

# July 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 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).

*"There were no missionary societies, no missionary institutions, no organized efforts in the ante-Nicene age (33 A.D. - 325 A.D. - KS); and yet in less than 300 years from the death of St. John the whole population of the Roman Empire which then represented the civilized world was nominally Christianized... And while there were no professional missionaries devoting their whole life to this specific work, every congregation was a missionary society, and every Christian believe a missionary, inflamed by the love of Christ to convert his fellow-men" (Philip Schaff, **History of the Christian Church**. 2:20)*

*"Afterwards institutions were founded for widows and orphans, poor and infirm, and generally placed under the superintendence of the bishop; but personal responsibility was diminished by the organized charity, and the deacons lost their original significance and became subordinate officers of public worship" (Schaff. 2:143)*

Check out these two podcasts:

<http://believeandfollow.org>

<http://sharpsermons.org>

## Question from Sri Lanka about Satan

### Question

In this life, how could be sathan affect our thoughts?. Are there a connection for sathan with cruel things that are happening in the world.?

Couldn't he affect to the eternal life?

### **Answer**

Yes, Satan can affect our thoughts. He is the one who influenced Judas to betray the Lord (John 13:2); Satan and the devil are the same being (Revelation 12:9; 20:2). He is the one who influenced Ananias and Sapphira to lie (Acts 5:3). He is the one who tempts all people to sin (Matthew 4:1-10; 1 Corinthians 7:5). He tries to prevent people from obeying the Lord (Mark 4:15). He is the father of all lies (John 8:44).

All that is evil in the world comes from Satan. He was the tempter who led Adam and Eve to sin (Genesis chapter 3; cf. Revelation 12:9). Death, both spiritual and physical, came into the world as the result, as well as pain and suffering (Genesis 2:16-17; 3:16-18, 22-23; Romans 5:12-13). All suffering is the will of Satan (Job 1:6-19; 2:1-8; Luke 3:10-16; Acts 10:38; 2 Corinthians 12:7). He is our ultimate enemy (Ephesians 6:11-12; 1 Peter 5:8).

When we receive eternal life in heaven (1 Peter 1:3-5), he will no longer affect us in any way, for he will be cast into the lake of fire and brimstone to be tormented forever (Matthew 25:41; Revelation 20:10).

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## **Questions from Nigeria about the Form of God**

### **Question**

Many insist that God is in form of man, that to say God is like man shape.

### **Answer**

God did indeed make man in His own image (Genesis 1:26-27). How are we in the image of God? It is not our fleshly bodies, because God is a spirit (John 4:24), and a spirit has no fleshly body (Luke 24:39) or form visible to humans (Deuteronomy 4:12-18; Colossians 1:15; 1 Timothy 1:17; Hebrews 11:27). Rather, each human has a spirit within (1 Thessalonians 5:23). God is invisible (Colossians 1:15), immortal (1 Timothy 1:17), rational, that is, capable of reason (1 Corinthians 2:11), and moral, that is, capable of distinguishing good and evil (Genesis 3:22), and the spirit of each human is invisible (Colossians 1:15), immortal (Matthew 10:28), rational (1 Corinthians 2:11; Acts 17:2-3), and moral (Genesis 3:22; Romans 9:1-2). God is the Father of our spirits (Ecclesiastes 12:7; Hebrews 12:9).

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## **Churches of Christ in Ghana**

Sewel Hall | Atlanta, Georgia, USA

Every saved person is added to the Lord's church (Acts 2:47). If there were saved persons in Ghana in 1956, there were members of the Lord's church. If there was an assembly of saved people meeting in Ghana at that time, there was a church of Christ. But if there were such individuals or groups, we did not know about them.

As far as we know, the first time believing sinners were instructed in the Holy Spirit's words:

"Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38) was in late Spring, 1958. It was in the village of Nkum, near Swedru. Also, as far as we know, it was the first time that a plea was made to go back to the New Testament to be Christians only without denominational ties.

It was my privilege to be the speaker on that occasion. However, this is not written boastfully. Wendell Broom was with me and could just as well have been the speaker. He did preach at this same location the next day. Wendell was in fact the one who received the letter from Bennie Lee Fudge in Athens, Alabama, asking that someone try to contact John Oppon Gaidoo with whom he had been in correspondence. Wendell and I, living in Eastern Nigeria, would not have had the funds to go to Ghana except for a gift from American service men worshiping in Spain. We believe that all of us working together were being controlled by the providence of God.

