness of the land that "flowed with milk and honey, as God has promised" (Exodus 3:8). There is special significance to verse 10: "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, Nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, Until Shiloh comes,

And to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.” The scepter refers to ruling power. Even after its captivity, Judah did not lose its tribal identity, and the right to pass its own laws, including the death penalty. The Jewish rulers ceased their reign when Herod came to the throne, and the legal power of the Sanhedrin was restricted 23 years before the trial of Jesus, thus they had to go to the Roman authorities in order to get the death penalty passed.

*In any of the Jewish writings, “Shiloh” is another title for the Messiah. So neither the scepter nor the ruler’s staff will depart until Messiah comes. But after he comes the scepter will depart from Judah. The scepter is a “tribal staff” This and “the ruler’s staff” indicate the lawmaking power of Judah (mainly here to pass the death penalty), which will not depart until the Messiah has come, and then it will depart.*

*Now, let’s trace this through history. The 70-year Jewish exile in Babylon, spoken of by Daniel, was started by Nabopolassar and continued by his son, Nebuchadnezzar. Judah lost its national sovereignty, but did not lose its tribal staff, its tribal identity, or the right to exercise its own laws and pass the death penalty.*

*Herod the Great, who was not of Jewish blood, came to the Jewish throne, following the Maccabean princes who were the last Jewish kings to reign in Israel. The legal power of the Sanhedrin was restricted 23 years before the trial of Jesus. Dr. McGaff, in his book, **Jesus Before the Sanhedrin**, points out that the Jewish Supreme Court (and there were actually two of them, one of 71 members, and one of 23) started to have their power restricted.*

*This was actually started by Archelaus, who was the son and successor of Herod the Great, in 11 A.D. Josephus records this in his **Antiquities**, Book 17, chapter 13. The Roman historian, Tacitus, states that “The Romans reserved to themselves the right of the sword,” and thus took power away from the Jews.” The Jerusalem and Babylonian Talmuds both bear this out. (These were Jewish commentaries, and are named for the cities in which they were written). The Jewish Talmud states: “A little more than 40 years before the destruction of the Temple (which would be 30 A.D., as the temple was destroyed in 70 A.D.—jdt), the power of pronouncing capital sentences was taken away from the Jews.” Remember, this was 30 A.D.*

*This had a profound impact on the Jewish court. Rabbi Rachman says, “When the members of the Sanhedrin found themselves deprived of the right over life and death, the judicial power of the scepter, a general consternation took possession of them. They covered their heads with ashes and their bodies with sackcloth exclaiming, ‘Woe unto us, for the scepter has departed Judah and the Messiah has not come.’”*

*But wait a minute! Who was walking in their midst in 30 A.D.? Jesus Christ! And the prophecy said that the Messiah had to come before the scepter departed, and the scepter departed by 30 A.D. Thus the Messiah had to be in their presence (Quotes from **The Messiah and Prophecy**, pages 1 and 2 by JDT).*

Thus we see this particular prophecy fulfilled some 1,700 years after it was spoken by Jacob. What powerful evidence! Jesus was in their midst, and the rulers were blind to it. Jesus referred to this in his statement in Matthew 15:14: “Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if a blind man guides a blind man, both will fall into a pit.”

*“**Zebulun** will dwell at the seashore; And he shall be a haven for ships, And his flank shall be toward Sidon” (v. 13).*

Their land was from the Mediterranean Sea to the Lake of Gennesareth. Their ports for the trade ships

provided the means of profitable commerce for them.

***“Issachar** is a strong donkey, Lying down between the sheepfolds. When he saw that a resting place was good And that the land was pleasant, He bowed his shoulder to bear burdens, And became a slave at forced labor” (verses 14-15).*

Issachar had good land, and worked hard to reap the produce of the land. Their men showed their strength in their valor (1 Chronicles 7:1-5). They also showed wisdom in their leadership. (1 Chronicles 12:32).

***“Dan** shall judge his people, As one of the tribes of Israel. Dan shall be a serpent in the way, A horned snake in the path, That bites the horse’s heels, So that his rider falls backward. For Your salvation I wait, O LORD” (verses 16-18).*

The 20-year judgeship of Samson, who was of the tribe of Dan, would be an obvious fulfillment of this, and certainly the Philistines would have considered Samson to be a poisonous snake that greatly troubled them. And he was a savior of Israel, in that he delivered his people from the oppression of the Philistines.

