

# September 2018

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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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*"People who require that a revelation from God should always use language of strict scientific precision, really require that a revelation should anticipate by hundreds or thousands of years the discoveries of science, and use language which, when the revelation was given, would be unintelligible to the mass of mankind; nay, which would be always unintelligible to a large portion of the race - since people ordinarily, however much the exact truths of science may be diffused, do not learn to use such exactness of speech. As long as men have occasion to speak on the subject at all they will probably continue to say that the sun rises and sets... and that water runs" (Albert Barnes, **Notes on the Psalms**, comment on Psalm 29:5).*

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## Question from Nigeria about Instrumental Music and Dancing

### Question:

Beloved please what is your view regarding instrumental music and dance outside worship?

### Answer:

Even the Master needed time to rest and relax from His labor (Mark 6:31). As long as we do not allow recreation to interfere with our responsibilities, such as working for the Lord (Matthew 6:33) and providing for our families (1 Timothy 5:8), and as long as it does not involve sinful activities (Ephesians 5:11), recreation and amusement in moderation are innocent.

The Lord has specified the kind of music to use in worship, singing (Acts 16:25; Romans 15:8-9; 1 Corinthians 14:15; Ephesians 5:18-19; Colossians 3:16; Hebrews 2:11-12; James 5:13), but he has not given any directions about the use of music for recreation, so this is a matter of liberty. Instrumental music for recreation is a liberty, something allowed but not required (1 Corinthians 8:8-9). The music should not involve sinful lyrics (Ephesians 4:29).

If memory serves me correctly, the Igbo translation of the New Testament specifically condemns dancing. This is a mistranslation. The Scriptures condemn lewdness (Romans 13:13; 2 Corinthians 12:21; Galatians 5:19; Ephesians 4:19; 1 Peter 4:3; 2 Peter 2:18, Jude verse 4). Lewdness includes “filthy words, indecent bodily movements, unchaste (impure – KS) handling of males and females” (J.H. Thayer, **Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament**. 79-80). Most but not all dances involve either or both “indecent bodily movements” and “unchaste handling of males and females.” These dances are sinful.

### **Response**

Thanks a lot and God bless you for your detailed answer.

This has been a very great issue and a point of disagreement and debate amongst brethren in Nigeria most especially here in the Southern part of Nigeria. The Igbo bible really misinterpreted the word reveling.

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## **Preach The Word!**

Sunday Ayandare | Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria

"I charge thee therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ...Preach the word, be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine." (2 Timothy 4:1-2).

This is a solemn charge from the peerless apostle Paul to his son in the faith Timothy. The solemnity derives from the fact that it is made “before God and the Lord Jesus Christ.” If Timothy was to commit the things he had heard from Paul “to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also” (2 Timothy 2:2); and since this solemn charge is part of those things committed unto Timothy, then, it follows that all preachers today, indeed, servants of God in every age and in every place are under this charge.

### **Preaching the Gospel Is a Sacred Trust**

Contrary to the notion of many today, preaching the gospel is a sacred trust. Writing to the Corinthians, Paul declared, “And we have such trust through Christ toward God. Not that we are sufficient of ourselves, but our sufficiency is of God; Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament...” (2 Corinthians 3:4-6). It is a job in which God, in His infinite greatness, condescends to make man His fellow-laborer: “For we are labourers together with God...” (1 Corinthians 3:9).

“The Lord...is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). And now, “the gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation” (Romans 1:16-17). But this gospel must be preached by man, not by angels or by any other creature. Cornelius, a man, had to send for Peter, a man, “who will tell you words, by which you and all your household will be saved” (Acts 11:14). Saul of Tarsus was told on the road to Damascus, “Arise and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all things which are appointed for you to do” (Acts 22:10). Who was to tell Saul these things? An angelic being? No! Just “a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias” (Acts 9:10).

Little wonder Paul said, “we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us” (2 Corinthians 4:7). Paul was simply saying, as one writer has aptly pointed out that “God entrusted the gospel to men, to be preached by men, that men might know the power is not in the messenger but in the message.”

### **Some Preach Other Things**

But instead of preaching the Word, it is distressing to see that some, and their number is not infinitesimally small, are busily engaged in preaching themselves. The possibility, nay, the reality of some preaching themselves is evidenced in 2 Corinthians 4:5. Paul says, "For we preach not ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord..." What do you think of some of our brethren who in the name of preaching the gospel are engaged in throwing their weight around, displaying intellectual prowess, and telling funny stories? Yes, that kind of preaching, no, jabbering, will only succeed in tickling the fancy and vanity of the preacher-jabberer and his listener(s), but will surely be an abysmal failure as far as saving precious souls is concerned.

What about the practice of using the pulpit to sanction what one is, or is not, doing? There are copious cases of people who, when enmeshed in unscriptural divorce/remarriage, would resort to advancing theories to justify their adulterous state. Those who have turned themselves to slaves of alcohol are often seen adducing reasons (?) for the rightness of "small-small drinking." How great would it be for us to remember in such cases that we are under a solemn charge to preach the word and not ourselves.

Following from this as a corollary is the fact that some are preaching other men. This sort of people have made heroes out of men. There is nothing wrong in this per se. Or is it not a biblical principle that we should give honor to whom it is due? (Romans 13:7) It goes without saying that some people have been instrumental in shaping us to our present level of spiritual development. It is good to thank God for them and to express our appreciation to them too. But when we hero-worship and develop a penchant for whatever these mentors have to say, and consider ourselves as being under obligation to defend these things and these men, then, we are already thinking "of men above that which is written" (1 Corinthians 4:6). A particular doctrine is not sound simply because "brother Big Name" propounds it. Remember, Paul warns, "If any man preach any other gospel unto you...let him be accursed" (Galatians 1:8-9).

Moreover, there are still some who equate stealing the hearts of men with preaching Christ, a la Absalom (Read 2 Samuel 15:1-6). When some preachers move to a new place, they are obsessed, not with "preaching Christ and Him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:1-2), but as it were, with undoing the work of the former preacher. They erroneously have the notion that they are in competition with their fellow-preacher who must be run down before they could be accepted. And so, in their diabolical schemes, they resort to gerrymandering, and circumlocution becomes the hallmark of their preaching. Peter has long ago spoken of false teachers who "speak great swelling words of vanity" with the sole aim of enticing gullible souls (2 Peter 2:18).

So, in the face of temptations here and there to preach other things but Christ, remember brother-preacher, you have a solemn charge: "**Preach the Word....**"

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## Isn't Being Sincere Good Enough?

