

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

PHILIPPIANS  
**4:8**

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

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*"Christians can easily forget that their service is to God. If they do, they become ill tempered and agitated by mistreatment for doing right. But keeping in mind that one serves the Christ enables one to look beyond the miserable present and the suffering being endured to the inheritance that God has promised to his children who serve him faithfully. One's life is given meaning, purpose, and dignity by this relationship to God, whatever ignominy may be visited upon one by the unrighteous"* (Clinton D. Hamilton, **Truth Commentaries: 1 Peter**. 111 [comment on 1 Peter 2:21])

"Power to say 'No' is the decisive test of strength of moral character. Good, if followed at all, must be pursued actively - uphill. But to go wrong you need buy yield, and drift with the stream" (**The Pulpit Commentary**. 8:277 [homily on Psalm 36:4]).

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## Pastors

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

A man taking our Bible correspondence course stated he is the pastor of a church. The English word "pastor" is found only once in the New Testament, in the list of offices Christ set in the church for its edification when He ascended on high (Ephesians 4:10-16). The verb (action word) form of the noun (naming word) translated "pastor" is translated "shepherd" in Acts 20:28 and 1 Peter 5:2 in the **New King James Version**. A "pastor" is a spiritual shepherd. These same men are called "elders" and "overseers" (Acts 20:17, 28; 1 Peter 5:1-2). The word translated "overseers" is also translated "bishops" (Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:1-2; Titus 1:7). To be a pastor (ie. shepherd - elder - overseer/bishop) a man must meet divinely ordained qualifications (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). One man cannot serve as "the pastor" of a local church, but there must be a plurality of pastors in a local church to be scriptural (Acts 14:23; 20:17, 28; Philippians 1:1; Titus 1:5; James 5:14; 1 Peter 5:1-2).

## Five English Names - One Office

Elders | Pastors / Shepherds | Overseers / Bishops

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### The Autonomy of the Local Church

Sunday Ayandare | Ibadan, Nigeria

One of the principles of the New Testament that is grossly misunderstood by many is the autonomy of the local church. There are those who opine that congregational autonomy has to do with each local church being an island to itself, having nothing to do whatsoever with Christians in other local churches. Some even go to the extent of asserting that congregational autonomy confers on each local church the right to bind and loose anything under the sun!

On the other hand, there are those who consider the concept of congregational autonomy as not only unbiblical, but also divisive and therefore, devilish. These views are blatantly false and wrong.

#### What is Congregational Autonomy?

Autonomy is derived from two Greek words, namely, “auto” and “nomy.” “Auto” means self, while “nomy” is law. So, autonomy has to do with the quality or state of being self-governing. Hence, when we talk of congregational autonomy, we are expressing the idea that each congregation is self-governing and is independent of every other.

Congregational autonomy does not mean each local church can make laws for itself. We have only one lawgiver who is Jesus Christ (James 4:12). He is the head of the church (Ephesians 1:22-23); “the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords” (1 Timothy 6:15). Autonomy of the local church simply means each local church reserves the right to make decisions as to what expedencies it will employ in executing God’s laws.

Let us illustrate: In Hebrews 10:25, we read: “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another, and so much the more, as ye see the days approaching.” The direct command here is “not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together.” Implicit in this command, however, is the need for a specific time and place of meeting. It is inconceivable that there could be a meeting, any meeting whatsoever, without a specific time and place of meeting. The Lord does not bind any specific time or type of a place of meeting. This is where congregational autonomy comes in. Each local church has the right to decide at what time it is going to meet, how many times in the week, who is to do the preaching, for how many minutes or hours.

Autonomy of each local church does not mean a congregation could decide to appoint a 25 year old unmarried Christian an elder. The Lawgiver has already decreed that a man must be married and have believing children to be qualified as an elder (Titus 1:6). A local church cannot decide on which day to eat the Lord’s Supper. The head of the church has already decided that – the first day of the week (Acts 20:7). To break bread on any other day is to transgress the doctrine of Jesus Christ (2 John 9-11). The Lord has specified the elements at His Table – unleavened bread and fruit of the vine (Matthew 26:17, 26-29). To eat amala and drink coke at the Lord’s Supper in the name of congregational autonomy is to act without the Lord’s authority (Matthew 7:21-23). The Lord through His inspired apostle has given us the method we should follow in giving of our means to support the work of the church (1 Corinthians 16:1-2; 2 Corinthians 9:6-8). To adopt any other method because each congregation is autonomous is to go beyond that which is written (1 Corinthians 4:6).

#### Congregational Autonomy Is A New Testament Concept

After Paul and Barnabas had preached and established churches in several cities during their first evangelistic tour, they came back to appoint elders for each of these churches (Acts 14:23). That elders were appointed in every church in apostolic times underscores two principles which form the basis of the concept of congregational autonomy: one, the independence of each local church; and two, the equality of all the churches.

Let us keep in mind that Barnabas and Saul were sent out by a local church – Antioch (Acts 13:1-3). Having accomplished their task, they returned and gave report to the same local church (Acts 14:26-27). The church at Antioch did not oversee the local churches started by Paul and Barnabas in spite of the fact that it (Antioch) was responsible for sending out the preachers who established these churches.

In the New Testament, there was nothing like “mother church” or “supervising congregation” or “sponsoring church.” Every church was independent and all the local churches were on the same footing – equal before God – in spite of size or location.