*“As for **Gad**, raiders shall raid him, But he will raid at their heels” (verse 19).*

The tribe of Gad was often attacked by the Ammonites, but in time the Ammonites themselves suffered great defeat (Judges 10:8; Jeremiah 49:1ff).

*“As for **Asher**, his food shall be rich, And he will yield royal dainties” (verse 20).*

Asher’s allotment was on the seacoast between Tyre and Mt. Carmel. It was a very fertile area, and produced fine corn and oil.

***“Naphtali** is a doe let loose, He gives beautiful words” (verse 21).*

This is a possible reference to him as an agile and beautiful warrior. Barak, of the tribe, was summoned to go with Deborah to defeat Sisera and the Canannite army (Judges 4:6ff). As to the beautiful words, he helped Deborah with the beautiful song of victory recorded in Judges 5.

***“Joseph** is a fruitful bough, A fruitful bough by a spring; Its branches run over a wall. The archers bitterly attacked him, And shot at him and harassed him; But his bow remained firm, And his arms were agile, From the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob (From there is the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel), From the God of your father who helps you, And by the Almighty who blesses you With blessings of heaven above, Blessings of the deep that lies beneath, Blessings of the breasts and of the womb. The blessings of your father Have surpassed the blessings of my ancestors Up to the utmost bound of the everlasting hills; May they be on the head of Joseph, And on the crown of the head of the one distinguished among his brothers” (verses 22-26).*

It is quite obvious that Joseph was bitterly attacked, not only by his brothers, but by Potipher’s wife. Yet he remained firm in his faith. We also note that the record refers to the fact that God was constantly with him (Genesis 39:2, 3, 5, 21, 23).

***“Benjamin** is a ravenous wolf; In the morning he devours the prey, And in the evening he divides the spoil” (verse 27).*

Benjamin had a war-like character. The tribe overcame the other tribes in battle, having produced strong warriors. Ehud was from Benjamin. He delivered Israel from the Moabites, by slaying their king Eglon, and then he raised an army and defeated his people. He judged Israel with honor for many years (Judges 3:12-31; 4:1). We also note that King Saul was from Benjamin, and he had much success in battle.

For the most part, these prophecies started to be fulfilled some 400 years after Jacob spoke them, with some reaching final fulfillment 1,700 years later when Jesus (Shiloh) came.

Truly, God “did not leave Himself without witness,” as Paul declared to his hearers at Lystra (Acts 14:17).

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## **The Church As God Intended It For His Glory (1)**

Tommy G. Thornhil | Etna, Arkansas, USA

The church is no accident, nor unessential, as some contend. God, from eternity, planned the church. He intended the church to play an important role in His plan of salvation, not to save people, but to proclaim and defend the gospel of Jesus Christ, once it was revealed (1 Corinthians 15:1-4), which is God's power to save those who would believe and obey it (Romans 1:16-17). Just as God intended, as the church performed its role in God's plan He would be glorified. “To Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen” (Ephesians 3:21).

God designed the church to reveal His manifold wisdom in both the spiritual and the physical realm (Ephesians 3:10-11). This was the purpose for which Jesus cleansed and purified it, that it might be a glorious church (Ephesians 5:27). But, from the human standpoint, it is an imperfect church, composed of inglorious, sinful people. To an undiscerning world this might seem a contradiction, that God would design the perfect church, then add to it undeserving sinners, who could be saved by His grace. Yet, since the fall of man in the Garden of Eden, sinful people are the only kind of people God has ever had to work with. So, God doing what He did shows that He really loves and cares for the creatures (human beings) made in His image.

So, while God doing what He has done may seem strange to many people, God is still glorified when we recognize His wisdom and ability to use man's imperfections for His glory. Even though human beings were imperfect, God still used them to perform works in ways that would glorify Him, not them. Let me give you a couple of examples in the Old Testament where God chose sinful men to do things where it would be obvious that the glory would be His and not the men who performed the actions required of them.