Jefferson David Tant | Roswell, Georgia, USA

A very commonly held idea among many religious people is that if you are sincere in your daily living, that is, if you lead a good, clean life and are honest, pay your bills, treat others with kindness, set a good example before others, etc., God will reward you with a home in heaven. No one can deny that a sincere heart is something God requires. Paul wrote to the church at Corinth: "I am not speaking this as a command, but as proving through the earnestness of others the sincerity of your love also" (2 Corinthians 8:8).

But is that all God requires? Consider a few scriptures that give a fuller view of sincerity.

### King David

Consider the intent of David to build a structure that would represent God's presence among the people of Israel.

*“Now it came about when the king lived in his house, and the LORD had given him rest on every side from all his enemies, that the king said to Nathan the prophet, ‘See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells within tent curtains.’ And Nathan said to the king, ‘Go, do all that is in your mind, for the LORD is with you”* (2 Samuel 7:1-3).

Obviously, this was something good that David sincerely wanted to do, and God’s prophet Nathan agreed that David’s intent was a worthy one. But this was not according to God’s plan.

Let us continue reading the text:

*“But it came about in the same night that the word of the LORD came to Nathan, saying, ‘Go and say to My servant David, ‘Thus says the LORD, ‘Are you the one who should build Me a house to dwell in? For I have not dwelt in a house since the day I brought up the sons of Israel from Egypt, even to this day; but I have been moving about in a tent, even in a tabernacle. Wherever I have gone with all the sons of Israel, did I speak a word with one of the tribes of Israel, which I commanded to shepherd My people Israel, saying, ‘Why have you not built Me a house of cedar?’”* (verses 4-7)

Notice that God did not claim that David’s intent was evil, but it was not according to God’s plan. David’s son, Solomon, who came to the throne after David many years later, had this to say concerning the matter.

*“Now it was in the heart of my father David to build a house for the name of the LORD, the God of Israel. But the LORD said to my father David, ‘Because it was in your heart to build a house for My name, you did well that it was in your heart. Nevertheless you shall not build the house, but your son who shall be born to you, he shall build the house for My name”* (1 Kings 8:17-19).

Notice what God said to David: “...you did well that it was in your heart.” You can’t get sincerer than that! But “nevertheless,” it was not acceptable to God that David build the temple.

### **The Apostle Paul**

Then what about Saul of Tarsus? As he was answering the false charges brought against him by the Jew’s Council, “...Paul, looking intently at the Council, said, ‘Brethren, I have lived my life with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day” (Acts 23:1). And what was it that Paul’s “good conscience” led him to do?

Later, as he stood before King Agrippa making his defense, notice what he said about his former life:

*“So then, I thought to myself that I had to do many things hostile to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And this is just what I did in Jerusalem; not only did I lock up many of the saints in prisons, having received authority from the chief priests, but also when they were being put to death I cast my vote against them. And as I punished them often in all the synagogues, I tried to force them to blaspheme; and being furiously enraged at them, I kept pursuing them even to foreign cities”* (Acts 26:9-11).

Does “good conscience” mean the same as “sincerity of heart?” Who can deny it? Yet who would argue that Paul was acceptable to God just because he was “sincere?”

### **Cornelius, the Roman Centurion**

In Acts 10, we have the interesting story of the Roman soldier named Cornelius.

*“Now there was a certain man at Caesarea named Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian cohort, a devout man, and one who feared God with all his household, and gave many alms to the Jewish people, and prayed to God continually”* (Acts 10:1-2).

Notice what the text says about the man—he was “devout,” he “feared God with all his household,” he “gave alms to the Jewish people,” and he “prayed to God continually.” One would be hard pressed to find a man of better character than Cornelius. Who could deny that he was sincere in his heart?

The story continues with an angel appearing to Cornelius instructing him to send servants to the city of Joppa where they would find Peter, and ask him to come to the house of Cornelius. Meanwhile, Peter was trying to make sense of a vision that appeared to him wherein a sheet was lowered from heaven full of unclean animals. He was told to prepare a meal from these animals that were forbidden to Jews (such as pigs). This vision was to prepare Peter to take the gospel message to the Gentile Cornelius, as Jews were to have no dealing with Gentiles under the Old Testament Law of Moses.

So, when Cornelius’ servants appeared at Peter’s door, “the light went on,” and Peter understood that God wanted him to take the gospel to the Gentiles. Sometime later the apostles and other Christians heard about Peter and Cornelius, and they were upset. They called Peter to appear before them and explain what he had done.

*“Now the apostles and the brethren who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those who were circumcised took issue with him” (Acts 11:1-2).*

Now note what Peter told his brethren about what had transpired. He explained the vision:

*“And this happened three times, and everything was drawn back up into the sky. And behold, at that moment three men appeared before the house in which we were staying, having been sent to me from Caesarea. And the Spirit told me to go with them without misgivings. And these six brethren also went with me, and we entered the man’s house. And he reported to us how he had seen the angel standing in his house, and saying, ‘Send to Joppa, and have Simon, who is also called Peter, brought here; and he shall speak words to you by which you will be saved, you and all your household’” (Acts 11:10-14).*

Did you notice that Cornelius was told that Peter “*shall speak words to you by which you will be saved*”? Consider that Cornelius was a man with an excellent reputation and obviously a sincere heart, but he still needed to hear some words that would lead to his salvation.

It is interesting to note that the Holy Spirit had already come upon Cornelius as he and those with him were speaking in tongues. Therefore, some would claim that they had already been saved.

*“And all the circumcised believers who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out upon the Gentiles also. For they were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God” (10:45-46a).*

Thus, the argument would be that the fact that the Holy Spirit came upon them is evidence that they were saved when that happened. But in looking at the sequence of events, a different conclusion becomes evident. We remember that in 10:14, Cornelius was told Peter would “*speak words...by which you will be saved.*” But look in 11:15, as Peter gives the chronology as to the sequence of the events: “*And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, just as [He did] upon us at the beginning.*”

The inspired record states that as Peter began to speak, the Holy Spirit came upon them. Thus the “*words of salvation*” had not been spoken. Thus, the baptism of the Holy Spirit was not a part of their salvation, but it was a sign from God that Gentiles were to be accepted under the New Covenant.

And what were the “*words of salvation*?”

*“For they were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God. Then Peter answered, ‘Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did, can he?’ And he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ” (10:46-48).*

And we know this is consistent with the words that Jesus spoke in Mark 16:16: "He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned."

### **And what about Uzzah?**

The Ark of the Covenant was being brought back to Jerusalem by King David after it had been captured some time earlier by the Philistines. There were two serious problems with the transport of the ark.