Moreover, the principle of congregational autonomy is seen in the limitation of the authority of the elders. Elders in the New Testament period were local officers, not state or provincial or national officers. Each church had its own elders. What was the jurisdiction of these elders? Paul, addressing the Ephesian elders charged them to “take heed to yourselves and to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers ...” (Acts 20:28). That is how it should be today. The jurisdiction of elders should not go beyond the congregation where they are appointed. In a similar vein, Peter said, “the elders which are among you I exhort ... Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof ...” (1 Peter 5:1-3). That conclusively shows the limit and extent of the authority of the elders. The elders of a large congregation cannot oversee the work of another nearby small church with divine approval. No group of men outside the confines of a local church is conferred with the authority by the Lord to supervise or police the affairs of any local congregation of the Lord’s people. This is the principle that puts a question mark on the scripturalness of any supra-local body like the Board of Trustees (BOT) over several local congregations. If there should be any board of trustees for whatever reason, it should consist of the elders of a local congregation for that particular local church alone.

We have heard it argued by some that the Nigerian government would not allow for the registration of churches at the local level. We state it kindly: that is just NOT correct. In the first place, before some of our brethren who are now championing the cause of BOT over several local churches woke up to realize they would be losing grounds if churches are allowed to register on individual basis, the Nigerian State has already registered some local churches. It is a verifiable fact that Church of Christ Enugu was registered by the Corporate Affairs Commission with RC No. 20336. Besides, denominations of men have been registered such as Church of Christ Divine (RC No. 5702); Church of Christ Mission (RC No. 4889); Church of Christ On Earth (RC No. 9496); Celica Church of Christ (RC No. 7233); International Church of Christ (RC No. 6718).

In the second place, when the church at Owode, Apata, Ibadan made attempts to register in 2006, it was not the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC) that objected. It was a group among us, the “Board of Trustees Church of Christ- Nigeria” that raised objection claiming that Owode Apata was “a branch of Church of Christ-Nigeria.” To say that a local congregation of God’s people is “a branch” of another body is to introduce an outlandish terminology to New Testament Christianity just as the “language of Ashdod” among the Jews of old (Nehemiah 13:24-25). It also betrays a denominational concept regarding the church of our Lord Jesus Christ. Unlike the denominations of men, the church for which Christ died has no branches or earthly headquarters. The moment a religious organization talks of having branches and earthly headquarters, it is already a full-fledged human denomination.

The New Testament teaches that each congregation did its own work under its own elders. The church at Jerusalem, for example, sent out Barnabas to Antioch (Acts 11:22). The church at Antioch on the other hand sent out Barnabas and Saul (Acts 13:1-4). There was no centralized, inter-congregational pooling of

funds. The church at Jerusalem relieved its own needy members (Acts 2:44-45; 4:32-37). When the need became greater than the ability of the Jerusalem church, other churches like Macedonia, Achaia and Galatia sent benevolence to “the poor saints at Jerusalem” (Romans 15:25-26; 1 Corinthians 16:1-4).

While Paul was working at Corinth, he was supported by many churches (2 Corinthians 11:8). How was this done? It was not done through any committee or board or agency. Each church sent directly to Paul through its own chosen messenger (Philippians 4:15-18). This is the principle set forth in the New Testament for the church of our Lord.

### **Autonomy and Jerusalem Conference**

It has been argued by some that the meeting held at Jerusalem in Acts 15 to consider the matter of circumcision was a precedent for inter-congregational organization. It is asserted that since the church at Antioch sent “Paul and Barnabas and certain of them” to Jerusalem, that is a veritable proof that today local churches can send representatives to a supra-local organization, or a board for “the work of God.” That is just not so!

First, the meeting at Jerusalem recorded in Acts 15 was a one-time event. It was not a regular or a continuing “conference.” Second, it was not composed of representatives from various congregations of a state or province, but of members of just one congregation (Acts 15:2). Third, it was occasioned by a question of doctrine which no one could answer except the apostles who constituted the repository of divine revelation at that time (Acts 15:28). Fourth, it featured the apostles of Christ who had special qualifications and special authority and had no successors.

### **Abuse of Congregational Autonomy**

Like every other arrangement ordained of God, we have seen and heard of instances where the principle of congregational autonomy has been abused. We have heard of some of our preaching brethren shouting “autonomy, autonomy” to the high heavens when their sins were about to be exposed. To such we would appeal that they repent before their sins find them out (Numbers 32:23). Others, like Diotrephes, love preeminence and lord it over God’s heritage and invoke the principle of autonomy to cast people out of the church (3 John 9-11; 1 Peter 5:1-3). The apostle Peter admonished, “Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility, for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time” (1 Peter 5:5-6).

Congregational autonomy is not, and should not be used as a cover for the sins of any Christian or any preacher. It is not a cloak for false teaching. Rather, it is a divine arrangement whereby the Lord protects His church from wholesale apostasy.

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Jefferson David Tant | Roswell, Georgia, USA

You recognize that, don't you? It's an asterisk. It is pretty small, and may feel insignificant. In fact, many people look right over it when they see it in print. It refers to something at the bottom of the page. I wonder if it ever gets discouraged, thinking no one pays attention to it. But an asterisk does have a useful function and purpose, even though it may be small and sometimes overlooked.

I have known people who were looked upon as asterisks. They may have resigned themselves to the fact that they don't contribute much, so are content to sit on the sidelines. They may feel discouraged or sorry for themselves.

But as the song says, “There is room in the kingdom...”

What are your limitations? Does illness hinder you? A physical handicap? Are you older and without youthful energy? Does a lack of education limit you? Do others overlook or belittle you?