Gaidoo had been a respected Major in the Salvation Army but had resigned because his conscience would not allow him to continue with an organization that did not practice baptism and the Lord's Supper as the scriptures teach. His was the kind of heart that Jesus called "honest and good," one in which the seed (the Word of God) would fall and "bear fruit with patience" (Luke 8:15). Indeed, J. O. Gaidoo bore much fruit before his untimely death just three years later. His faith was in Jesus Christ and he was determined to follow Him whatever the cost.

His decision involved considerable sacrifice. He sacrificed a sizeable pension that would have been his if he had stayed with the Army just a little longer. He also lost the prestige he had gained in a reputable organization. Like Abraham, "he went out not knowing where he was going" (Hebrews 12:8). He did not immediately agree to baptism when he first met Americans who were preaching the necessity of it. Wendell Broom made return trips, taking with him some Nigerian evangelists. On one of those trips Nigerian Solomon Etuk baptized Gaidoo.

After his baptism he began traveling about preaching and baptizing with no promise of financial support from any source. On one occasion he mortgaged his cocoa farm to get funds to go to Nigeria for Bible study. He was not working for Americans or for any denomination, but for Jesus to whom he had committed his life.

By the time I visited him again two years later, he had baptized 55. A small group was meeting in his home and another larger group in Nkwabirim. That church had erected the first meeting place owned by a church of Christ in Ghana as far as we know. Like Gaidoo, these were just Christians. They were committed to no denomination and they had no manmade creed; the New Testament was their only guide. There were no other churches like them in Ghana but they were one in Christ with Christians all over the world.

When I returned to Nigeria in 1960, I lived in Lagos, helping to establish churches in the western part of that country. This put me 600 miles closer to Ghana and made possible several trips during the next two years. It was perhaps on my second trip that I first met Samuel Obing. Brother Gaidoo expressed great admiration for him and the confidence that he would become a New Testament Christian if time were available to teach him.

I was leaving Ghana very soon and had no time to study with him in Ghana. So I invited him and his wife Comfort and their little Giftie to go back to Lagos with me. In Lagos, for some weeks we held daily classes in our home including also some Nigerian Christians. When the studies ended Samuel and his wife were baptized and they returned to Ghana where he became a widely known and effective preacher.

A sign in front of Gaidoo's humble home, announcing it as a meeting place of a church of Christ, revealed the extent to which even his house was dedicated to the Lord. It was here that I first met him and came to realize his sincere determination to do all that the Lord commanded and only what the Lord commanded. Here he died, his family reporting that they heard him in the evening reading his Bible, praying and singing a hymn in English and one in Fante. Next morning they found him still in his bed with his open Bible by his side, his glasses still resting on it.

When he died on 26th July, 1961, there was disagreement about where he should be buried. In Nkum there were only three cemeteries: Salvation Army, Methodist and Heathen. He had left the Salvation Army, and the Methodists did not want him. The only option seemed to be the Heathen cemetery, except that a kindly Salvation Army Captain agreed for him to be buried in theirs. It made no difference, of course, for his soul was already in the keeping of the one into whose care he had committed it, and where his body was buried was of no consequence.

### **Our Goal in Coming to Ghana**

Our goal was not to introduce another denomination; there were too many of those already. Our purpose was to call Ghanians out of paganism and denominationalism to be Christians only. We hoped to

accomplish this by preaching the pure gospel, pointing out from the scriptures what a sinner had to do to be saved and encouraging those who were saved to join together in local congregations. It was not our purpose that those congregations should be exactly like churches in America but exactly like those described in the New Testament.

There is always the tendency for churches to unite in some kind of association. This tendency is what led eventually to the formation of the Catholic Church out of the independent churches established in the first century. Such associations may combine churches in a city, a region or a country. Associations require organizations and organizations require officials who are more important and honorable than the elders of local churches, and this feeds pride. There is nothing in the Bible about such associations, organizations or officials. Sometimes such associations establish headquarters to which the churches report and send delegates. Instructions may be sent out from these headquarters and officials may come to the churches to encourage cooperation and perhaps to collect funds for various projects. There were no such organizations in the New Testament.

Of course, a formal organization does not have to exist for a denomination to be formed. Sometime a prominent preacher may control a number of churches that are under his influence. The apostles had "care of all the churches" (2 Corinthians 11:28), but there are no apostles today. Sometime one church may solicit all the churches in an area to cooperate in some project, such as a school or hospital or even a radio or TV program, and each church feels pressured to do so to avoid being criticized as non-cooperative. Thus, an association of churches is formed composed of the churches that are involved, and those that are not involved are excluded.

When a preacher or church or school or any other institution becomes a center of influence among a separate group of churches, a denomination has been formed.