(1) The ark was being carried on a new ox-cart. From a practical viewpoint, this made sense, as there were some miles to travel, and that would have worked a hardship on the priests that would have carried the ark on their shoulders by the poles placed through rings placed on either side of the ark.

*"And they placed the ark of God on a new cart that they might bring it from the house of Abinadab which was on the hill; and Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, were leading the new cart" (2 Samuel 6:3).*

(2) But when they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, Uzzah reached out toward the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen nearly upset it. *"And the anger of the LORD burned against Uzzah, and God struck him down there for his irreverence; and he died there by the ark of God" (6:6-7).*

What has happened? In the first place, God had instructed the ark to be carried by the priests. "But unto the sons of Kohath he gave none, because the service of the sanctuary belonged unto them; they bare it upon their shoulders" (Numbers 7:9). These priests had no other responsibilities, as their job was to transport the ark.

So the first problem is seen in the fact that the ark was carried on an oxcart, but God had ordered that the ark was only to be carried on the shoulders of the priests. But why did David order the cart for transport? Obviously, it would more convenient to use the cart, and easier on the priests, who would have had to carry this burden for some miles.

Was David sincere in his directive to carry the ark on the cart? Who could deny this? But God said it was to be carried by the priests. I have no doubt that David thought it would be OK, as it would save a hardship on the priests.

A second problem had to do with one of the oxen that stumbled, and it appeared that the ark was about to fall off the cart. That's when the priest Uzzah reached out to steady the ark and keep it from falling.

*"And when they came to the threshing-floor of Nacon, Uzzah put forth his hand to the ark of God, and took hold of it; for the oxen stumbled. And the anger of Jehovah was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for his error; and there he died by the ark of God" (2 Samuel 6:6-7).*

Was Uzzah sincere in his effort to keep the ark from falling to the ground and being harmed? Who could argue otherwise? So...what was the problem? Why did Uzzah die? God had given some strict instructions about the ark, and one is found in Numbers 4:15:

*"And when Aaron and his sons have made an end of covering the sanctuary, and all the furniture of the sanctuary, as the camp is set forward; after that, the sons of Kohath shall come to bear it: but they shall not touch the sanctuary, lest they die."*

Thus the good intentions and sincere hearts of David and Uzzah did not change or undo what God had said. Their "sincere hearts" did not provide an escape from judgment.

*“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ ‘And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you who practice lawlessness.’”*

We would naturally assume that those who were calling upon the Lord were those who were sincere. They pointed to the good things they were doing—prophesying, casting out demons, and doing various miracles. But what was Christ’s response? He rejected them and charged them with “lawlessness.”

And what is “lawlessness?” The word “lawlessness” is from the original Greek “anomia.” The root word is “nomos,” which is “law.” In English, when we want to negate a word, we can put “un” in front of the word. Thus “healthy” becomes “un-healthy,” or “safe” becomes “unsafe.” The same thing happens in the Greek language. One can change “lawful” to “unlawful” by putting an “alpha” (the first letter of the Greek alphabet) before the word. So Jesus claimed they were doing things that were “unlawful,” or to put to another way, things that were “without authority.”

The matter of “authority” is a matter of great importance with respect to our relationship with God. Christ told his disciples, *“All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth”* (Matthew 28:18).

The apostle Paul also touched on the matter in Colossians 3:17: *“And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.”* The phrase “in the name of,” refers to authority. If a policeman knocks on your door at midnight, and says “Open, in the name of the law,” he is referring to the authority by which he operates. Thus Paul’s instruction to the church at Colossae tells them that whatever they teach (“in word”) or whatever they practice (“in deed or action”) must be according to, or by the authority of, our Lord.

So, in the situations we have observed, sincerity does not cancel out the need to follow God’s instructions. We obviously need to have a sincere heart, but we also need to be sincere in seeking to follow God’s will. This is contrary to what so many people think, but man does not always think the way God does.

Proverbs 14:12 points this out very clearly. *“There is a way which seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death.”* Uzzah learned this lesson the hard way when he with good intent reached out to steady the ark, but his tragic death was written and preserved for our learning. The apostle Paul emphasized this in Romans 15:4: *“For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.”*

There are many good deeds and projects that some churches do, but there is no scriptural authority for the Lord’s church to be doing them. Hospitals are good, fire departments are good, homeless shelters are good, but these are not the work that God has given to his church. There are other legitimate ways to provide for those good projects. The work God has given the church is the saving of souls—feeding hungry souls, not hungry stomachs.

Let us paraphrase the passage in Matthew 7.

*“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not feed the hungry in Your name, and in Your name build hospitals, and in Your name build fire stations?’ ‘And then I will declare to them, “I never knew you; Depart from me, you who practice lawlessness.”*

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## Light In The Lord

Patrick Farish | Wauyahatchie, Texas, USA

*"...for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true) and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord."*

Having urged the Ephesians to "not become partners" with those he identifies as "darkness," he urges them, as "light in the Lord", to walk as children of light. There are different descriptions of the walk of a Christian – as "walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called" (4:10). Now, we will look at the task – indeed, the requirement -- of discernment.

To "discern" is to determine a conclusion from available facts. Sometimes new converts to the study of the Bible, or people like those in Hebrews 5:12-13, want to know where some activity, or practice, is authorized, or prohibited – "where does it say have a church building?" --- or, "where does it say, don't gamble; or, don't drink booze; or, don't eat the Lord's supper on Thursday?"

As far as a "church building" is concerned, a requirement to assemble (Hebrews 10:25) necessitates a **place** – whether it be a building built for that purpose, or someone's home. Whatever is most advantageous to those involved, is authorized; not named, but discerned as authorized. God said, have a place to assemble, when He said, assemble.

Another wants to know, where does it say "don't gamble?" Gambling involves putting something of value at risk in a game of chance, for the purpose of taking the valuables of another. Several passages have good application here – but we cite just one, in Matthew 7:12, "So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them; for this is the Law and the Prophets." What does the gambler wish that others would do to him? Then, that's the thing he should do to them. The word "gambler" is not there – but the principle is, easily discerned by the student.

Then, drinking intoxicants – does the Bible say, "don't"? Well, not in so many words; but the requirement to not "get drunk with wine" comes close to being an outright prohibition. The one who would not be drunken – cannot be drunken, without taking the first drink!