When God chose Gideon to deliver the Israelites from the Midianites, Gideon was not a virtuous man. Yet, God selected him, and in the process, whittled down Gideon's army from 30,000 to only 300 men. Armed with torches, clay pitchers and good voices, they were victorious over the immense army of the Midianites (Judges 6-7). Who got the glory? When David defeated the giant, Goliath (1 Samuel 17), he was not wearing the king's armor, but, was a young man in shepherd's attire, armed with a sling and 5 stones, doing battle against the giant. When the battle was over, who was the one really glorified?

On the other hand, we learn from Moses what happens when God is not honored and given the glory He deserves (Numbers 20:27). Because Moses did not follow God's instructions, Moses dishonored God, and God would not permit him to enter the promised land.

Think how God is the one glorified in the church, when men follow His design. For example, the plan of salvation (belief, repentance, confession, baptism) that one must obey, in order to be saved and added by the Lord to the church is certainly not glorious from a human standpoint. Everything in the plan points to God being glorified, not man. The gospel is a very simple message, one that men don't find appealing (1 Corinthians 1:18, 21-25). The men whom He chose to carry the soul-saving message were simply imperfect, earthen vessels (2 Corinthians 4:7). The contents were valuable, not the container. God and His Son received the glory when men preached the gospel message given to them by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, for it was Deity's gospel they preached, not their own.

Who gets the glory when His people assemble each first day of the week to pray, praise, and worship Him, and memorialize His Son's sacrifice as the saints partake of the Lord's Supper? What about local church

organization? Could man come up with a better design for the church to function than God's simple design in Philippians 1:1? History shows us what happens when men tamper with God's organizational design. Men, seeking glory for themselves, using flawed human wisdom have produced a divided religious world, known as denominationalism. God receives no glory when men build their human, ornate houses of worship and name them after men, nor is He honored when men build institutions He has not authorized, and attach them to the church.

So, how can we be sure that the local congregation of which we are a part, is glorifying God as He intends? First study the New Testament pattern carefully, for this is the ideal or perfect church, the one that God approves. Then we (the members) will strive to do all we can to conform to that pattern. This also means we will continually examine our faith and practices in the light of God's word to remain faithful to God.

Part of this examination means that we will also notice where actual churches in the New Testament failed to measure up to God's ideal plan, and learn what they were told to do to correct the problems where they had failed.

Once we have learned what God expects of His church, then we do all we can to conform ourselves as a group to the revealed truth. As members we will honor God by respecting His authority, which He gave to His Son, and revealed in His word (Matthew 17:5; Colossians 3:17; 2 John 4-6; 1 Timothy 1:3; 6:3-4; 1 Corinthians 14:37; 1 Peter 4:11). The members will have the mind of Christ (Philippians 2:5; Galatians 2:20), always willing to submit to His leadership (1 Peter 2:21-23). The members will uphold (defend) God's truth (1 Peter 3:15; Galatians 2:5; Ephesians 6:10-13; Philippians 1:17). They will love spiritual things (Colossians 3:1-5; Matthew 6:33). And they will strive to be faithful (Revelation 2:10; Colossians 3:17). Doing this will glorify God, not ourselves.

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## Hiding God's Word In Our Heart

Jim Mickells | Lewisburg, Tennessee, USA

*Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You! (Psalm 119:11).*

The value of the word of God is undeniable. It directs us to the Father (Jeremiah 10:23), lights the path of life (Psalm 119:105) When received it will save our souls (James 1:21) and will set us free from the bondage of sin (John 8:32). When obeyed we can be sanctified unto the Lord (John 17:17). It is milk to the immature (1 Peter 2:2); it is solid food to the mature (Hebrews 5:12-14). It will strengthen the inward man (Acts 20:32) and provide comfort to those who are troubled (1 Thessalonians 4:18). It sounds warnings to those living in sin (Revelation 1:7), and all will be judged by it when life on earth is over (John 12:48, etc). Yet in our text one of the great benefits is the word's ability to help us in the prevention of sin.

Notice this comment by Matthew Poole in his commentary on this verse:

*"I have not contented myself with bare hearing or reading thy word, but have received it in the love of it, have diligently pondered it, and laid it up in my mind and memory like a choice treasure, to be ready upon all occasions, to counsel, or comfort, or quicken, or caution me, as need requires; that by a diligent and affectionate consideration of thy precepts, and promises, and threatenings, I might be kept from sinful courses, against which these are the best antidote."*

Let me suggest to you a few reasons why the word of God, when placed in our hearts, will prevent sin in our lives.