In fact, no church or group of churches in the New Testament operated schools or hospitals. It is a good work for individual Christians to establish and support schools and hospitals if they are able to do so, but the Bible does not teach that churches should do it. It is fine for individual Christians to start businesses to make money to support their families, but the Bible does not teach churches to obtain money that way. When churches do form schools, the schools easily become centers of influence among the churches. Churches of Christ in the New Testament existed to save souls and prepare them for heaven, not to teach secular subjects or to make sick people well.

If the absence of scriptural authority makes instrumental music and infant baptism wrong, it also makes wrong any work that is not authorized for churches to do. In the same way it makes wrong any association of churches to do even the work that God has assigned.

As stated above, it was our original purpose in Ghana to save souls and rescue them from denominational affiliation so that they would be Christians only. It has always been my prayer that those who were saved and formed independent, autonomous congregations would never form a denomination. It has also been my prayer that if such a denomination were formed, individuals and congregations would refuse to join it. Let every congregation be just as independent, autonomous and self-sufficient as congregations were in the New Testament and as those early ones were in Ghana, bound together by nothing more than a common loyalty to Jesus and His word.

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## **I Don't Go There**

Jefferson David Tant | Roswell, Georgia, USA

People use many devices to mitigate or cancel out plain Bible teaching. This ancient practice can be traced to the Old Testament. Seven hundred years before Christ, Isaiah was dealing with a rebellious people. God told him: "Now go, write it on a tablet before them And inscribe it on a scroll, That it may serve in the time to come As a witness forever. For this is a rebellious people, false sons, Sons who refuse to

listen To the instruction of Jehovah; Who say to the seers, 'You must not see visions'; And to the prophets, 'You must not prophesy to us what is right, Speak to us pleasant words, Prophecy illusions. "Get out of the way, turn aside from the path, Let us hear no more about the Holy One of Israel"' (Isaiah 30:8-11).

It is hard to imagine a more blatant rejection of God—people who believed in God. But this attitude is not confined to ancient times. We see it in different ways in our generation.

**"I don't go there."** A Lutheran Church (ELCA) controversy concerns ordaining practicing homosexuals. An Atlanta trial dealt with Pastor Bradley Schmeling and his "marriage" to another man. A church supporter, James Mayer, was interviewed by a reporter who asked "about Biblical verses that condemned homosexuality...Mayer's posture stiffens. He says: 'I don't go there.'" Problem solved! Just don't open the pages that deal with this sin.

**"I don't see it that way."** After a sermon, Yater Tant spoke to a visitor who questioned his use of Mark 16:16. With no comment on the verse, my father turned to it and read, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned." The lady responded with "I don't see it that way." She what?! She obviously "saw" what it said, but rather than say "I don't believe it," she softened her unbelief by saying she didn't "see" it that way.

**"That was just Paul's opinion."** When I have asked people about the practice of women preachers, which is condemned in I Timothy 2:12, the response I often get it, "Paul was a woman hater," or "That's just Paul's opinion." In other words, their opinion is just as good as Paul's.

**"I don't preach against sin."** This fits well with the people in Isaiah's day. A popular mega-church preacher in our time is Joel O'Steen, who has a 40,000-member church in Houston. When interviewed by an Atlanta newspaper reporter about his popularity, he explained that he just wanted to make people feel good, so he didn't preach against sin. There may have been a huge elephant in the middle of his church building, but his advice would be just to ignore it.

**"That's not what it means."** A favorite ploy when faced with a very clear, but disliked, verse is to dismiss it by claiming it doesn't mean what it says. This is a favorite with homosexuals who have to deal with numerous scriptures that flatly condemn homosexuality.

**"That's not the kind of God I serve."** Those were the words of a young Baptist preacher I talked with in New Mexico many years ago. I had asked him if he believed in "salvation by faith only." When he agreed, I asked him to read James 2:24 and explain it. "Ye see that by works a man is justified, and not only by faith." He read it, closed the Bible and admitted he had never read that verse, but that made no difference. Case closed—Bible closed—mind closed.

**"It's not in my Bible."** One lady argued with Yater Tant that Mark 16:16 was not in her Bible. My father insisted it was, and called for her Bible. She was right! She had taken scissors and cut the offending passage out. I guess that's one way to deal with offending scripture.

"Hear, O earth: behold, I will bring evil upon this people, even the fruit of their thoughts, because they have not hearkened unto my words; and as for my law, they have rejected it" (Jeremiah 6:19).

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## What Happened To The Church Jesus Built? #3

Tommy G. Thornhil | Etna, Arkansas, USA

The last issue closed with the thought that the church had been furnished with all the gifts necessary to help the saints of God to "come to the unity of the faith...to the perfect man (maturity)" Eph.4:13. But what happened afterward?