Finally, the Lord's Supper on Thursday – or Friday, or whenever. The first day of the week, the Lord's day, is prominent in the New Testament. It was the day of the resurrection of Jesus (John 20:1), of Eutychus (Acts 20:7-9), the day designated for contribution by the saints (1 Corinthians 16:1-2); and the Lords Day, the day John was charged to write (Revelation 1:10-11). In none of those passages, however, is the first day of the week, the Lord's day, named as the day of eating the Lord's Supper. So maybe Thursday is alright, hmmm? No; the only time the Lord's Supper is associated with any specific day, is in Acts 20:7, 11:

*"On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them, intending to depart on the next day, and he prolonged his speech until midnight ... And when Paul had gone up and had broken bread and eaten, he conversed with them a long while, until daybreak, and so departed."*

The first day of the week was the day when the early Christians gathered to eat the Lord's Supper, and that is what they did. They did this in the company of an apostle, and evidently this was the apostolic practice. Verse seven records their eating the Lord's Supper – "we were gathered to break bread." In verse eleven Paul "had broken bread and eaten", in preparation for traveling on foot. They all ate the Lord's Supper; only Paul ate the common meal preparatory to his departure.

Well, does that exclude Thursday? Only the Lord's day is mentioned. Writing to the Corinthians Paul said "*... that you may learn by us not to go beyond what is written ...*" (1 Corinthians 4:6).

If we walk as "children of light," our lives will bear fruit that is good and right and true.

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## If There Is A God - Why Does He Let Bad Things Happen? (3)

Tommy J. Thornhill | Etna, Arkansas, USA

So far, in answering the question, “If there is a God – why does He let bad things happen?”, some may have noticed I assumed the validity of two things. 1. “That there is a God, who is the Creator of all things, the universe, the earth and all that lives in and on it. 2. That this God gave mankind an inspired book, the Bible, which declares God, and all His wondrous works. The evidence for God is overwhelming if one will just look up into the sky. “The heaven declare the glory of God, and the firmament shows His handiwork” (Psalm 19:1). The existence and validity of His book, the Bible, is just as substantial. It exists today, and no one has ever been able to disprove anything it teaches. To expand on the evidence, proving the existence and validity of God and His book is reserved for another time since that is not the purpose of this series. For this series I am writing it as a fact that God truly exists and is in control of the universe, and that His book, the Bible is not only true but that it is God’s perfect revelation, and is without error or contradiction.

Now, back to the purpose of this series, “Why does God let bad things happen?” So far, in answering the question, we have seen that God created a perfect paradise where the perfect humans He had created in His image, could live and serve Him. He never wanted them to sin and ruin their paradise, but, He was not going to force them to obey Him, so He gave them free-will to make their own choice as to what they would do. Adam and Eve chose to abuse their free-will and disobey God. In making their bad choice, they yielded to sin, and contaminated their paradise by sinning. This brought the curse of sin down upon them and the world in which they would live.

So, don’t blame God when bad things happen. While He may allow bad things to happen to us, testing our love for Him, and our faith in Him, He is not the source. Satan, His arch-enemy is the ultimate source. Satan is the one who enticed the first pair to sin and bring evil to mankind and their environment. Normally, when people hear the word, evil, they think of moral badness. But, the word is also used accommodatively to describe the bad things that happen to mankind in this world, the consequence of man’s choice to sin in the Garden of Eden. So, I will be using the word “evil” in this article in an accommodative sense. Think, if people call something “evil,” and there is no God, who has the right to determine the ultimate standard by which one distinguishes between evil (bad) and good?

Basically, evil (the bad things that befall mankind) falls into three categories, natural evil, (upheavals in nature), human suffering (sickness, disease, etc.) and moral evil (caused by men acting unbecomingly). But, in all cases, the root cause is sin. We will consider each of these groups and expand on them, but first, let’s consider natural evil, the catastrophic acts of nature (earthquakes, floods, tornados, hurricanes etc.). Could God stop them? Yes, He has the power and the ability to do so, but for reasons of which only He is fully aware He allows these things to happen. We need to remember that the nature of God is both love and justice. He loved mankind when He created them in His own image, and placed the first man and woman in a Paradise. He told them, that if they chose to disobey Him by eating of the forbidden fruit they would die. When they violated His command, He was obligated by His nature to keep His word, for He would not and could not lie (Hebrews 6:12-18). So, when they sinned He had to punish them, or be found a liar. Because of their sin, He kept His word and pronounced a curse upon the first pair, and all future mankind, as well as the environment in which they would live. If man was going to be imperfect, he would have to live in an imperfect world (Genesis 3:15-17; Romans 8:20-22).

Jesus made sure His disciples understood they were living in a contaminated world when He told them, “... In the world you will have tribulation, and trials and distresses and frustration ...” John 16:33 (**Amplified Bible**). This statement included the persecution they would suffer for His sake, but it also included the distresses and frustrations of nature they would also endure. Yes, the evil, destructive forces of nature happen in life. When these calamities happen, they cause a lot of pain and suffering, along with the loss of many lives and much property. They are forms of nature’s evil side, occurring as a penalty for man’s apostasy from God. Mankind suffers these natural calamities because they are living in an imperfect world

made that way because of sin.

When terrible catastrophic events occur, people see, hear and experience the worst side of nature. They see the loss of life and property and say, "Why did God let this happen to us?" "Why did He allow it?" I can't answer for God since He hasn't informed us as to why He doesn't intervene in these things. But I know one thing. He knows what is happening, and He still cares for the people, even while He doesn't interfere when they happen.

It could be that He allowed it as a warning to others, that He "is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). People see the tragedies but do not stop to think that it was not the ultimate final judgment. It was limited in scope. How many other places, property, and people were spared from the same tragedy. A ship wrecks at sea, a plane crashes, an automobile has an accident, and people think, "O how terrible." But how many other ships, planes, and automobiles safely reached their destination the same day. It could be that God allowed these things to happen to show the terribleness of the curse of sin, and warn nations and people that if they don't straighten up they are doomed to ultimate destruction. By God allowing bad things to happen, and sparing the lives of others, He is warning the living, "repent or perish."

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## Compliments Given By Christ

Jim Mickells | Lewisburg, Tennessee, USA

Have you ever received a compliment from your fellow-man? I am sure you have. It could have been because of a kind deed you rendered, just being a friend, or it could be a flattering compliment with an ulterior motive. In the New Testament we find Jesus complimenting people for the good which He saw in them. He never had an ulterior motive when issuing a compliment.

"Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward Him, and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit!" (John 1:47) The word "deceit" (**King James Version** – "guile") is defined as "properly, bait; a lure, snare; hence, craft, deceit, guile" (J.H. Thayer, **A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament**. 155). He was a man of honesty and integrity. He did not say one thing and mean something else. His life was not one of self-deception nor of trying to deceive others. Barnes says:

*"No deceit, no fraud, no hypocrisy. He is really what he professes to be - a Jew, a descendant of the patriarch Jacob, fearing and serving God. He makes no profession which he does not live up to"* (Albert Barnes, **Notes on the New Testament**).

Jacob or Israel had been man of deception (Genesis 27:35) but not Nathanael.

"Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he" (Matthew 11:11). John was a man who was willing to give his life to prepare the way for the coming of the Son of God (John 1:23). He never tried to exalt himself, understanding his God-given role in this work. He openly confessed he was not the Christ, not Elijah, nor was he the Prophet the Israelites had been looking for (John 1:19-21). He was not worthy he said to loose the Lord's sandal strap (John 1:27). His unusual food, dress, and where he dwelled while preaching was a testimony to his willingness to sacrifice for the Lord whom he loved (Matthew 3:1-6). Just because John was not a citizen in the kingdom of God did not diminish his greatest in the eyes of the Lord.

The Centurion – "When Jesus heard it, He marveled, and said to those who followed, 'Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!'" (Matthew 8:10) There are several interesting facts revealed about this Centurion: (1) his great love and compassion for a servant (Matthew 8:5-6), (2) his humility in recognizing the Lord's greatness and how unworthy he was for Him to enter his house (Matthew 8:8), (3) his kindness and generosity toward the Jews (Luke 7:4-5), and (4) his faith in the Lord once he had heard about Him, knowing He could heal this man (Luke 7:3). Not only did he have faith in Lord's ability to heal, but he knew Jesus only had to speak and the disease would obey His voice. He did

not need to be in the presence of the sick servant (Matthew 8:8-10).

*“So He called His disciples to Himself and said to them, “Assuredly, I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all those who have given to the treasury; for they all put in out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had, her whole livelihood” (Mark 12:43-44).*

Here is a poor widow who gave everything she had to the Lord. She loved God more than she loved what little money she did have. She not only was willing to sacrifice but also to put her faith and trust in the Lord that He would provide what was needed to sustain her life. All I can say is, Wow!

“But Jesus said:

*“Let her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a good work for Me. For you have the poor with you always, and whenever you wish you may do them good; but Me you do not have always” (Mark 14:6-7).*

This woman was Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus (John 12:1-8). The oil she used to anoint the head and feet of Jesus was very costly (Mark 14:3), which would indicate her willingness to sacrifice for her Lord. She anointed His feet with this spikenard and wiped them her hair, showing her great humility. Even though what she did was a good work for the Messiah, some were very critical of her (Mark 14:5; John 12:4-6). Yet Jesus said, “Assuredly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her” (Mark 14:9).

Each of the things which Jesus commended these men and women for are characteristics the Christian must possess. There is honesty, uprightness, a willingness to sacrifice, faith, trust, humility, and steadfastness. Would He see and compliment these traits in us? May it always be our aim to please our Lord, so He could compliment us (2 Corinthians 5:9)

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## Test The Spirits

Mike Thomas | Kokomo, Indiana, USA

Christians of the first century had to “test the spirits” with the word of God to avoid being misled by false teachers. Those who were unalert or naïve were prime targets for deceitful influences. The apostle John warned, “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1). The “spirit” he was concerned with was a theory in his day (Gnosticism) that said the material world was evil and that God would not occupy the flesh. John had to counter this philosophy with the warning that “every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God” (verse 3). He would tell us the same thing today in response to the influences of Islam, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and Judaism, since they also deny Jesus was God in the flesh. None of them agree with John’s testimony that “the Word was God” (John 1:1) and “became flesh and dwelt among us” (verse 14). They would rather have us believe that Jesus was sent by God, but was not God’s Son or a member of the Godhead (Colossians 2:9). They want us to think He was a prophet and a good man; just not the Son of God. Like the first Christians, we are to test these spirits with the word of God to avoid their error.

The deity of Christ is not the only aspect of God’s will from which Christians can be misled. There are spirits that also deny there is “one body and one Spirit...one hope...one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all” (Ephesians 4:4-5). Some may teach God’s will on loving others, yet deny baptism is essential for salvation (1 Peter 3:21). Some will teach the truth on baptism, yet dismiss God’s command to worship while “singing and making melody in your heart” (Ephesians 5:19). Others will avoid making melody on mechanical instruments in worship, yet ignore God’s will to not make social programs the work of the church (1 Corinthians 11:22). The world is filled with all kinds of philosophies that make people feel religious and close to God, but are not taught in God’s word. The devil operates through these influences to persuade us to believe a lie. It is as Paul said to the Corinthians:

*But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the [a]simplicity that is in Christ. For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted—you may well put up with it!" (2 Corinthians 11:3-4).*

If we are to avoid religious error we must compare every teaching (spirit) to the word of God and remain only with the truth. Remember the Bereans, who "received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so (Acts 17:11). Being religious is not enough to walk with God. We must also abide in teachings that are consistent with His will. Namely, "In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother" (1 John 3:10). Any teaching that results in a different conclusion is not of God but of the world—from "deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons" (1 Timothy 4:2)—as any good examination will prove.

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## **A Response to "THE BIBLE VERSUS THE CHURCH OF CHRIST" (7)**

William Stewart | Kingston, Ontario, Canada

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Someone recently pointed me to an article claiming to expose the falsehood of the Church of Christ. We will be responding to the content of the article over a period of several months. The original article, by James L. Melton, can be found at [www.av1611.org/jmelton/chchurch.html](http://www.av1611.org/jmelton/chchurch.html)  
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### **Water Baptism, Mark 16:16**

Melton points his readers to what he calls "proof texts" used by the Church of Christ and seeks to demonstrate they do not say baptism is essential for salvation. The first text he addresses is Mark 16:16, *"He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned."* His charge? We are "taking verses out of context and IGNORING the rest of the Bible." How have we taken Mark 16:16 out of context? Apparently, because we don't *"...cast out demons ... speak with new tongues ... take up serpents ... drink anything deadly ... lay hands on the sick..."* (verses 17-18). First, whether we are doing the things listed in verses 17-18 or not doesn't change what Jesus said in verse 16. Jesus still said, *"He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned."* How exactly is the truth of the statement modified by verses 17-18 to mean something other than what it says? Second, one needs to understand the Biblical purpose and duration of these signs and wonders. Jesus said they are signs that would follow those who believe, and we can find a record of most of these things in the book of Acts. However, the question is, would these things "follow those who believe" indefinitely? Or would there be an end to these miraculous signs? We do not have the space to deal with the topic at length here, but I will simply say the Bible reveals the miraculous gifts were given to confirm the word that was spoken (Hebrews 2:1-4), and they would end when the complete revelation of God's word was given (1 Corinthians 13:8-13). I am happy to discuss this at length with anyone who wants to sit and look at it together. But again, be clear, nothing in verses 17-18 change the meaning of verse 16. Jesus still said, *"He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned."*