Are you limited because of little money? Various things may cause some to draw within themselves, content with being a spiritual asterisk.

But it need not be that way. I have known so many through the years who overcame many hindrances to be effective servants of God. Let me cite a few.

Marian White was born with crippling arthritis. Her little body was twisted and painful. She could not even properly care for herself. But rather than wallowing in "Why me?" pity, she used her mind to write Bible literature for children. Her Bible Story books were widely used. She had a good sense of humor, and was a delight to know.

Terry Cocson was lame. He walked with a cane and took 6-inch steps. He lived a simple life in the Philippines. I recall meeting him and learning that he had walked four hours to come to gospel preaching. If he never did anything else in his life, his example has now gone to other nations. Some Americans would not even drive an air-conditioned car four hours to hear preaching, and certainly would not walk, even in good health.

The last years of Hortense Hudgins' life were pretty well home-bound. Her husband had worked as a drummer (an old term for a traveling salesman) into his 90s. In her 90s, Hortense was still teaching, and converted her care-giver to Christ.

Don Sadler had Parkinson's disease beginning in his 40s. In his later years, the severity of his condition greatly affected his mobility and speech. But he met with the saints every time the doors were open even though it was difficult. Sometimes he fell while walking to his seat, but his devotion to the Lord was such an encouragement to all who knew him. He also had some cards printed for everyone that had a Scripture reminder on it.

Margaret Head was still nursing, even in her late 80s. She went here and there ministering to those who benefitted from her loving care, even traveling 1,000 miles to care for those who needed her.

I knew Pappy Obsome in my first work among the Choctaw Indians in Oklahoma. In his 80s, he was not able to do much. But he did find things to do. He made sure he greeted every visitor to our little congregation, and he made sure all the songbooks were put in their racks after our services.

Mid McNight told of a man who was converted at age 80. An atheist in his youth, he had debated preachers on the existence of God. After his baptism, he was bedfast for 3½ years before and after heart surgery. One time when he was in the hospital with both palsy and cancer afflicting him, he remarked, "Since I have obeyed the gospel of Christ, I have led 21 souls to Christ, and if the Lord lets me live a little longer, I have 12 or 14 more just about ready to obey."

I have known of saints who may be confined to home, but who are still able to write notes of encouragement, or make phone calls to encourage others. And there are others who are active in sending out Bible Correspondence Courses, or who make it a practice to care for those who are sick or otherwise in need of some help.

There are young people like Love Joy (yes, that's her real a name). This 13-year-old Philippine girl invited two of her friends to come to a country-side home where I was preaching. They walked for some distance over dirt roads. At the invitation, her two friends stepped forward, asking to be baptized into Christ.

There was an occasion many years ago when Jesus was visiting a home in Bethany. While eating dinner, a woman came and anointed his head with a costly ointment. His disciples were upset and murmured against her. This was not some great deed she had done in the eyes of others, but Christ took note of it, and told his disciples, "Let her alone...she has done what she could" (Mark 14:3-8).

And certainly you remember the widow who was commended by our Lord. "And He sat down opposite the treasury, and began observing how the people were putting money into the treasury; and many rich people were putting in large sums. A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which amount to a cent. Calling His disciples to Him, He said to them, "Truly I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all the contributors to the treasury; for they all put in out of their surplus, but she, out of her poverty, put in all she owned, all she had to live on" (Mark 12:42-44).

"For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because of your name as followers of Christ, truly I say to you, he will not lose his reward" (Mark 9:41). That's all the Lord asks of us, to do what we can, even if we are an asterisk. If you will look and inquire, surely you can at least give a cup of cold water.

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## Light Versus Darkness | Ephesians 5:11-14

Patrick Farish | Wauxahatchie, Texas, USA

*"Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, 'Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.'" (Ephesians 5:11-14)*

We know about darkness. If we are out at night walking with no illumination, we are prone to run into things, or trip over things, that we cannot see. When we get a light on, those obstacles are visible. There is an obvious spiritual application.

Darkness (the absence of light), is used by inspired writers to indicate evil. The works of darkness are unfruitful; but there is "no darkness" in God (Ephesians 5:11; John 1:5); one "in the darkness" is wandering, aimlessly (John 12:35); only the one following Jesus "will not walk in darkness" (John 8:12).

On the other hand, "light" is the word of purity. Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8:12). John had written that the true light "gives light to everyone" (John 1:9). So: "if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7).

Everybody needs to be careful about their "walk": the company they keep and the places they go. Satan knows that the wages of sin is death; he doesn't care. You and I care: take no part in unfruitful works of darkness.

Sometimes we are dismayed at choices loved ones make. The problem, maybe, is that they have not learned to take no part in sinful, shameful deeds. One test of behavior is, would you do what you are doing if you knew your mother or grandmother were watching? Maybe they are not watching. Jesus is.

Know these things about one who is "bad company": he/she is going to be a charmer; going to be popular; the one most admired for his/her sophistication (?) and wit. This is not to say that every personable youth or adult is necessarily "bad company" – but these characteristics should set off alarms of caution.

If you, innocently or ignorantly, find yourself with the "bad company" that is shameful and ruins good morals (I Corinthians 15:33), scam. Do not be frightened by ridicule – your loved ones, and your Lord, will not ridicule you. Do not be intimidated by scowls – the scowlers mostly perform for audiences. Do not be

disheartened by the loneliness of ostracism. Paul had been there; he told Timothy “ ... all who are in Asia turned away from me; ... Demas ... has deserted me; ... At my first defense no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me” (2 Timothy 1:15; 4:10, 16). His solution should be yours, and mine: “I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that day what has been entrusted to me” (2 Timothy 1:12). He is able to guard – not that there will never be hiccups as we journey; but that our ultimate success, he is able to guard.

