

# Oct/Nov 2019

Editor, Keith Sharp  
Designer, William Stewart



- 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 VIRTURE 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).

## The Attire of a Harlot

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas

"And there a woman met him, With the attire of a harlot, and a crafty heart" (Proverbs 7:10). "In like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel... which is proper for women professing godliness" (1 Timothy 2:9-10). As Les Maydell drove us to a Bible study near Pretoria, South Africa in 1995, he casually remarked to me, "There's some prostitutes." I looked and saw a group of women standing at a bus stop. Some were dressed in traditional African garb, and some wore miniskirts. Which do you think were the prostitutes?

Prostitutes dress to be sexually alluring. Godly women dress so that their clothing does not present a stumbling block to men (cf. Matthew 18:6). When women wear short skirts, shorts, skin tight clothing, low tops, see through clothing, and typical swim wear, they are making themselves a stumbling block. Their clothing is sexually provocative. Only your husband should see you alluringly dressed. Dress as a woman professing godliness not as a prostitute.

## Question from Sri Lanka about Worshipping Idols

### Question

As Sri Lankan Catholics, most of the times we have adapted to worship to idols when we are praying. It feel us more closer to His son, Jesus Christ and easy to imagine he is in front of us. Why is there no spiritual reality behind this kind of venerate?

### Answer

Thanks for this excellent question. The inspired apostle Paul plainly affirms there is no reality behind idols. "Therefore concerning the eating of things offered to idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one. For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as there are many gods and many lords), yet for us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live" (1 Corinthians 8:4-6).

God is invisible. "Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen" (1 Timothy 1:17). He has no visible form, and there is no visible image to which He may be likened. On this basis the Law of Moses forbade idolatry.

*"Take careful heed to yourselves, for you saw no form when the LORD spoke to you at Horeb out of the midst of the fire, lest you act corruptly and make for yourselves a carved image in the form of any figure: the likeness of male or female, the likeness of any animal that is on the earth or the likeness of any winged bird that flies in the air, the likeness of anything that creeps on the ground or the likeness of any fish that is in the water beneath the earth."*  
(Deuteronomy 4:15-18).

The New Testament also forbids idolatry. "Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen" (1 John 5:21).

We are to pray to the Father through the Son. "In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name" (Matthew 6:9). "And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him" (Colossians 3:17).

The dead know nothing about current events on this earth and no longer have any part in what happens here. Regardless of how good they were, they have no power to help.

*"For the living know that they will die; But the dead know nothing, And they have no more reward, For the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, their hatred, and their envy have now perished; Nevermore will they have a share In anything done under the sun"* (Ecclesiastes 9:5-6).

The key to this passage is the phrase "under the sun," meaning life here and now upon this earth.

The dead have no part in it. Praying to dead saints, including Mary the mother of Jesus, is both useless and without divine approval. Praying to statues of them is forbidden.

We must have the faith to see with the eye of the mind the invisible God.

*"By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible"* (Hebrews 11:24-27).

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## Question from Kenya about Foot Washing

### Question

"Accordance with John 13:1-17, should should christians practice feet washing when taking the Lord's supper?, and was it done later according to John 18:28."

### Answer

Thanks for the good question. John 18:28 isn't about foot washing but the Jewish conviction they would be defiled if they entered the house of a Gentile.

The kingdom of heaven pertains to the spiritual rather than the carnal, i.e. fleshly (John 18:36; Romans 14:17; Ephesians 1:3; Colossians 2:20-23). Thus, it is the spiritual principle of a passage that is binding. Therefore, if the outward act is only a cultural or incidental expression of that principle, the outward act is a liberty, not a requirement. To find what is bound by the Lord upon us in any passage, we need to find what has spiritual significance.

The word “custom,” pertaining to a common practice, occurs nine times in the **King James Version** of the New Testament. Twice it is a translation of the Greek term “*sunetheia*” (Young, 216). This word means “a custom ..., customary usage, ... or force of habit” (Vine, 1:163). It is not used to mean a practice required by law (cf. John 18:39).