A sinful world, for the first time in history, was now able to hear the wonderful gospel (good news) message of salvation freely offered to all mankind. But, instead of rejoicing over the good news they were hearing, most people, deluded by the alluring nature of sin, didn't want the gospel. They preferred to follow the course of the world, fulfilling the desires of the flesh. So, rejecting the message, they reacted with bitter hatred and enmity toward the messengers bearing the good news. The world showed its contempt for the church and set out to destroy it by persecuting its members. This same ungodly, unthankful, hateful attitude of the world continues unabated even to this very day against the people of God.

The members of the Lord's church experienced the first persecutions at the hands of the unbelieving Jews, but their persecution was soon followed by persecution from the Gentiles. Instead of destroying the church, persecution caused the church to grow and prosper. The suffering and bloodshed of the martyrs by the hand of their enemies became the seed of the church. The more severe the persecution against them, the more willing the Christians were to die for their faith in Jesus, the Son of God. To a great extent, the persecutions served to keep the church pure. For, if confessing one's faith in Jesus Christ meant suffering, then only those fully committed to Christ would be willing to obey the gospel.

While the apostles lived they were able to keep the church relatively pure from the ideas and innovations of men. They knew the saints were imperfect people, susceptible to the devil's wiles (2 Corinthians 2:11; Ephesians 4:27). While alive they continually exhorted Christians to be steadfast in faith and continually warned them of impending dangers. They knew the apostasy was coming, and it would come from the leadership (Acts 20:28-32; 2 Peter 2:1-2; 2 Thessalonians 2:2-11; 1 Timothy 4:1-4; 2 Timothy 4:2-4). Yet, in spite of all that God had provided, the human side (the imperfect part) of the church still drifted into apostasy. Human philosophy and paganism crept into the church, making it difficult for the church to remain separate from the world.

As Christianity flourished, some of those converted tried to bring with them some of the pagan practices and rituals of their previous religions, things that were unknown to the early church. Wanting to include these things made it difficult for the church to maintain the simplicity of the gospel, its purity of worship and form of government God intended. The members' ignorance and lack of respect for God's word, the spirit of compromise, and a prideful leadership led the way. Imperfect people felt they could improve on God's plan and make the church more acceptable to the world.

The departure started where the apostles said it would, in the leadership. God's plan of leadership for the local church, was to have bishops, also known as elders and pastors (Philippians 1:1). The office of the eldership always consisted of a plurality of men, all being equal in rank. No one elder/bishop was superior or elevated over the others. Each man appointed had all the necessary qualifications of (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9), and all were capable of leadership. But, this did not mean all had the same abilities in exactly the same portion. As in life, some have more ability to rise to the top (like cream in milk before it is homogenized). If one is not careful, a person might begin to think of himself as superior (Philippians 2:3-4), desiring to have the chief seats, so to speak. The apostles had this tendency to seek the top spots, and Jesus had to correct their attitude (Matthew 18:1-4; 20:20-28), teaching them they were all servants, not masters. This same problem developed among the eldership.

Playing on the ignorance of the membership, and showing a lack of respect for God's word, men in the leadership position, lifted up with pride, began to make a change in the eldership. They made a subtle change in the eldership, elevating one man above the others. They justified this by changing the meaning of words for those who led. They made a distinction where there was none. Originally, the terms "elder" and "bishop" referred to the same office and the same people. The words are used interchangeably (Acts 20:17, 28; Titus 1:5, 7). The difference in meaning dealt with qualification and work. The word, "elder" ("presbuteros") denoted one's age and experience, while "bishop" ("episkopos") denoted oversight and responsibility. A third word, sometimes used for this same office was "pastor" ("poimen") Ephesians 4:11, meaning to lead and shepherd the flock. The verb form of pastor describes their works "feed" (Acts 20:28),

and “tend” (1 Peter 5:2). So we have the idea of men, like shepherds, leading and guiding the flock (congregation).

As the church drifted into apostasy, the distinction was made in the eldership. One of the elders was elevated above the others, and became the bishop, presiding over the elders. He was given superior status. But, this simple change was just the beginning of the apostasy, opening the door to many later corruptions to come, in doctrine, worship and work as we shall see. The church was drifting because the members had failed to give heed to what they had been taught (Hebrews 2:1-3; 3:12-13).

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## **A Follower of Christ**

Jim Mickells | Lewisburg, Tennessee, USA

In Luke 10:57-62, Jesus teaches us some valuable lessons on one becoming a follower of Him. Many claim to be followers, yet in life they deny this assertion. Some will say they want to be a disciple, but are not willing to fully submit to the Lord. Either they are not ready to give up some sin they want to cling to or they refuse to do something required of them. In our text, we see Christ inviting one man to follow Him, while two others said they would follow.