**1. I can know what sin is when I read and study my Bible.** Paul said, "What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, "You shall not covet" (Romans 7:7). If we know what is sinful, then we can avoid those things. As children, our parents instructed us on what was right and what



was wrong. They knew what was best for us. Out of love and respect for them we followed their instruction. God is of much greater knowledge than our parents. He truly knows what is best for us. So, should we not out of love and respect for Him listen to His word, understanding that He knows what is best for us?

**2. I can know the consequences of sin.** In Paul's letter to those at Rome, he said, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23). Someone has said that sin will take you farther than you want to go, keep you longer than you want to stay, and cost you more than you are willing to pay. You can look at the example of King David and the sin he committed with Bathsheba and see the truth in that statement. What higher price could be paid for the pleasures of sin than one's soul? Knowing the wages sin pays should motivate us to avoid such at all cost.

**3. I can also know how my sins affect others.** Once again look in the book of Romans at something the apostle Paul said, "You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonor God through breaking the law? For 'the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you,' as it is written" (Romans 2:23-24). David's sin with Bathsheba illustrates this point so well. Uriah is killed, enemies blaspheme the Lord, the child dies, sword would never depart from his house, God would raise up adversity against the king from his own house, wives be given to his neighbor (his own son), etc. The choices I make can have a devastating effect on those around me, especially those whom I love. Knowing this why would I want to sin?

**4. I can know the blessings of living a righteous life.** When Joshua was selected by God to replace Moses he was told:

*"This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success" (Joshua 1:8).*

True prosperity involves more than just material possessions. Remember the question Jesus asked, "For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matthew 16:26). The Bible is filled with passages which assures us if we have conquered sin through Christ, eternal life is awaiting us (2 Timothy 4:6-8; Revelation 22:14).

The Psalmist says of the words of God, "More to be desired are they than gold, Yea, than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb" (Psalm 19:10). May we hide them in our hearts to help prevent sin in our lives.

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## Homophobic or Holiness?

Mike Thomas | Beaver Dam, Kentucky, USA

A phobia is an irrational fear that causes people to avoid certain things. Those who are afraid of being in a crowd are agoraphobic. A person afraid of heights is acrophobic. The list goes on. The latest phobia to make the circuit is homophobic, which is the fear of homosexuals or of becoming homosexual. We hear this term a lot nowadays because this is the accusation made of those who oppose homosexuality; that they are homophobic. Nothing could be further from the truth.

I oppose homosexuality, yet I have no fear of becoming gay, nor am I afraid to interact or befriend homosexuals. To say otherwise would be absurd. I may not condone their behavior or support their immorality, but I will love them and help them as I do any other person. I believe most Christians are like this; love the sinner but oppose the sin. Yet those who engage in homosexuality must reach the same conclusion if they want to go to heaven. A homosexual must repent of his sinful behavior in the same way a thief has to stop stealing, a drunk has to stop drinking, and a liar has to stop lying. The desire or lust for these things might remain, but the behavior must cease. No one can practice these things and still go to heaven (1 Corinthians 6:9-11). It's as simple as that. So to oppose these sins is not a matter of phobia or irrational thinking. It's a matter of holiness and being obedient to God, who has made it abundantly clear

that He will not approve of homosexuality. This is seen especially in His fiery judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah for their immorality (Genesis 19:24-25). The sin of Sodomy is a sexual sin that relates to this event. It should forever show mankind that God will never condone same-sex activity or unions. It is contrary to nature (Romans 1:26-32), as it prevents and perverts life on earth, and is an offense to His holiness. Thus, "as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities around them in a similar manner to these, having given themselves over to sexual immorality and gone after strange flesh, are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire" (Jude 7).

If this stand warrants accusing me of a phobia, then label me Hadeophobic, which is the fear of going to hell. For I am convinced that there is an eternal God who is holy and holds man accountable for how he lives (Acts 17:30-31). Fortunately, He loves us enough to offer us salvation through the gospel of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:38; Galatians 3:26-27), if we repent of our wickedness. God will gladly receive sinners who "come out" of immorality to be holy as He is holy (2 Corinthians 6:14-18).