Melton states Mark 16:16 *"...certainly does not teach 'faith plus baptism equals salvation!'"* The word "and" is a conjunction. It joins two things together. A peanut butter and jelly sandwich requires both peanut butter and jelly (unless Melton made the sandwich; then it only has peanut butter). But if it only has peanut butter, then it's not a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, is it? By rejecting the necessity of baptism from the phrase "believes and is baptized," Melton is effectively saying the text should read, "He who believes will be saved." Of course that is what Melton believes, but the problem is, that is not what Jesus said. Seems that Melton is the one who is IGNORING what the Bible says.

Melton writes, "One is damned for NOT BELIEVING. No one is damned for not being baptized." His point, Jesus did not condemn the unbaptized, therefore, one can be saved without being baptized. Friend, unbelievers are not going to be baptized; but those who believe what Jesus said will be baptized. Consider a parallel statement: "He who eats and digests will live, but he who does not eat will die." Digestion follows naturally after eating. If one does not eat, they cannot digest. To speak of the imminent death of those who do not digest (since they did not eat) would be redundant. Baptism naturally flows after faith. Jesus linked them together ("believes and is baptized"). If one does not believe, they will not be baptized. To speak of the condemnation of those who are not baptized (because they did not believe) would be redundant.

A common ploy of those who reject the necessity of baptism is to focus on the large number of verses that mention the necessity of faith. Melton does the same. He lists John 1:12; 3:15-18, 36; 5:24; 6:47; Acts 16:30-31; Romans 10:9; 1 Peter 2:6; and John 11:25-26. After citing these texts, he writes, "...who in their right mind would choose to IGNORE these plain and simple Salvation verses by charging to Mark 16:16 and trying to confuse matters?" What?? Who is ignoring these texts on the necessity of faith? I believe them. All of them. But one must wonder whether Melton believes what Mark 16:16 says or not. How about we talk all that the Bible says about salvation? Is faith necessary? Yes, there are a myriad of verses that speak of the necessity of faith. Is baptism necessary? Yes, there are several verses (Mark 16:16 included) that speak of the necessity of baptism.

Melton concludes his denial of what Jesus said in Mark 16:16 with the following: "The key element in one's Salvation is his BELIEF ON CHRIST ALONE. Water baptism is important, and it should always FOLLOW Salvation as a picture of the death, the burial, and the resurrection of Christ, but it cannot save anyone." Melton says that faith only results in salvation. The phrase "faith only" appears just one time in the Bible. It's in James 2:24, where the Spirit inspired writer penned, "...not by faith only." Melton says baptism is important, but that it FOLLOWS salvation. Friend, open your Bible to Mark 16:16. Put your finger on the word "saved." What does Jesus put before salvation? Was it belief only, or was it belief and baptism?

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## A Prayer for Unity

Sean P. Cavender | Bald Knob, Arkansas, USA

In John 17, just before Jesus was betrayed by one of His own disciples, Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane. Matthew, Mark, and Luke record Jesus's pleadings to let the cup of suffering pass from the Him; the apostle John records an entirely different prayer by our Savior. The entire chapter is devoted to Christ's prayer. It was not a prayer for the pain Jesus was going to endure in the crucifixion. Instead, He prayed for us, all believers. In what is sometimes called the "High Priestly Prayer," Jesus prayed on behalf of all who were to follow the word of God. One of the petitions that Jesus made to His Father was that all who believe in Him might be unified in the truth.

*"Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth...that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me,"* (John 17:17, 21, **English Standard Version**).

Jesus identifies several things as essential for unity and oneness. He outlines a path for unity, even in darkness and despair. Just moments before He was betrayed and handed over to be crucified, in the hour of His greatest trial, Jesus prayed for the unity of believers.

So, what is essential for unity?

### 1. Learn the value of service and obedience.

Jesus came to earth to do His Father's will. He said, "I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do" (John 17:4). He would say that He revealed the name of the Father to the world (John 17:6). Jesus did not come to earth to demand glory be given to Him; instead, He came to point

others to glorify the Father! Jesus was an example of service to God and to the world. Are we doing all that we can to obey God and to glorify Him? Our actions, choices, and thoughts should be in subjection to the will of God. By those actions, choices, and thoughts, we should be capable of bringing others to realize the greatness of God and help others see that they should be serving God. For unity to be achieved, we must first serve like Jesus did. We must glorify God and help others see how they can know the God of heaven, too.

## **2. Unity requires protecting what we have.**

Jesus said that He had not lost any that had been given to Him, except the son of perdition (John 17:12). However, the emphasis Jesus wants to draw attention to is the diligent work of guarding what He had been given stewardship over. God sent Jesus to the world to teach people about Himself; Jesus faithfully did as God had sent Him to do. That was not a task Jesus took lightly. Jesus wanted to protect all that He had been able to bring to God. He actively guarded them! The Lord knew Satan, the evil one, was waiting to devour His flock (John 17:15; 1 Peter 5:8). Unity is something that must be maintained and we must realize the stakes are high and very real! The Lord did not underestimate the power of the devil and Satan's ability to destroy the work of God and Christ. One was lost—Judas. We must be aware of the dangers and traps the devil lays for us; he is crafty and will try to destroy the Lord's people. Churches must learn from Jesus—protect the flock from those who may come in, trying to lead people astray (Acts 20:28).

## **3. Keep the world out.**

Unity is based on a relationship with God and Christ, not with the world. Christ was not of the world, so neither should His disciples be of the world. "They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world" (John 17:16). Jesus overcame the temptations by the devil, as recorded in Matthew 4 and Luke 4. The devil rules the world (John 14:30). Our Lord and Savior overcame the devil and his tests to get Christ to fail. Disciples of Christ should not maintain a relationship with the world. We are in the world, but we do not belong to the world (John 17:15). Our fellowship is not with the world, instead, we should be in God and Christ!

"That they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me," (John 17:21).