The first man who volunteered to follow the Lord was told, “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head” (verse 58). Jesus wanted him to be aware of the cost involved in being His follower. Our Lord had no home of His own. While traveling from place to place teaching His great gospel message, there were no hotels or nice comfortable Inns for rest at night. How many days and nights did the Lord find Himself out in the elements of the weather with no shelter? Was this man willing to make such a personal sacrifice to follow the Lord?

Jesus clearly pointed out if one wanted to be His disciple sacrifices had to be made. Three times, in Luke 14:25-35, the Lord uses the expression “cannot be My disciple” (verses 26,27,33). One must come to Him hating his father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters and even his own life (verse 26). Matthew 10:37 is a good commentary on the meaning of hating one’s family, etc. Christ must come first. Those who follow Him must bear their cross (verse 27). A disciple must crucify himself, bearing any shame, reproach and persecution involved in serving Him. There is a forsaking of all one might hold near and dear to be a disciple (verse 33). This is the price one must be willing to pay to be a follower of Jesus Christ (verses 28-32).

To the second man in this story, Jesus says, “Follow Me” (Lk. 9:59). His response was he needed to first go bury his father. This certainly seems to be the respectable thing to do, showing honor to a deceased love one. Yet the Lord said, “Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God” (verse 60). Those who are spiritually dead can provide the burial for those who are physically dead. This seems, at least to us, to be harsh and unreasonable. Yet I believe the Lord is teaching us a valuable lesson in having our priorities in order. Far too many Christians put other things in life ahead of serving God.

Jesus shows us the importance of preaching the gospel to a world of lost sinners. His apostles were told, “Go make disciples of all the nations” (Matthew 28:18); “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). “It pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe” (1 Corinthians 1:21). The gospel is still God’s power unto salvation today (Romans 1:16). Churches of our Lord and individual Christians have placed other things ahead of preaching the gospel. Where are our priorities?

The third man in Luke’s story steps forward, saying, he would follow but he needed to first go bid those of his house farewell (Luke 9:61). This seems harmless enough; and if he only said “goodbye” surely this would not have taken very long. Were there to be some festive activities associated with his departure, wasting valuable time? Would those of his house persuade him to change his mind? Regardless, there is

always danger in delay. Christ said, “No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:62). His focus needed to be on the Lord and His kingdom.

How difficult is it to plow a straight row if one is looking back and not where he is going? Christ said, “Remember Lot’s wife” (Luke 17:32). The story of this woman, and what she did, is recorded for us in Genesis 19. As Lot, his wife, and two daughters were escaping the destruction of Sodom, they were told not to look back. His wife failed to obey and became a pillar of salt (verse 26). Was she looking back longing for the things she had enjoyed in the city, not wanting to give those things up? As a follower of Christ, we must never take our eyes off heaven. Our hearts or minds must be upon those things above (Colossians 3:2). How easy it is for us to look back to the world, from where we came, wanting either to remain friends with it or still loving those sinful things we have given up (James 4:4; 1 John 2:15-17). One of the reasons the men and women, in Hebrews 11, were successful in serving God was they never lost sight of the country to which they were going (verse 13-15).

Want to be a follower of Christ? Be determined to make any sacrifices necessary, counting the cost, realizing the rewards far outweigh the hardships one might be called upon to endure. Always have your priorities in order, putting the Lord first; He will provide the things we need. And never lose your focus in life; keeping your spiritual eyes turned toward heaven. If you will heed His instruction, you can successfully be His follower.

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## They Think It Strange

Mike Thomas | Beaver Dam, Kentucky, USA

The apostle Peter warned: “For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles—when we walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries” (1 Peter 4:3). This is an excellent text to show why Christians should not engage in recreational drinking, from drunkenness to casual drinking parties. Peter said we have wasted enough time on such wickedness in the past, so now is the time to walk uprightly and soberly. Our new manner of life is that of putting away the lusts of the flesh.

For those who think it is okay for Christians to engage in social drinking (despite the clear warning against such in this text), Peter’s further admonition should be considered. He added, “In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you” (verse 4). Who will the world consider strange: the person having a drink with them or the person who abstains? Any honest soul will see it is the abstainer who is going to be humiliated and belittled. The one who dabbles in it, even just a little, is not going to be criticized or condemned. It is the one who won’t touch the stuff that will appear odd and absurd.

Furthermore, the Christian who drinks (even a little) will not only avoid the rejection Peter is referring to, his example will be used by many to justify drinking. “It must be okay to have a sip every now and then because Joe had a beer at dinner.” Or, “I saw Mary buying a bottle of wine at the grocery store; I thought she was a Christian?” Yet if Joe and Mary were the disciples they should be, and actually applied Peter’s instructions to abstain from recreational drinking, they would be considered weird and abnormal. The people who know them would have different things to say about them. “Can you believe Joe doesn’t drink, not even a little?” Or, “How does Mary deal with life without having a glass of wine?”