“For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:38, 39).

“But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7).

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## **Preach The Man, Not The Plan (1)**

Tommy J. Thornhill | Etna, Arkansas, USA

A few weeks ago, a reader who receives this paper via email, wrote to me, asking me to write about some articles he had in his possession that he felt were false doctrine. Even though I did not see the material mentioned, as soon as he named the authors who had written the articles in question, I knew of the false doctrine that was being taught. Years ago, it was known as "the grace of God, unity in diversity movement," which purposed to set aside doctrinal differences for the sake of unity. In other words, "agree to disagree" on matters of doctrine, for the sake of unity. This movement is still alive, and continues to be promoted today, and I will example some aspects of it in coming articles.

First, a little preview. During the 1960s, known by many as the age of the “baby-boomers,” a concept arose that concluded there were no absolutes. Everything was relative, including truth, i.e., what is truth to one person may not be truth to another. The answers to the questions of life given by previous generations were challenged, for with the new generation there seemed to be no firm answers. The only certainty to the “baby-boomers” was there was no certainty. Since there were no absolute truths of right and wrong, that meant the traditional concept of an eternal, omnipotent, omniscient God, who taught a fixed, moral standard for humanity, was outdated, and no longer valid as a standard.

Naturally, this concept being advocated by the “baby-boomer” generation spilled over into the Lord’s church, and influenced the thinking of many, especially the untaught, younger generation who had not been well grounded in the Scriptures. Many preachers in the Lord’s church, who already had a shallow faith in the integrity and authority of the word of God, were easily influenced by the thinking of the baby-boomers. They had little respect for a “thus says the Lord” (1 Peter 4:11), to prove their faith and practice. They saw no need to adhere to, and walk in “the old paths, where is the good way” (Jeremiah 6:16), the path earlier generations had been encouraged to follow. So, setting aside the warning of the Scriptures “not to go beyond what is written” (1 Corinthians 4:6), the new generation decided to ignore any doctrinal differences.

So, “change agent” preachers began teaching the idea of unity in diversity, to placate a generation of untaught, scripturally ungrounded people, who wanted some semblance of religion; and at the same time broaden the fellowship of believers beyond the biblical, spiritual bulwarks that kept the church distinctive from the world. These “change agent” preachers blurred the distinction between the church and the world. They began to teach that the Lord’s church was too exclusive, for there were a lot of sincere religious people who felt they shouldn’t be divided over doctrinal matters. Since they no longer saw a need to follow the teaching of Colossians 3:1, to “do all in the name of the Lord” they would no longer be exclusive. As long as people professed a belief in Jesus Christ, that would be enough for fellowship. They would be accepted into fellowship regardless of their doctrinal beliefs. After all, in their way of thinking, truth was relative. What doctrine meant to one person may not be what it means to someone else. So, each to his own belief.

This attitude allowed that any professed believer in Christ would be fellowshipped regardless of what they might believe about doctrinal matters, such as to use or not to use mechanical music in worship, acceptance of unbaptized believers (called Christians in prospect), premillennialism, the role of women as preachers and elders, serving the Lord's Supper on special occasions other than the first day of the week, special church music (choirs and solos), social/fellowship halls, family life centers, the status of denominationalism on grace, faith, baptism, and other such like.

This movement has never really died. No false doctrine ever does. Error always comes back (maybe under a different name). It has been practiced for many, many years by denominational preachers, as well as apostate preachers in the Lord's church. With this in mind, it is profitable to restudy the issue. One of the tenets of the movement described above is the title is one I am using for this series, "Preach the man, not the plan."

What I have written so far, gives the underlying concept for "preach the man, not the plan." Wherever the "grace, unity in diversity" is taught, one of the things the advocates of the false doctrine do is draw a distinction between the "gospel of Christ" and the "doctrine of Christ." They say, you only preach the gospel to the lost, you teach doctrine to the saved afterward. What they mean by this is that you only teach/preach the "core" gospel of Christ to the lost. They define "core" gospel to mean the fundamental facts that Jesus lived, that He was crucified on a cross, was buried, then resurrected on the third day. To support their idea they use First Corinthians 2:2, "I determined not to know anything among you, except Jesus Christ and Him crucified," and First Corinthians 15:1, 3-4:

*"Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel, which I preached to you ... that Jesus died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures."*

Only after the sinner believes (whether baptized scripturally or not), acknowledging the core facts, then will be the time to teach doctrine as suggested by Hebrews 6:1. "Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ (they call this the core gospel t.t.), let us go on to perfection." But when you teach doctrine, don't be overly strict about what doctrine requires. This false teaching gives people a lot of leeway, allowing a wide range of opinions about which doctrine to follow. In the next issue, "the gospel-doctrine" is a distinction not taught in the scriptures.