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## More Thoughts On Attendance

William J. Stewart | Odessa, Ontario, Canada

If you haven't read [last month's article](#), please do so. If you have read it, perhaps you noticed that there were no Bible references in it. None! It wasn't by design, it just happened that the article developed into a pair of lists - bad things that result from failing to assemble and good things that result from being at the assembly. This week, we want to look at what the Bible says about our assembling together.

### Principles From The Psalmist

Psalm 122 begins:

*I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go into the house of the LORD.'* (Psalm 122:1)

David was glad when he heard such an invitation. He desired to be with God's people and to worship the Lord. What is our response to such an invitation? Do we want to be with fellow Christians, so we can worship God and encourage one another, or would we rather be somewhere else doing something else?

In another Psalm, we read:

*Make a joyful shout to the LORD ... come before His presence with singing... Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise.* (Psalm 100:1, 2, 4)

Do we come together every opportunity available to praise God? How often do we enter His presence (publicly) to give thanks to the Lord? As we look through the writing of David, it is evident that he desired to worship God publicly at every opportunity available. This is part of what made him a man after God's own heart (Acts 13:22). Does our focus on public worship make us men and women after God's heart? And if not, then whose heart are we following after?

### Attendance From the New Testament

Before we look at what the New Testament says about attendance, let's acknowledge what it does not say. There is no "thou shall attend every assembly or else" verse. The way some speak about attendance, you'd think there was such a verse. There isn't. Don't misunderstand. I am not suggesting that Christians do not need to assemble - if that were the case, it would be pointless to write an article on the topic. However, in our zeal, we need to be careful not to go beyond or fall short of God's word. We need to teach what the Bible says about attendance, not what we wish it said.

So, what can be learned about attendance from the New Testament? Notice a few things:

- Thomas for an unspecified reason was not gathered with the other disciples (John 20:19-25). Jesus was there, Thomas was not! Every time the Christians are gathered together, Jesus is there. Are we? His absence that evening was directly responsible for what must have been an awful week. The

rest of the disciples knew Jesus had risen from the dead, but Thomas continued in unbelief. What knowledge and encouragement are we not getting by our absence?

- Throughout the time they walked with Jesus, it seems the disciples were almost always together. After Jesus ascended to heaven, they were together in prayer (Acts 1:13-14). Their relationship to Jesus is what united them and caused them to be together as often as they were. Do we have a close connection with fellow Christians? We ought to. Our relationship to Jesus should result in a close relationship with His people.
- In fact, we cannot reject Jesus' people without rejecting Him. The Bible calls the church the body of Christ (Romans 12:4-5; 1 Corinthians 12:12-27; Ephesians 1:22-23; 4:11-16; 5:30; Colossians 1:24). How can we claim to have a relationship with Jesus but rarely assemble with His body?
- After the people on the day of Pentecost obeyed the gospel, we're told what they continued to do from then on (Acts 2:42-47). They assembled to hear teaching, for fellowship, to remember Jesus, and to pray. This was not a once in a while thing - it was very regular (v 46). They desired the company of people of like precious faith. How often are we together? Do we anticipate every occasion with God's people?
- When Paul was in Ephesus, he met daily with the disciples and others who sought to know the word of God (Acts 19:9-10).
- Acts 20:7 says the disciples came together on the first day of the week to break bread. Which week? The inference is that they did this every week (see the parallel Sabbath command, Exodus 20:8). Do we meet with the disciples every week to break bread? It should be understood that if it is the first day of the week, we should be with the disciples, breaking bread, giving of our means (1 Corinthians 16:1-2), praising God, and encouraging one another.
- While pointing out the unfaithfulness of national Israel, the writer of Hebrews appealed for Christians not to depart from God, but rather to exhort one another daily (Hebrews 3:12-13). How better to be exhorted by fellow Christians than to be at the assembly of the saints? And if we do not have the regular encouragement of fellow Christians, how can we expect to not repeat the unfaithfulness of Israel?
- The Hebrew writer rebuked the recipients of his letter for a lack of spiritual growth (Hebrews 5:12-14). Was their problem a failure to assemble with fellow Christians (see 3:12-13; 10:24-25)? Every assembly is an opportunity to learn God's will and to grow in faith.
- Finally, look at Hebrews 10:22-29. God wants us to draw near, hold fast and assemble together; not to stay away, let go and forsake the assembly. We have a responsibility to encourage one another (v 24). We cannot do that by not being at the assembly. In fact, when we choose not to assemble with God's people, we become a discouragement to others.