The fact is God has been telling people to avoid strong drink for a long time. He inspired Solomon to write, “Wine is a mocker, strong drink is a brawler, and whoever is led astray by it is not wise” (Proverbs 20:1). A quick glance at the police reports in the newspaper validates this warning. So many people are ruining their lives (and the lives of others) by the incidents caused by impaired judgment. Enough is enough, says Peter. Now is the time to live wisely, righteously, soberly and prudently. Now is the time to come out of the world and be separate in devotion to God and in living for an eternal reward.



Despite all this evidence against recreational drinking, some Christians will still imbibe. They will have their wine when dining out or their beer on the way home from work. At the golf course, on the lake, at the wedding, or just home watching television, they will find reasons to justify a drink or two (or more). Never mind their example, when people see them buying or consuming these things, which should alarm any honest soul (Romans 2:24). These Christians have a greater problem besides their ungodly influence and example. These Christians are deceived by sin. And until they realize that, they will continue to lie to themselves about the carnality that is in their heart.

Hence, as Jesus told the Ephesians who returned to worldliness, "Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent" (Revelation 2:4-5).

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## The Spirit Realm, #3

William J. Stewart | Odessa, Ontario, Canada

In the spirit realm, there are good spirits, identified at times in the Bible as angels, but there are also evil spirits, identified at times as demons. There are references to demons in both the Old and New Testaments, though by far, the majority are in the gospels.

When the pagan nations (or the people of Israel for that matter) made sacrifices to idols, they were in fact sacrificing to demons (Leviticus 17:7; Deuteronomy 32:17; 2 Chronicles 11:14-15). In 1 Corinthians 8 & 10 (as well as Romans 14), Paul discusses at length the meats which were offered to idols. He states that the idols are nothing; that is - they are not real (1 Corinthians 8:4; 10:19), and the meat was fine to eat (ie. not polluted), unless the conscience of the one eating (or another who was present) could not separate the meat from the idol/demon.

Moses' Law forbade witchcraft, sorcery, consulting spirits and such (Deuteronomy 18:10-11). Those who practiced these things were to be put to death (Leviticus 20:27). The New Testament doesn't specifically mention mediums or consulting spirits, but does speak against magic [curious arts, KJV] and sorcery [witchcraft] (Acts 19:19; Galatians 5:20).

Unless I am missing something, there is little to no focus on demon possession in the Old Testament. In fact, the times we read about a spirit coming upon someone in the Old Testament, it is attributed to the LORD. We read of a distressing spirit which came upon king Saul (1 Samuel 16:14-23), and perverse or lying spirits at work among the enemies of God's people (1 Kings 22:21-24; Isaiah 19:14; 37:7). None of these are a possession in the sense we find in the New Testament.

We read through the Old Testament with no mention of demons possessing people (perhaps because it was not happening???), and then there is a flood of possessions in the first century A.D.. Specifically, the synoptic gospels show how widespread demon possessions were during the ministry of Christ. It seems likely that Satan, knowing the Son of God was upon the earth, used everything at his disposal to battle the Messiah.

Looking at the demon possession texts, let's divide them based upon what we are told about the possessions. The first list of texts will simply be general references to demons possessing someone and being cast out, while the other texts refer to the activity of the demons in those whom they possessed.

### General references:

Matthew 8:16, 31; 10:1, 8; 12:43-45; Mark 1:34, 39; 3:15; 6:7, 13; 7:24-30; 9:38; 16:9, 17; Luke 6:18; 7:21; 8:2; 9:1, 49; 10:17, 20; 11:24-26; 13:32.

### Demons causing mute condition:

Matthew 9:33; Mark 9:17; Luke 11:14

**Demons causing convulsions:**

Matthew 17:15-18; Mark 1:23-26; 9:20, 26; Luke 4:35; 8:38, 42

**Demons revealing Jesus' identity:**

Mark 1:25-26; 3:11; Luke 4:33-34; 4:41

**Demons causing derangement:**

Mark 5:1-16; Luke 8:27-35

**Demons causing deaf and mute:**

Mark 9:25

**Demons causing infirmity:**

Luke 13:11

That's quite a list of effects demons were having on people. But I want you to notice something - demons did not cause people to sin. None of the conditions listed above are sinful conditions. If I have missed a case in the Bible where a demon caused a person to sin, by all means, show it to me. They caused trouble and severely altered people's lives; of that there is no doubt. But none of the things listed are sinful. God gave man free will; the ability to choose to do what is right and wrong. From a survey of the possession accounts in the New Testament, demons were not empowered to force an individual to sin. Primarily they affected health and quality of life.