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## **Sin - Its Consequences**

Jim Mickells | Lewisburg, Tennessee, USA

The word of God has much to say about sin. It is a universal problem which all who are accountable to God must deal with (Romans 3:9-10, 23). The Bible defines sin for us (Romans 14:23; James 4:17; 1 John 3:4; 5:17; etc.). It also gives us several lists of sins to help us identify and avoid violating the commands of our Father (Galatians 5:19-21; Colossians 3:5-9). We are also instructed how sin affects our relationship with the Lord (Isaiah 59:1-2) and what will happen to those who continue to practice such (1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Galatians 5:21). Instruction is also furnished by Jehovah in helping us to avoid committing such acts (Psalm 119:11; Ephesians 6:11; James 4:7). The great news for all is that Jesus suffered and died to free us from the bondage of our sins (Romans 5:8; 1 Peter 2:24; 1 John 2:2).

The Lord will forgive us of our transgressions when we meet His terms of pardon. To the one who has never contacted the blood of Jesus, an alien sinner, they are to be taught the word of God (John 6:44-45), must have faith in Jesus as Lord (John 8:24), repent of their sins (Luke 13:3, 5), confess Him with their mouth (Romans 10:9-10), and be buried in the waters of baptism for remission of sins (Acts 2:38). As Christians who are now raised from this watery grave, they are to walk in newness of life, having crucified the old man of sin, and are now new creatures in Christ (Romans 6:4-7). This does not eliminate the temptation to commit sin even though we are now children of God (1 John 2:1-2). We will at some point



and time yield to those temptations. The Father has made provision for the erring Christian to be forgiven of any evil they are guilty of as well. They are told to repent, confess their sin, and pray for forgiveness (Acts 8:22; 1 John 1:7-10), thus receiving the benefits of the blood of Christ.

Yet there is an aspect of sin, it seems to me, that many either don't see or maybe they don't want to see it until it is too late. Sin has consequences that God does not always remove. Let me illustrate with the life of King David. He had committed adultery with Bathsheba and killed her husband Uriah the Hittite, as we read in 2 Samuel eleven. In chapter twelve, Nathan the prophet is sent to the king, who makes David aware that God knows of the great sin of which he was guilty. He acknowledges to the prophet that he had sinned against the Lord (12:13). Though Jehovah forgave his iniquity the consequences remained. The child that Bathsheba gave birth to died (12:14-18) and the prophet also told the king the sword would never depart from his house (12:10).

Notice the words of the wise man, "Can a man take fire to his bosom, And his clothes not be burned? Can one walk on hot coals, And his feet not be seared?" (Proverbs 6:27-28). Sin is not something for one to play with. It can leave scars which will never be healed. The Psalmist said, "For I acknowledge my transgressions, And my sin is always before me" (Psalm 51:3). The heading in my Bible for this Psalm says, "A Psalm of David when Nathan the prophet went to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba." The high cost of sin!

May the Lord help us to think soberly and seriously before violating any of His laws! The consequences of even one sin can be devastating. What about the man or woman who has a one-night stand with someone, their spouse puts them away because of this sin, and they must spend the rest of their lives apart from their family? The individual who takes one drink, which leads to another, and then he becomes an alcoholic? I have heard that one out of every fifteen who takes the first drink becomes an alcoholic. Even if the statistics are not as high as this (one out of fifteen), is the risk worth it? Especially when we look about us and see the havoc that alcoholism causes in the lives of so many. God will forgive, but will He restore the health of one who is dying with cirrhosis of the liver because of his drinking? I think you know the answer to this question. You can multiply these two illustrations hundreds of times with different sins with their consequences, yet surely, we get the point.

Sin brings pleasure (Hebrews 11:25), yet it also has consequences. The dangers of any transgression of God's law are real. Let us never be guilty of taking it into our bosom lest we be burnt by it.

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

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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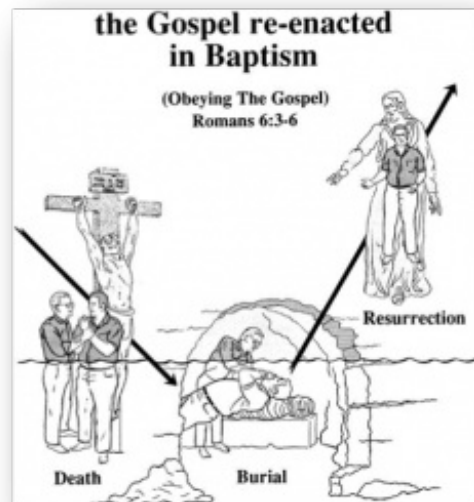
Mr. Melton mentions 1 Peter 3:21, and just as quickly as he refers to it, he discounts it and moves on. He says of baptism, "...it is a figure, not a doctrine." It is a doctrine. Doctrine simply means teaching, and the New Testament teaches about baptism a lot. And 1 Peter 3:21 doesn't merely say baptism is a figure, it says it is "the like figure." The Greek word here is *antitupos*, from which the English antitype has been transliterated. It means "after a true likeness" (Robertson's NT Word Pictures) or "corresponding (antitype, ie. a representative, counterpart)" (Strong's). The concept of type and antitype is used frequently between the Old and New Testament. There are several Old Testament types of Christ (ie. Melchizedek, Isaac, Moses, Joshua, etc.). There are key elements about each of these (and others) which serve as foreshadows of the Messiah. Jesus is not just "a figure" of these Old Testament examples; He is the true

fulfillment, He is the antitype. The same word (*antitupos*) is used in Hebrews 9:24, where the Old Testament tabernacle and sacrifices are identified as types or "copies of the true." The church and the sacrifice of Christ are the true. In the same fashion, Noah's salvation through water (1 Peter 3:20) was the type, the foreshadow; whereas our salvation through water (verse 21) is the true.