We do not want to misrepresent and misuse this text - it is not about a missed assembly from time to time. The Greek word "forsake" in Hebrews 10:25 means to leave behind, to desert (Strong's). However, we must acknowledge that desertion of the assemble and of one's faith doesn't happen overnight. It is a process, and that process will involve decreasing attendance over a period of time. Are you assembling less and less? If so, then you are on the road to forsaking the Lord. Forsaking the assembly (ceasing to meet with the church) is identified as a willful sin (v 26), and results in judgement (v 27-29).

Friend, you need to be at the assembly to grow; others need you there to be encouraged, and God wants you there.

## **Names of the Messiah**

### **Mighty God**

Sean P. Cavender | Bald Knob, Arkansas, USA

Several encouraging prophecies about Jesus Christ are recorded for us in the pages of the Old Testament. Some of the most particular and exact prophecies about Christ are found in the prophet Isaiah. Isaiah was writing approximately 700 years before the birth of Jesus of Nazareth. Isaiah foretold the Messiah's conception and birth by a virgin (Isaiah 7:14) and how Immanuel ("God with us") would be a sign to the

house of David, the rightful heirs to the throne of Israel (Isaiah 7:13). The miraculous birth would be a sign concerning the throne of David and the kingdom God would be established by a descendant of David.

This helps establish the context of the prophecy made 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).

Associated with the establishment and coming kingdom was the proclamation the Messiah would be associated with Galilee of the Gentiles (Isaiah 9:1).

*“The people who walk in darkness will see a great light; those who live in a dark land, the light will shine on them. You shall multiply the nation, You shall increase their gladness; they will be glad in Your presence as with the gladness of harvest, as men rejoice when they divide the spoil,”* (Isaiah 9:2-3).

These verses (Isaiah 9:1-2) were quoted by Matthew as being fulfilled when Jesus began His earthly ministry in Galilee, preaching “repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand,” (Matthew 4:17).

Not only did Isaiah describe the coming Messiah as “Immanuel” which translates to be “God with us,” he also affirmed the coming prince of the kingdom would be called “Mighty God”—a strong affirmation of the deity of the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth.

Might denotes strength, power, and authority. The Old Testament gives a picture of God as having a mighty hand, demonstrating His power as the Almighty. God delivered the children of Israel out of Egypt by a “mighty hand and by an outstretched arm” (Deuteronomy 5:15), certainly recalling the ten plagues and the parting of the Red Sea. God demonstrated His power and might in saving Israel and delivering them from Egyptian bondage.

David, a great warrior and king of Israel, described God as being “strong and mighty” and “mighty in battle” (Psalm 24:8). These descriptions of God’s might and power all demonstrate the ability of God to save and deliver His people, while also conquering and humbling His enemies.

It is in this vein that Isaiah speaks of the kingdom of God. The Messiah will be the King. Jesus stated that all authority had been given to Him on heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:18). He is pictured in the book of Revelation as the rider on the white horse, who judges and wages war, commanding the armies of heaven against Satan (Revelation 19:11-16).

Jesus is the perfect example of might, strength, and greatness. He said, “and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many,” (Mark 10:44-45). So the picture of might, power, and strength is not what we typically imagine. Jesus exemplified Himself as the Mighty God by:

- Humbling Himself in obedience to God the point of death on the cross (Philippians 2:8)
- Resurrection from the dead, vindicating Him as God (John 20:28)
- Ascension and exaltation to the right hand of God, having the scepter of righteousness and the demand we worship Him (Hebrews 1:5-9)

While humility, death, rejection, and sacrifice may run against our natural measures of greatness, Jesus Christ is vindicated and proven to be the greatest of all. Jesus Christ is the Mighty God, and He has established the kingdom of God, reigning in heaven, a fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah. He has established and rules the kingdom, offering peace, justice, and righteousness. By His might we may be

saved and through His sacrifice we may be forgiven of our sins. Praise the Lord for our Mighty God and King, Jesus Christ! We may come to be a part of His kingdom and be made righteous by the gracious offering of salvation through faith in the Son of God.