John's gospel doesn't record any instances of demon possession. With the other gospel accounts already addressing Jesus' activity in casting out demons, perhaps there was no need for John to add more. It appears the discussion of demons was outside the scope of what the Spirit had planned for John's gospel.

After the Lord ascended, we find a few instances of demon possession in the book of Acts (5:16; 8:7; 16:16-18; 19:12-16), but the number of occurrences is negligible compared to the synoptic gospels. Why? It seems reasonable to think that a considerable reduction in the report of demon possession by Luke in the book of Acts compared to his record in the gospel would mean the number of instances had also gone down considerably.

The prophet Zechariah foretold the coming of the Messiah by writing:

*...they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn (Zechariah 12:10).*

In the beginning of the next chapter, we read:

*...I will cut off the name of the idols from the land, and they shall no longer be remembered. I will also cause the prophets and the unclean spirit to depart from the land (Zechariah 13:2).*

Why did occurrences of demon possession drop off? It was prophesied. Next time, we will consider whether possessions still occur today.

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**GETTING TO KNOW YOUR BIBLE**  
**The Old & New Testaments**

Sean P. Cavender | Bald Knob, Arkansas, USA

Christians believe and accept the Bible as the word of God. We are confident that it is inspired by God, being the very words of God revealed and made known to man. "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness," (2 Timothy 3:16).

In spite of our firm resolve in the authority of Scripture and belief that God has revealed Himself to us through the Bible, far too many Christians are unaware of their Bibles. A general lack of knowledge seems to prevail in society and in the church. We must ask ourselves if we are having an influence on society, or is society's ignorance of God's will having an evil influence on us. The Bible warns us of the dangers of spiritual ignorance: "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being My priest. Since you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children" (Hosea 4:6). Therefore, we must get to know our Bibles better. Perhaps we need to introduce ourselves once again to the Scriptures. Maybe we need to take the biblical journey for the first time. Whichever might describe you, the time to begin is now.

So let us begin to know our Bibles.

### **The Old Testament**

The Bible consists of 66 books, divided into two major sections—the Old Testament and New Testament. First, we will consider the Old Testament.

The Old Testament contains 39 books, which may be divided into several different categories. The Old Testament tells the story of the creation of the world, the formation of the nation of Israel, and how God blessed them as a people, so they could become a blessing to all nations. Abraham is recognized for his faith and was the first of the patriarchs, and father of the Hebrew people. Moses is recognized as the great lawgiver. Later there would be judges, kings, and prophets that were political, social, and spiritual leaders to the nation of Israel, often encouraging the nation to repent and obey God.

The books of the Old Testament can be divided into distinct categories:

- Books of the Law - Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy (5)
- Books of History - Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, 2 Kings, 1 Chronicles, 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther (12)
- Books of Wisdom/Poetry - Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon (5)
- Major Prophets - Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel (5)
- Minor Prophets - Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi (12)

### **The New Testament**

The New Testament is not just new because it's an updated improvement of the Old Testament. We are under a better system, a new covenant. This covenant has been established by the blood of Jesus Christ. So let's become more familiar with our New Testaments.

The New Testament teaches us about Christ and His church. There are 27 books in our New Testaments.

- There are four books which we call "the Gospels" (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John), which tell us about the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Within the gospels we learn of Jesus' great teachings and how we ought to live.
- We learn from the book of Acts, the one book of history of the actions of the apostles and early church. We read of the conversions of sinners, coming to faith in Christ and being added to the Lord's church.
- Then we have 21 letters that were written to local churches or individuals to aid in instruction of the churches.
- Letters of the Apostle Paul — Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, & Philemon (13 books).
- General Letters to churches and individuals by other apostles and leaders in the churches (8 books)
- Hebrews by an unknown author
- James wrote the epistle of James
- Apostle Peter wrote 1 & 2 Peter

- Apostle John wrote 1, 2, & 3 John
- Jude wrote the epistle of Jude
- The New Testament closes with one book of prophecy: the book of Revelation. This book uses a lot of figurative language, but its overall message is full of comfort—the church will be victorious over Satan!

### **Value of the Old and New Testaments**

Reading the Old Testament, even though we are no longer under that system of law, can prove to be helpful. The examples we read about can show us ways to be pleasing to God through faith and obedience to Him. On the other hand, some examples will show us what we ought to avoid from the sins and mistakes of others. Neglecting our Old Testament will depreciate the expectations and value of the New Testament. We need to read our New Testaments and learn from them. When we do, we will become more familiar with Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God. We will learn of His teachings and how He wants us to live. We will also learn of the church that He promised to build and die for (Matthew 16:18; Acts 20:28). Then through studying the epistles of Paul, James, Peter, John, and Jude we understand more clearly the church and how we should live and what we should believe. Then we are given hope and assurance at the close of the New Testament, knowing that Christ and His church will be victorious!