Aside from his misapplication of "the like figure," Melton has nothing else to say about 1 Peter 3:21. He cannot get around what it says, so he ignores the text. Notice what Peter wrote by the Spirit of God: *"There is an antitype which now saves us - baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ."* Peter specifically says baptism saves us; Melton simply ignores the statement. Baptism alone? Of course not. Noah wasn't saved through water alone. Had he not believed God and obeyed, he would have perished like the rest. Likewise, we are not saved through water alone; we too must believe God and obey Him. But the fact remains, Peter identifies baptism as the point of salvation (just as he did in Acts 2:38).

Moving on to Romans 6:3-4 and Galatians 3:27, Melton says, "...there is no WATER baptism in either..." Thus he concludes these texts are about "...the SPIRITUAL baptism of 1 Corinthians 12:13..." It is true, the word "water" is not found in either text. If the absence of the word "water" means it is not water baptism; by the same token, would the absence of the word "spiritual" not likewise mean it is not spiritual baptism?

Paul clearly illustrates we have a death, burial and resurrection patterned after the Lord's death, burial and resurrection. He died physically; we die to sin (Romans 6:1-3). He was buried in a tomb; we are buried in a watery grave (Romans 6:3-4). Coming forth from the grave, He conquered the power of death; arising from baptism, we are raised to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:4). Notice Romans 6:5, "...if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of his resurrection." I'm curious, how does Melton's spiritual baptism argument fit with verse 5? How does spiritual baptism unite us with the likeness of His death? Water baptism perfectly parallels the death, burial and resurrection.



Melton was right to group Romans 6:3-4 and Galatians 3:27 together, for what one speaks of, the other speaks of. Both use the phrase "...baptized into Christ...", and as we have just noted, water baptism fits the text. There is no reason to think Galatians 3:27 is not about water baptism. In fact, the word baptism or some variation of it appears about 80 times in the New Testament. It means to immerse or submerge. It is true the word is used figuratively at times (ie. baptism of suffering, Matthew 20:22; Holy Spirit baptism, Mark 1:8; baptism into Moses and the sea, 1 Corinthians 10:2), but by far, the most common use of the word is immersion in water. Basic Bible hermeneutics would have us understand a word by its common usage unless something in the text demands otherwise. Nothing in Romans 6:3-4 or Galatians 3:27 demand that baptism be anything other than immersion in water.

Melton closes his assault on what the Bible says about baptism by citing Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 1:17, "...Christ sent me not to baptize but to preach the gospel..." Why did Paul say that? The context reveals a spirit of sectarianism in the church at Corinth. Paul was thankful he only baptized a few of them, "...lest anyone should say that I had baptized in my own name..." (v 14-16). He is not saying baptism is not necessary, as Melton tries to infer from the text. But, the fact is, no one is sent to baptize. Baptism results from the preaching of the gospel. Look through the conversion accounts in the book of Acts, and you will see consistently that those who heard and responded favourably to the gospel did so by being

baptized.

Melton appeals to 1 Corinthians 15:1-4, which reveals the gospel as the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. He quickly points out "...the subject of water baptism isn't mentioned once." True, but may I point out, the subject of repentance isn't mentioned once either. Will Melton affirm that we can be saved without repenting? (see Luke 13:3, 5; Acts 3:19; 17:30-31). The absence of repentance or baptism in a particular text does not negate the fact that they are both mentioned several other places in connection with salvation.

The gospel is the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. Both 2 Thessalonians 1:8 and 1 Peter 4:17 speak of the necessity of obeying the gospel. How do you obey the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ? Those are facts to be believed, but how does one obey such? Believing the gospel is not sufficient (James 2:18); Jesus says we must obey (Matthew 7:21-23; Acts 5:32). As we noted from Romans 6:3-4, in being baptized, one parallels the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. When Paul speaks of the Corinthians receiving the gospel, it is not merely that they believed it - they obeyed it. They were baptized for the forgiveness of their sins (Acts 18:8; cf. 1 Corinthians 1:14).

Melton has done his best to discredit the churches of Christ in his lengthy article, unfortunately by peddling a lot of misinformation and misrepresentation. I challenge readers to consider what is written in his material, and the responses herein; but especially to focus on what God's word says. It doesn't matter what any preacher says, whether Mr. Melton, myself, or another - it matters what the Lord says. Be like the Bereans and search the Scriptures to see whether these things are so (Acts 17:11). If I have failed to be honest in my use of God's word, please be a friend to me and point it out. The salvation of souls is too important to be playing around with. May we all be diligent students of the Bible, setting aside bias and simply accepting what the Lord would have us do.

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## **Titles of Jesus (2) - King**

David Cooper | Evening Shade, Arkansas, USA

### **When Did / Does The Kingdom Begin?**

We know the Kingdom was nigh in John's and Christ's time. In John 3:1-2 John wrote.: "In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Jesus stated the same in Matthew 4:17: "From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." "At hand," means near or nigh. Is it logical to think it has not come by this millennium? As earlier mentioned Jesus said it would come in that generation, Mark 9:1, "which is restated in Luke 9:27, "But I tell you of a truth, there be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the kingdom of God.

The kingdom did, in fact, come with power as stated in Mark 9:1 on Pentecost as recorded in Acts 2:1-4:

*"And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance."*

We know this refers to the kingdom of promise returning from Acts 2:34-35: "For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, Until I make thy foes thy footstool." The next verse states that Jesus is both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36).

The kingdom was already in existence when Paul wrote to the Colossians in Colossians 1:13: "Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son."