## **Conclusion**

John 17 and the prayer of Jesus are singular in focus—He is intent on the unity of believers. Those who are sanctified and saved by the word of truth, the gospel, are meant to have unity with one another and with God Himself. While unity requires work and effort to obtain and maintain, it was the goal of Christ and should be the goal of every Christian. Satan will take opportunity to destroy our unity, we must persevere. Even through adversity, unity can be achieved! Our Lord and Savior longed for unity of every believer, so all believers could be with Him for eternity (John 17:3, 24). Unity is the means by which we may dwell with God for all eternity. Do not lose sight of Christ's prayer and purpose for the unity of all believers!

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## **Titles of Jesus: Apostle and Prophet**

David Cooper | Evening Shade, Arkansas, USA

The titles "apostle" and "prophet" are very much alike, therefore I will address them together. They both refer to one who speaks for another.

"Apostle" is very similar to our word "ambassador." The apostles were Jesus' ambassadors. The title "apostle" is used only once for Jesus. He is called the "Apostle of our profession" in Hebrews 3:1. By the way a High Priest is an ambassador for God. Strong's dictionary says This of the term apostle: "1. a delegate, messenger, one sent forth with orders (including) the apostle whom we confess, of Christ, God's

chief messenger.” Strong gives the example of Epaphroditus (Philippians 2:25). The Apostle of the Jewish faith was Moses, while Jesus is the Apostle of our profession.

The term “prophet” in the Old Testament is also defined by Strong as, “spokesman, speaker, prophet, false prophet, heathen prophet.” He gives as example Deuteronomy 18:18, where Moses prophesies of another who will take his place, which is, of course, Jesus. Peter confirms that Jesus was the prophet Moses referred to in Acts 3:22-23. Thayer in his lexicon says the term “prophet” in the New Testament means, “an interpreter or spokesman for God; one through whom God speaks.” He uses Stephen in reference to the same passage in Deuteronomy (Acts 7:37).

Peter, as stated before, calls Jesus a “prophet” (Acts 3:22-23). Both He and Stephen (Acts 7:37) indicate that Jesus is the Prophet of Deuteronomy 18:18. The multitude praising Christ as He entered Jerusalem said, “This is Jesus the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee.

When Jesus offered “living water” many of those present said, “Of a truth this is the Prophet” (John 7:40). They understood, as the next verse shows, that the Prophet was indeed the Christ, Messiah.

After Jesus raised the widow’s son, all present glorified God and said, “That a great (D.C.) prophet is risen up among us; and, That God hath visited his people. When Jesus talked with the disciples on the road to Emmaus after his resurrection, they called Jesus of Nazareth, “a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people.”

The lesson we should learn from Jesus being the apostle and prophet of the New Testament of God to man is that we need to heed his word. as Stephen stated in Acts 7:37, while quoting Moses. Peter adds, “And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people” (Acts 3:23). God the Father told the apostles on the Mount of Transfiguration, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him” (Acts 17:5). Those who did not obey Moses Law died in the wilderness (Hebrews 3:17). The Hebrew writer gives two warnings to us about not obeying our prophet (Hebrews 3:13; 4:1). If we add the warning of Hebrews 10:28-29,

*“He that despised Moses’ law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?”*

we see the great catastrophe awaiting us for not heeding the prophet of our profession.

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## The Divine Plan of the Ages

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

### Introduction

On July 20, 1969, Neil A. Armstrong, American astronaut, became the first human to set foot on the moon. The plan devised by scientists at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration to get him there was truly remarkable for its technical complexity and accuracy and is indeed a monument to the skill of American technology. Yet, the plan that God devised for the salvation of mankind is as much higher in grandeur than the program devised by NASA, or any other human scheme, “as the heavens are higher than the earth” (Isaiah 55:8-9). What is God’s plan of salvation?

### Purpose

God’s scheme of redemption first existed in **purpose**.

*“To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make*

*all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, according to the **eternal purpose** which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him” (Ephesians 3:8-12).*

That purpose was in the mind of God “from the beginning of the world” (verse 9), indeed, it is an “eternal purpose” (verse 11). Before there even was a man, an earth, moon or universe, in eternity before time, God purposed His plan for our salvation.

### **Promise**

God created all things and set the first man and woman in the garden of Eden to keep it. But they sinned and fell. God was forced to bring curses upon them. But even with the curses grace was manifested as God promised that the seed of woman (one born of a virgin) would bruise the serpent’s head, i.e., destroy the power of Satan. “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel”(Genesis 3:15). Thus, the scheme entered the state of **promise**.

After many centuries had passed, God appeared to Abram in Ur of the Chaldees, commanded him to depart from there to a country He would show him, and delivered to Abram a grand three part promise.

*“Now the LORD had said to Abram: ‘Get out of your country, from your family and from your father’s house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed. ... “Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, ‘To your descendants I will give this land.’ And there he built an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him” (Genesis 12:1-3, 7).*

The Lord pledged to make Abraham “a great nation” (verse 2), give his descendants the land of Canaan (verse 7), and through him to bless “all the families of the earth” (verse 3).

When Abraham’s descendants, Israel, were in Egypt, God fulfilled the first part of the promise by making them “a nation, great, mighty, and populous” (Deuteronomy 26:5).

Under the leadership of Joshua Israel received in fulness the land of promise, for “All came to pass.”

*“So the LORD gave to Israel all the land of which He had sworn to give to their fathers, and they took possession of it and dwelt in it. The LORD gave them rest all around, according to all that He had sworn to their fathers. And not a man of all their enemies stood against them; the LORD delivered all their enemies into their hand. Not a word failed of any good thing which the LORD had spoken to the house of Israel. All came to pass” (Joshua 21:43-45).*

But the spiritual promise, “in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed,” remained unfulfilled.

### **Prophecy**

Then the plan entered the stage of prophecy, as prophets foretold the coming salvation. For example, Isaiah prophesied a Savior to come.

*“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. “Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this” (Isaiah 9:6-7).*



The prophet also foretold a Way of Salvation to be revealed.

*"A highway shall be there, and a road, And it shall be called the Highway of Holiness. The unclean shall not pass over it, But it shall be for others. Whoever walks the road, although a fool, shall not go astray. No lion shall be there, nor shall any ravenous beast go up on it; it shall not be found there. But the redeemed shall walk there"* (Isaiah 35:8-9).

He further prophesied a Realm of Safety to be built.

*"Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, 'Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.' For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem"* (Isaiah 2:2-3).

### **Preparation**

After more centuries had gone by, John the Baptist came preaching repentance and baptizing in the wilderness of Judea in fulfillment of the prophecy:

*"Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, who will prepare Your way before You. The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; Make His paths straight.' John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. Then all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to him and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair and with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. And he preached, saying, 'There comes One after me who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose'"* (Mark 1:2-7).