It is sinful to bind customs as essential to salvation that God has not so bound (Acts 15:1; Colossians 2:20-23). This raises human customs to the level of divine rite. Ritualism is a return to Judaism (cf. Galatians 5:1-4).

The Master commanded His disciples to wash each other’s feet (John 13:1-17). Some practice foot washing as a religious ceremony, which it never was. It was a customary act of hospitality and humble service at a time when people walked miles in sandals on dusty roads to visit one another (Luke 7:44). To turn foot washing into a ceremony is to rob it of its purpose. The spiritual principle Jesus taught was humble service (Matthew 20:25-28).

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## The Baptist Church and the Bible (2)

Jefferson David Tant | Roswell, Georgia, USA

### Salvation by Grace Only

**Baptist Manual**, page 61 - "IV. **The Way of Salvation** – We believe the Scriptures teach that the salvation of sinners is wholly of grace; through the mediatorial offices of the Son of God..."

**The Bible** -- If you read the previous words about “faith only,” then you can perceive an obvious contradiction. How can salvation be by “faith only” while we are taught that we are saved by “grace only?” If “grace” is all that is required, then it seems that all will be in heaven, and no one will be lost.

Consider 2 Peter 3:9:

“The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.”

If God does not want any to perish, and thus all to be saved, then, according to the **Baptist Manual**, all will be saved, for grace is all it takes. Consider Paul’s writing to Titus in 2:11: “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men.” Did you notice what the passage says, that God’s grace has brought salvation to “all men?” Therefore, if we are saved “wholly of grace,” as the **Baptist Manual** states, then Satan may be a bit lonesome, as no one will be in hell with him.

Now, allow me to illustrate this. There’s a knock on my door one day, and there stands a young man who tells me, “I’m working my way through college, and I’ll mow your lawn for \$50.” I am impressed with his good ethic, and reply, “I’ll tell you what. If you’ll mow my grass, I’ll extend some grace to you and give you \$1,000.” A big smile comes on his face, accompanied with a profound expression of thanks. He then sits on my porch and waits for my gift. Sometime later, when I see him still sitting there, and not one blade of grass has been cut, I ask him why he hasn’t cut the grass. “Oh, I’m sorry. I didn’t know you wanted me to cut the grass. You said the money was a gift, that you were extending grace to me.”

So, I offered him \$1,000 as an expression of my grace. If he cut the grass, he would not be earning \$1,000. My lawn doesn’t have many blades of grass. It’s not worth a \$1,000 payment. If I paid him \$50, then he could rightfully say he “earned” the money, but if I give him the \$1,000, there is a condition—that

he cut the grass. But the \$9,950 is a gift given by grace.

Thus the grace of God is “conditional.” We are not saved “wholly of grace,” as the **Baptist Manual** states.

### **Church Membership**

**Baptist Manual**, page 22 – “It is most likely that in the Apostolic age when there was but ‘one Lord, one faith, and one baptism,’ and no differing denominations existed, the baptism of a convert by that very act constituted him a member of the church...In that sense, ‘baptism was the door into the church.’ Now, it is different; and while the churches are desirous of receiving members, they are wary and cautious that they do not receive unworthy persons. The churches, therefore have candidates come before them, make their statement, give their ‘experience,’ and then their reception is decided by a vote of the members.

The Bible – In reading the statement that “Now, it is different,” a question pops into my mind. “Who said it was different?” My Bible still reads that we are “baptized into Christ” (Galatians 3:27). To be “in Christ” is to be “in his body.”

And what is the body of Christ? It is his church. “He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything” (Colossians 1:18).

God has not given any man or church the authority to change a single word from His revelation. Consider a few passages that deal with adding to, taking from, or changing what God has written. “You shall not add to the word which I am commanding you, nor take away from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you” (Deuteronomy 4:2). “Whatever I command you, you shall be careful to do; you shall not add to nor take away from it” (Deuteronomy 12:32). “Do not add to His words Or He will reprove you, and you will be proved a liar” (Proverbs 30:6). “I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book” (Revelation 22:18-19).