The apostles had access to the keys of the Kingdom as Christ stated in Matthew 16:19:

*“And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”*

It would be silly to think they did not use them when alive. The Hebrew writer made clear that Christians at the time had received and continued to receive (Greek grammar) the Kingdom: “Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear...” (Hebrews 12:28). John stated that he was in the Kingdom with those to whom he wrote:

*“I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ (Revelation 1:9)*

### **All Authority and Dominion is Christ’s Forever.**

He has all power in Heaven and Earth by his own words, “And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth” (Matthew 28:18). Furthermore, we are to keep his commandments as the King of Kings:

*“That thou keep this commandment without spot, unrebukeable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ: Which in his times he shall shew, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords” (1 Timothy 6:14-15).*

In addition Jesus clearly was to have power over kingdoms of the Earth.

*“I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee. Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel” (Psalm 2:7-9).*

Paul makes this clear in Eph 1:21, “Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come.”

Peter echoes the eternal nature of the Lord’s reign in First Peter 4:11:

*“If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.”*

### **The Kingdom will return to the Father after the Judgment.**

The Kingdom will be delivered up: “Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power” (1 Corinthians 15:24). Psalm 110:1 says the Kingdom would be Jesus’ until his enemies were made his footstool. “The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.”

### **We have a responsibility to obey our King.**

In Acts 4:12 Peter says Jesus is our only hope of salvation. “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.”

We, as his servants are to observe his commandments through the apostles.

*“And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things*

*whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen” (Matthew 28:18-20).*

If we do not heed Jesus we will be destroyed from among God’s people.

*“For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people” (Acts 3:22-23).*

In Matthew 17:5 God the Father endorses that Statement: “While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him” (emphasis mine). All will eventually bow to him purposely or not according to Paul. “That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth” (Philippians 2:10).

Each of us must make the choice to intentionally bow to Jesus our King if we are to experience his salvation.

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## The Genealogy of Jesus

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

The genealogy of Jesus is crucial to His claim to be the Christ. The Savior had to be the descendant of both Abraham (Genesis 12:3; 22:18) and David (2 Samuel 7:12-16; 1 Chronicles 17:11-14). Matthew and Luke each clearly portrays Jesus as the descendant of Abraham and David (Matthew 1:2, 6; Luke 3:31, 34), and Matthew obviously implies this is the purpose of his record of the genealogy (Matthew 1:1).

The two accounts of the genealogy of Christ are found in Matthew 1:1-16 and Luke 3:23-38. Matthew begins his book with the genealogy, whereas Luke reserves it for the introduction to Jesus’ earthly ministry. Matthew begins with David and comes down to Christ, but Luke begins with Christ and works backward to Adam.

Both writers make it clear to the discerning reader that Joseph did not actually beget Jesus. Matthew writes that each father “begot” his son until he comes to the relationship between Joseph and Jesus and carefully writes, “And Jacob begot Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus who is called Christ” (Matthew 1:16). He doesn’t say Joseph begot Jesus, but states that Jesus “was born” of Mary. Of Christ Luke pens “being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph” (Luke 3:23).

Albert Barnes, in his commentary on Matthew, summarizes the problem in harmonizing the two accounts.

*From Adam to Abraham Matthew has mentioned no names, and Luke only has given the record. From Abraham to David the two tables are alike. Of course there is no difficulty in reconciling these two parts of the tables. The difficulty lies in that part of the genealogy from David to Christ. There they are entirely different. They are manifestly different lines. Not only are the names different, but Luke has mentioned, in this part of the genealogy, no less than 42 names, while Matthew has recorded only 27 names.*

Neither Matthew nor Luke states that he is recording the lineage through Mary, so the answer to the dilemma is a matter of inference. In my opinion, the answer lies in the different purposes of Matthew and Luke.

Matthew’s account of the life of Christ is well placed at the very beginning of the New Testament, since it helps tie the Old and New Testaments together. It shows how Jesus fulfills the Old Testament as the Messiah (Christ) promised by the prophets. Matthew wrote to strengthen Jewish Christians in their faith, to refute their opponents, and to prove that the gospel, rather than contradicting the Old Testament, fulfills it. **Matthew is the gospel to the Jews.**

A number of peculiarities of Matthew demonstrates this purpose. Matthew traces the lineage of Christ from Abraham through David (1:1-17). He quotes or alludes to the Old Testament about sixty-five times. Matthew uses

the term "kingdom" fifty times and the phrase "kingdom of heaven" thirty-three times. He uses the phrase "kingdom of God" only five times, in deference to the Jewish hesitancy to directly mention God. He assigns the title "Son of David" to Jesus nine times. Matthew repeatedly recognizes Jesus as King (2:2; 21:5; 22:11; 25:34; 27:11,37,42). He records Jesus' claim to fulfill the law (5:17-20), His denunciations of the Pharisees (cf. 15:1-14; 23:1-36), and His rejection of national Israel (ch's 21 - 24). Matthew alone wrote of the Jews' acceptance of the guilt of the blood of Christ (27:25). He alone refutes the Jewish claim that the disciples stole the body of Jesus (27:62-66; 28:11-15). Matthew records Jesus' great lessons on the nature of the kingdom of heaven (ch's. 5-7, 13). Though Matthew wrote in Greek, even his style of writing is Jewish. Matthew emphasizes the righteousness of the kingdom (cf. 5:20). The terms "righteous" and "righteousness" occur more in Matthew than in the other three accounts combined.