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## **CHURCH HISTORY - PART 3**

### **Characteristics of the First Century Church**

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

In 1948 C.A.O. Essien, a former police officer in Southeastern Nigeria, was looking for a church which just followed the Bible and had almost decided none existed. He learned of a Bible correspondence course sent by the Lawrence Avenue Church of Christ in Nashville, Tennessee. Brother Essien completed the twenty-six lesson course quickly and began teaching and preaching, first among his Efik neighbors, then as far as he could. In 1950 the Lawrence Avenue congregation sent two American preachers who were in South Africa to check on the situation in Nigeria. They found that Brother Essien had already established forty-five churches of Christ and had trained several preachers.

Of course, Brother Essien had found the church that followed the Bible, and he let everyone he could know of it. It is the same as the first century church, the church we read about in the New Testament.

The Lord Jesus Christ promised to build His church (Matthew 16:18), and He kept His promise (Ephesians 1:22-23). The New Testament contains over one hundred references to the church. The church Jesus built is described there, and we must follow the pattern contained in this divine revelation (2 Timothy 1:13). What are the characteristics of the church Jesus built, the first century church, the church described in the New Testament?

Christ is the foundation of His church (Matthew 16:13-20; 1 Corinthians 3:11), and He possesses all authority over His church (Matthew 28:18; Ephesians 1:22-23). The church of the New Testament does everything by His authority (Colossians 3:17).

A creed is a short, authoritative statement of beliefs. The only creed of the church Jesus built is the Scriptures, the Bible, the inspired Word of God (2 Timothy 3:16-17). The first century church did indeed follow the Bible.

The Lord Jesus taught His disciples that they must love each other as He loved them (John 13:34-35). This is the way all people can know we are His disciples. That love was manifested by coming together faithfully to worship and study, sharing their goods with needy disciples, being hospitable to one another (Acts 2:42-47; cf. Hebrews 10:24-25), and by correcting one other when sin occurred (Galatians 6:1-2; James 5:19-20).

The church Jesus built did not wear sectarian names (1 Corinthians 1:10-13), for these manifest sectarian loyalty. The individuals who composed this church were called “disciples” (Acts 8:3; 9:1), “saints” (Acts 9:13), “Christians” (Acts 11:25-26), or “members” (1 Corinthians 12:27). Congregations were called “churches of Christ” (Romans 16:16) or churches of God (1 Corinthians 1:2), since all who belong to God also belong to Christ (John 17:10).

The first century church had a simple, powerful message it took to the whole world, the gospel of Christ (Mark 16:15-16), the power to save all who believe (Romans 1:16). It neither proclaimed nor tolerated any other message (Galatians 1:6-9).

This church was composed of all the saved. The Lord adds those whom He saves to the church (Acts 2:47), and He saves His church (Ephesians 5:23).

The only doctrine the church of the New Testament taught was the doctrine of Christ (2 John verses 9). Teaching human opinions was forbidden (1 Peter 4:11; 2 Peter 2:1-3).

The lives of its members were holy (1 Peter 1:15-16), and sin was not tolerated (Acts 5:1-11; 1 Corinthians chapter 5).

Its worship was in spirit and truth (John 4:23-24) and was simple and without pomp, consisting of partaking of the Lord’s Supper each first day of the week in memory of the death of Christ (1 Corinthians 1:23-26; Acts 20:7), preaching and teaching the Word of God (Acts 20:7; 2 Timothy 4:1-5), singing spiritual songs (Colossians 3:16), praying (Acts 12:12), and contributing to the church on the first day of the week (1 Corinthians 16:1-2).

The only earthly organization the disciples had was independent, self-governing local churches (1 Corinthians 1:2; 1 Peter 5:1-2), each ruled by their own elders (1 Peter 5:1-2).

The work these local churches did was spiritual (Romans 14:17), and was limited to preaching the gospel (1 Timothy 3:14-15; 1 Thessalonians 1:6-8), edifying (building up) the disciples (Ephesians 4:11-16), and assisting needy Christians (2 Corinthians 8:1-4).

This church had the same kind of unity Jesus and the Father have (John 17:20-21).

Finally, the church of the New Testament had only one hope, not a future, material kingdom on earth, not a better world now, but an eternal home in heaven (1 Peter 1:3-5).

Brother Essien discovered that there is still a church which follows the Bible, which is the same in faith as the first century church. You need to believe and obey the gospel, so the Lord will add you to this church.

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