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### **Present Truth**

"For this reason I will not be negligent to remind you always of these things, though you know and are established in the present truth" (2 Peter 1:12)

## **The Roman Road to Salvation**

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

(I borrowed the idea for and basic approach to this lesson from a sermon by Randy Cavender)

### **Introduction**

Rome is located on the banks of the Tiber River, fifteen miles from the west coast of Italy and built on seven hills. The "Eternal City" was already eight centuries old at the time Paul wrote to the Christians there. It was so important politically and economically in its day that it is hard for modern people to comprehend. In an empire that had a total population of perhaps thirty million, the populace of Rome numbered perhaps four million. It was the capital of its own empire, the most extensive empire of its day, ruling the Mediterranean world, with provinces from the Euphrates River in the east to Spain in the west, from Britain in the north to Egypt in the south.

The great city was the trading hub of the western world. It was truly said in a figure, "All roads lead to Rome." All manner of goods were brought to Rome as tribute from the provinces and as trade from both the provinces and all parts of the known world.

The apostle Paul wrote a letter to the saints in Rome (Romans 1:1-7). That letter is the greatest treatise ever written on the gospel plan of salvation. The apostle stated the theme of his epistle, the proposition he proved, in Romans 1:16-17.

*For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith."*

All roads may have led to Rome, but there is only one way to salvation. "The gospel of Christ ... is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes." It is not "a" power to salvation, it is "the" power. The definite article "the" indicates singularity. It is the one and only. It is "the power of God." Men contend for many ways of salvation, but God has revealed only one, "the gospel of Christ." It is God's power to save, not man's. It is "for everyone who believes," whether Jew or Gentile, men and women of every color, tongue, nationality, social status, or economic state. The gospel (good news) of Christ is the only road to salvation.

According to the Roman epistle, how are we saved?

### **The Need**

We must first realize our need for salvation. God's justice demands the condemnation of all sinners (Romans 2:2,11-12). All have sinned (Romans 3:23). Therefore all are condemned to death (Romans 6:23). "Death" in this passage is in contrast with "eternal life," thus, it is eternal death, eternal separation from God. Dear friend, without the gospel you are condemned to eternal torment away from the presence of God.

Since we have all sinned, we cannot rely on perfectly keeping the law of God for our salvation. We cannot do enough good works to earn salvation (Romans 3:27-28). A criminal who commits a crime deserving the death penalty cannot do enough community service to earn his pardon. Rather, we must depend on the grace of God, His undeserved favor, for our salvation (Romans 3:24).

### **Grace**

The grace of God is manifested in His Son (Romans 3:24-26). His death on the cross satisfies the just, divine demand for the death of the sinner, because He died for us. He redeems us from the guilt of sin and demonstrates that God can be just as well as merciful when He forgives our sins.

### **Faith**

To receive the benefits of the death of Christ, we must be in Christ (Romans 3:24). We learn how to come to Christ through the gospel (Romans 10:13-17). That's the reason the gospel is God's power to save (Romans 1:16-17). The gospel informs us we get into Christ by faith (Romans 5:1-2).

### **Obedience**

But neither Romans nor any other book of the Bible teaches salvation by faith alone. Paul begins and ends the book of Romans by affirming that the purpose of the gospel is to lead all people to "obedience to the faith" (Romans 1:5; 16:25-26).

To render the obedience of faith, we must repent (turn away from) our sins (Romans 2:5; 6:12), confess our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 10:8-10), and be baptized into Christ (Romans 6:3-5). When we are buried in the waters of baptism, we declare our trust in the blood sacrifice of Christ on the cross for our salvation by obeying a likeness of that death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6:17-18). We are then set free from sin.

I once went to a medical clinic because of a chronic, severe shoulder pain. I requested a shot into my shoulder to ease the pain. The medical professional refused, said the problem was due to a pinched nerve in my neck, and prescribed therapy for my neck. I had enough faith in the judgment of the professional to follow the prescribed therapy, and I was soon pain free. Do you have enough faith in the Lord to do what He says to do to be saved?