The Jews would be interested in the legal genealogy. For example, for purposes of inheritance, Israel (Jacob), adopted his two grandsons, Manasseh and Ephraim, the sons of Joseph, thus giving the birthright (double portion) to Joseph and bequeathing Ephraim and Manasseh equal inheritances with their uncles, the brothers of Joseph (Genesis 48:5). Of course, all Jewish genealogies are through the father. **Thus, in my opinion, Matthew gives the legal genealogy of Jesus, that through his adopted father, Joseph.**

Both Luke and Acts are addressed to "Theophilus" (1:3; Acts 1:1). This is a Greek name meaning "friend of God." The third gospel account is written in such a way as to appeal to the Greek mind. It is the only book in the Bible with a formal introduction according to the classical Greek style of writing history (1:1-4), in which the author states his subject, his purpose, his method, and his audience. **Luke is the gospel to the Greeks.**

Luke consistently writes in such a way as to appeal to the logical, educated, cosmopolitan Greek mind. Educated Greeks were humanists trained in logic. Luke presents Jesus as the Son of man. He, more than any other writer, emphasizes the human nature of the Lord. He traces the lineage of Jesus back, not just to Abraham, but all the way to Adam (3:23-38). Luke records more than any other writer about the childhood of Jesus, describing his natural growth as a normal, albeit perfect, child (2:40, 51-52). Luke records more about Jesus praying than any other gospel writer, writing eleven of the fifteen recorded instances of Jesus in prayer. He emphasizes the place of women and children in Jesus' life. Luke emphasizes the Lord's compassion for the poor, downtrodden, and sinners (cf. chapter 15). He also stressed the dependence of Jesus on the Holy Spirit (1:35; 3:22; 4:1,18; 10:21; cf. Acts 10:38).

Luke's gospel account introduces in the New Testament the concept of Jesus as man's Redeemer (1:68; 2:38; 21:28; 24:21). Jesus is our near Kinsman (Hebrews 2:11), "in all things ... made like His brethren" (Hebrews 2:17), Who purchases us for the Lord (cf. Leviticus 25:23-55; Ruth 2:1; 3:12).

**In harmony with his emphasis on the human nature of Jesus, in my opinion, Luke traces the lineage of Christ through Mary**, who was really his mother and was fully human. Finally, since both Joseph and Mary were thus actually descended from David, Jesus was both the legal and fleshly heir of David.

This is a reasonable answer to a supposed contradiction of Scripture. But let me add, since the Scriptures so abundantly give evidence of their divine origin, we should always assume and look for a fair explanation to perceived difficulties. God cannot lie (Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:18, et al). Those who look for and refuse to let go of contradictions in Scripture have a deeper heart problem.

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## Flesh and Spirit

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

*"Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life" (Galatians 6:7-8)*

"The Road Not Taken," Robert Frost  
*Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,  
And sorry I could not travel both*

*And be one traveler, long I stood  
And looked down one as far as I could  
To where it bent in the undergrowth;*

*Then took the other, as just as fair,  
And having perhaps the better claim,  
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;  
Though as for that the passing there,  
Had worn them really about the same,*

*And both that morning equally lay  
In leaves no step had trodden black,  
Oh, I kept the first for another day!  
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,  
I doubted if I should ever come back.*

*I shall be telling this with a sigh  
Somewhere ages and ages hence:  
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I--  
I took the one less traveled by,  
And that has made all the difference.*

In life we can travel one of two ways - the flesh or the spirit, the road we choose will determine our eternal destiny.

### **Flesh**

The apostle Paul uses the term "flesh" of literal flesh, including that of humans (1 Corinthians 15:39), of the physical body (Ephesians 5:29), as a figure of speech (synecdoche) for humans (1 Corinthians 1:29), of a fleshly, human relationship (Romans 9:3), of human standards in contrast with the divine standard (1 Corinthians 1:26), and of the sensuous part of man, with its animal-like passions and desires (Galatians 5:24).

Fleshly desires are not inherently sinful. God gave us our flesh with its natural desires (Genesis 2:7; Psalm 139:13), and He made us upright (Ecclesiastes 7:29). Our fleshly passions have legitimate purposes and lawful, innocent fulfillments (1 Corinthians 7:2; Hebrews 13:4; Mark 7:18-19; 1 Timothy 4:4-5). Jesus had the same flesh we have (Hebrews 2:14-17), yet He was without sin or defilement (Hebrews 4:15; 7:26).

But fleshly desires are avenues through which Satan tempts us to sin (Romans 8:5-8; Galatians 5:16-17; James 1:13-15; 1 John 2:15-17). It is not sinful to be so tempted (James 1:14-15; Hebrews 4:15). Rather, sin comes when we fulfill these desires unlawfully (1 John 3:4).

### **Spirit**

The word "spirit" (Greek *"pneuma"*) literally means "wind" (Vine). The apostle Paul uses the term 137 times in His letters. In Romans chapter eight alone he employs the term nineteen times. The apostle uses the word to denote the Holy Spirit, one of the three divine Persons Who compose the one, true God (Galatians 5:16, 18, 22, 25). He leads us through the inspired Word in the way that is right and leads to heaven (Romans 8:2, 14; 1 Peter 1:22-23). The Holy Spirit appeals to our spirits, our higher nature, made in the image of God (Romans 8:5-6).

### **Conclusion**

If we live for the flesh, we will die; if we live for the spirit we will live eternally (Galatians 6:7-8). You can travel only one of two roads, and the road you choose will make the eternal difference. Which way will you choose?



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