There are other passages that carry the same message. This means that God is serious about not making any changes to what he has revealed. If we do, the Revelation letter says we can expect a severe penalty.

If, as the **Baptist Manual** states, there were no “differing denominations” in the 1st Century, who gave the authority to have “differing denominations” today? By some estimates there are some 42,000 different denominations, all claiming to be “Christian.” It is obvious that they don’t all teach and practice the same thing, or they would all be “one.”

Consider the “ones” in Paul’s letter to the church at Ephesus. “There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all” (Ephesians 4:4-6).

How many “Gods” are there, and how many “hopes” are there, and how many “bodies” are there? In all seven things mentioned, there is only ONE. And what is the “one body?” It is Christ’s church!

“And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all” (Ephesians 12-23). If it is OK to have thousands of churches/bodies, then why not say the Hindus are OK with their thousands of gods?

In the 1st century, there was only one church. The denominations did not come on the scene until hundreds of years later. The Roman Catholic Church crowned its first pope in 606. The Lutheran church was established by Martin Luther in 1530. The Baptist Church was founded by John Smythe in 1611. The

Methodist Church was established by John and Charles Wesley in 1739. We could go on, but I don't want to burden you with 42,000, or with the odd ones such as The Church of Daniel's Band, or The Nudist Christian Church of the Blessed Virgin Jesus.

Do these churches all teach the same doctrine? Obviously not, or they wouldn't be separate denominations. Consider Christ's prayer shortly before he was crucified, as he prayed to the Father. "I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even 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 sent Me" (John 17:20-21). Christ prayed that his followers might be united, even as he and the Father were. When we consider heaven, do we think the Father might be an Episcopalian, and the Son a Presbyterian, and the Holy Spirit a Lutheran? Obviously not. Therefore, what we have on the earth is not what Christ prayed for. What we have is division, because all the denominational creed books teach things that are in contradiction to what the other creeds teach, and to what God's Word, the Bible teaches.

Wouldn't it be better to discard all the denominational creed books and just take the Bible, the "creed book" that God gave us?

But before going to the next point, consider what the **Baptist Manual** says on page 12, Note 3: "(The church) cannot make laws, but only obey and administer those which Christ has given in the New Testament. He is the only Lawmaker in Zion." Question: If Christ is the "only Lawmaker," then who gave the Baptist church the authority to say "Now it is different?" Was it Christ, or Satan?

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## Counting Elders Worthy of Double Honor

Sunday Ayandare | Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria

"Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine. For the Scripture says, 'You shall not muzzle the ox while it treads out the grain,' and, 'The laborer is worthy of his wages...'" (1 Timothy 5:17-18).

The fact that God has placed some responsibilities on the elders of a local church, ipso facto, implies certain obligations in the part of the church. Certainly, one of the obligations of the church to its elders is that of counting them "worthy of double honor" (1 Timothy 5:17).

What does this phrase mean? Must all the elders of a local church be supported? What should be the level of the support of elders? Who should fix the level of this support - the elders themselves, or the members of the local church? These are some of the questions that have been raised in recent times.

### What Does it Mean to Count Elders Worthy of Double Honor?

It is palpably evident from the context of 1 Timothy 5:17-18 that financial support is under consideration. The "for" of Verse 18 connects what follows with the preceding verse. Therefore, our passage of scripture establishes the right of elders, at least, some of them (as will be seen later), to be supported by the local church which they serve.

However, the passage is silent on the specifics to be followed in this matter. In view of this, therefore, the whole matter comes under the realm of judgment and prudence.

### Must All of the Elders of a Local Church Be Supported?

It seems very clear from 1 Timothy 5:17-18 that not all of the elders must be supported financially. The passage says, "especially those who labor in word and teaching." What about the elders who do not labor in word and teaching? Viewed from this perspective, it appears the passage does not demand that all of the elders must be supported financially.

To stretch the matter further, it is our considered view that even those elders that are financially supported

need not be supported equally. We would like to suggest certain parameters for consideration in each case of the elders.