### **Living Sacrifice**

But this is not the end of the road to salvation. After we are in Christ we must present our bodies to the Lord as living sacrifices by transforming our hearts and lives into the image of Christ rather than remaining conformed to the sinful world (Romans 12:1-2).

### **Conclusion**

Christ never abandons those who place their trust in Him (Romans 8:35-39). We may abandon Him, but there is no power, spiritual or physical, that can separate us from Him as long we maintain our obedient faith. He is faithful.

The greatness of this salvation far transcends all the wisdom of man (Romans 11:33-36). Once I went elk hunting in the high country of Western Colorado. When the sun came up from behind the high mountains of the continental divide far to the east, the beauty was so incredible I cannot adequately describe it. The apostle looked back over his revelation of the gospel plan of salvation and described the beauty of that divine plan that manifests the wisdom of God.

*Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! 'For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor?' 'Or who has first given to Him and it shall be repaid to him?' For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever.*

*Amen* (Romans 11:33-36).

All I can add is "Amen!"

This salvation is available to you (Romans 10:12-13). Will you not come to Christ by obedient faith and be saved?

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# Introduction to Malachi

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

## Author

Malachi wrote the book bearing his name (1:1). This is the only time in the Bible this name, meaning “my messenger,” appears, and Malachi describes the office of priests as “the messenger of the Lord” (2:7), foretold the coming “messenger” (3:1), John the Baptist (Mark 1:1-4), and the “Messenger of the covenant” (3:1), Jesus Christ. Like John and Jesus, Malachi called upon the Jews to repent. Nothing is known of Malachi other than what appears in his book.

## Date

At the time Malachi wrote, Israel was under a Persian governor (1:8). Levitical worship had been restored (1:7-10; 3:8), but the sacrifices were corrupted (1:7-8,14), the hearts of the people were not in their worship and service (1:12-13), the priests corrupted the law (2:7-9), the men were divorcing their Jewish wives to take foreign wives (2:10-16), and they were not tithing as commanded (3:8-10). The people were impoverished and oppressed (2:17; 3:11). This fits the time Nehemiah was twice appointed governor of Judah (445-432 BC), and Malachi probably wrote during this period, joining Nehemiah and Ezra in one last divine effort to save Old Testament Israel.

## Audience

Israel had become hardened skeptics (1:2; 2:12-13,17; 3:14-15). Like spoiled children, they talked back to God. Ten times Malachi represents them denying God's charge (1:2,6-7,12-13; 2:14,17; 3:7-8,13). Israel, even the priests, had lost their reverence for God (1:6-7,12).

## Style

Malachi introduces a new style of teaching, which became the norm in Jewish synagogues, called “didactic-dialectic.” He presents a charge, raises a supposed objection by his hearers, and answers the objection.

## Theme

Malachi pleads with Israel for the Lord, “Return to Me, and I will return to you” (3:7). This is the exact same message proclaimed by Zechariah 80 years earlier (Zechariah 1:3). Thus, Malachi's message is identical to Zechariah's: Return to the Lord. At the same time Ezra the scribe was restoring the law, and Nehemiah led the people in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem.

## Authority

Malachi claims the Lord as the source of his message 25 times (cf. 1:1-2).

## Overview

With Malachi, the Lord makes his last vain attempt to save Israel by His prophets. Now all that is left to do is to send His Son as His final revelation. Malachi closes the Old Testament with a look backward in His appeal to Israel to keep the law (4:4) and a look forward in his promise:

*“The Sun of Righteousness shall arise With healing in His wings”* (4:2; cf. 3:1; 4:5-6).

## Outline

- I. Introduction - 1:1
- II. Call to Repentance - 1:2 - 3:18
  - A. Israel Denied Love of God - 1:2-5
  - B. Priests Despised the Lord - 1:6 - 2:9
  - C. Jews Divorced their Wives and Married Foreign, Idolatrous Women - 2:10-16
  - D. Israel Denied Divine Justice - 2:17 - 3:6
  - E. Israel Robbed God - 3:7-12
  - F. Israel Said Service to God Is Useless - 3:13-18

III. Final Appeal by Lord through Prophets - 4:1-6

A. Coming Judgment - 4:1-3

B. Looking Backward and Forward - 4:4-6



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