Thus, the plan entered the stage of **preparation**. All things were in readiness. Indeed, "after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand' (Mark 1:14-15). Even the angels in heaven waited anxiously the revelation of the wonderful plan of the ages.

*"Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven--things which angels desire to look into"* (1 Peter 1:10-12).

### **Perfection**

Then, "when the fullness of the time (the time foreordained by God) had come, God sent forth His Son" (Galatians 4:4). He was the Savior prophesied before by Isaiah.

*"Then the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS. 'He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end'"* (Luke 1:30-33).

"For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord (Luke 2:11). Salvation is only through Him.

*".... let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus*

*Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole. This is the 'Stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the Chief Cornerstone.' Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:10-12).*

He is the fulness of God's plan for man, "for it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell" (Colossians 1:19). God's eternal plan of human redemption had entered the phase of **perfection**, when the divine plan was brought to completion.

In God's infinite wisdom, He used whole peoples and nations to prepare the world for "the fulness of the time." The Romans helped prepare the world by developing a sense of the unity of mankind under universal law and by establishing the *Pax Romana* (Roman Peace) whereby preachers of the gospel could travel to all parts of the Empire on Roman roads protected by Roman soldiers. The Greeks helped by giving people a common language, *Koine* (common) Greek, in which they could hear the Word and, negatively, by being at a low spiritual ebb, leaving a void for the gospel to fill. The Jews also helped by holding up the one true God to the world, by keeping alive the hopes of the Messiah ("Anointed," promised Savior), by providing the Old Testament, which paved the way for God's plan, by giving the pure morals of the Law of Moses, and by providing the synagogue as a place the Gospel could be preached. How glorious "the manifold wisdom of God" is shown to be (Ephesians 3:10).

God also revealed a Way of Salvation, Christ Jesus. As He Himself claims, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). This salvation is revealed by the Gospel. "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" (Romans 1:16). Likewise, He built a Realm of Safety, in Christ. "Therefore I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory" (2 Timothy 2:10). To be in Christ is to be in His body, the church. "And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all (Ephesians 1:22-23). He saves His body, the church. "For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body" (Ephesians 5:23).

## Conclusion

At last, in Christ Jesus the Savior, the promise to Abraham, "in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed," is fulfilled. "And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, 'In you all the nations shall be blessed'" (Galatians 3:8). "Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, 'And to seeds,' as of many, but as of one, 'and to your Seed,' who is Christ" (Galatians 3:16).

By faith in Christ and through baptism all people can become "Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."

*"For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Galatians 3:26-29).*

Indeed, the Way of Salvation is open to you; you are invited to enter the Realm of Safety. "And the Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' And let him who hears say, 'Come!' And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely" (Revelation 22:17). Will you come?

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## Respect

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

Aretha Franklin, "the Queen of Soul," passed away August 16th. Her signature song was her 1967 best selling hit, "Respect."

*"All I want you to do for me  
Is give it to me when you get home....  
R-E-S-P-E-C-T  
....  
A little respect ."*

Everyone has the legitimate desire to be treated with respect. As he marveled at the majesty of the Lord's creation, David wondered:

*When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers,  
The moon and the stars, which You have ordained,  
What is man that You are mindful of him,  
And the son of man that You visit him?  
For You have made him a little lower than the angels,  
And You have crowned him with glory and honor.  
You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands;  
You have put all things under his feet,  
All sheep and oxen--Even the beasts of the field,  
The birds of the air, And the fish of the sea  
That pass through the paths of the seas" (Psalm 8:3-8).*

The Lord has crowned all mankind "with glory and honor." Now, friends, that's respect indeed from the One who really counts!

Of course, David referred to Moses' account of creation.

*So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth' (Genesis 1:27-28).*

All people deserve respect because every person is made in the divine image. God created man in the divine "likeness" (Genesis 1:26) or "similitude" (James 3:9).

How are we in the divine image? Certainly not in outward form or appearance, for both the male and female are in God's image, as are all the races of men. Furthermore, God has no visible form (Deuteronomy 4:15-18; 1 Timothy 1:17). Rather, as God is an invisible Spirit (1 Timothy 1:17; John 4:24), man has an invisible spirit from God (Ecclesiastes 12:7). As God is immortal (undying; 1 Timothy 1:17), man has an immortal spirit (Ecclesiastes 12:7). God is rational (a reasoning Being), and so is man (Isaiah 1:18). As God is moral (capable of differentiating between right and wrong), so also is man (Deuteronomy 30:11-20).

This is the common heritage of all people of every race, language, and nationality. Thus, we should treat all people everywhere - the rich and poor, the famous and unknown, our friends and our enemies, men and women, those whose customs are like ours and those whose customs are far different - with respect. "Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king" (1 Peter 2:17). Some find anything that makes people different from them a reason for ridicule. This is sinful.

Some people are due special respect. Wives should honor their husbands (Ephesians 5:33), and husbands should honor their wives (1 Peter 3:7). Instead of criticizing or ridiculing your spouse to your friends, think of ways to honestly compliment her/him.

We must honor and respect our parents (Ephesians 6:2-3; Hebrews 12:9). This includes caring for them when they are too aged and infirm to care for themselves (Matthew 15:1-9; 1 Timothy 5:4) and addressing

them in respectful terms (cf. Matthew 21:30).

The aged are due special respect to the point of submission (1 Peter 5:5; cf. Leviticus 19:32). In our society old age is something to be ridiculed. No one wants to admit he is old. The average life span of people is 70 - 80 years (Psalm 90:10). I'm 73; I'm an old man. If you're my generation, you're old. Be thankful the Lord allowed you to have fullness of days. I liked the attitude of Brother Martin Broadwell, Sr., who was a generation older than I. He said he was happy to be old; it was one of the few things about him that demanded respect. I taught my children to address those a generation older than them as "Mr." or "Mrs." as a sign of respect. Some older people told them not to do this, because it made them feel old. They were asking my children to disobey their parents (Ephesians 6:1) and telling them not to treat older people with the deference that youth should show to their elders.

We should respect civil rulers (Romans 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:17). Instead of ridiculing our rulers, pray for them (1 Timothy 2:1-2).

Employees should respect their employers (1 Timothy 6:1).

We should respect the elders of the church for the work they do (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13; 1 Timothy 5:17).

When Christ comes in glory to judge the world, He will give honor and glory to those who have obeyed Him (1 Peter 1:7), but those who disobey Him will receive everlasting wrath (Romans 2:5-11). Which will you receive?



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