1. What is the extent of his work in shepherding the flock?
2. What is his need of support?
3. Does he have other means of support that is adequate and allows him to do his work as an elder without financial support from the church?
4. What if one elder prefers to provide his own financial support by “making tents” while serving?

These questions and perhaps others become germane when juxtaposed against the qualifications of a man to be appointed an elder.

These qualifications demand, among others, that:

1. He should not be greedy for money (1 Timothy 3:3; Titus 1:7).
2. He should not be covetous (1 Timothy 3:3).
3. He should serve eagerly and not for dishonest gain (1 Peter 5:2).

What we are saying is simply this: In a situation where we have a good man who is not covetous or greedy for money - but is making a comfortable living from his salary or pension or business - he would naturally and gladly do his work as an elder “without charge” (1 Corinthians 9:18).

### **What Should Be the Level of an Elder’s Support?**

There are two major considerations here. One, the financial ability of the local church. That what the elder receives as support for the work he is doing depends largely on the financial ability of the church is hinged on that general principle governing matters of this nature: “according to what one has, not according to what one does not have” (2 Corinthians 8:12b).

The second parameter is: How much does an elder need to be able to function effectively in his work of shepherding? In determining this, there is another principle which every member of the local church must consider. That is, “whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the law and the prophets” (Matthew 7:12).

So, one very good way of arriving at a reasonable, equitable and mutually agreeable level of support for an elder is to put the financial ability of the church side by side with the need of the particular elders(s).

### **Who Should Fix the Support of the Elders?**

The scriptures charge the elders with the responsibility of “taking the oversight” of the local church where they are appointed elders (1 Peter 5:2). They do not take charge of just the building, or only the treasury, or only the work of the church. They are to take oversight of the church. That means everything having to do with the local church. Certainly, this includes making a decision on how much the elders should receive as support for the work they are doing for the church.

While this is true and scriptural, there is however, another aspect that wise and prudent elders should consider. Since this is a matter that affects them personally, prudence dictates the need for them to seek the input of the church in the matter. Surely, they would not like to be seen as men who are out to help themselves “with the funds of the church.”

A good illustration is found in our National Assembly members. At the inception of civilian administration in Nigeria in 1999, many could well recall, about the first preoccupation of our lawmakers was fixing salaries and allowances for themselves which the generality of Nigerians considered to be “jumbo packages.” As a result of this, many have come to regard our law-makers, indeed, all politicians as rapacious, greedy and avaricious lot. This writer would not know whether our politicians have been able to change this perception of the generality of Nigerians.

In view of this, therefore, we would counsel elders to allow the congregation to have an input into the matter and then come to some conclusion. This would be the prudent thing to do. Of course, this involves matters of judgment. But elders, by what they are and the work that they do, are expected to exercise good judgment (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8).

In conclusion, it is apposite to remind our elders to “feed the flock which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly, not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind. Neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away” (1 Peter 5:2-4).

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## The Use Of Our Bodies

Jim Mickells | Lewisburg, Tennessee, USA

Notice what the apostle Paul said to those in Rome about the use of their bodies. “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service” (Romans 12:1). How wonderful it would be if each Christian was determined to use their bodies day by day in service to their Master. Think of how much more work would be done for the Lord if such was the case. May I suggest a few things which we could and should use our bodies for while striving to serve our great God.

**The use of our eyes.** Jesus said, “Do you not say, ‘There are still four months and then comes the harvest’? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest!” (John 4:35). We need to lift our eyes to see a world filled with people who are lost and in need of salvation. Look about you. What do you see? A family member who needs Jesus. What about the friend at work, your neighbor across the street, or the nice young man who put your groceries in the car? May we be willing to open our eyes to see the opportunities presented to us each day to share the glorious gospel message with those who are lost and need the Savior we know.

**The use of our hands.** While in the city of Jerusalem, Jesus tells His disciples, “I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work” (John 9:4). He requires we put our hands to the plow, cultivate the fields, sow the seed, water it and let the Father give the increase (Luke 9:62; 1 Corinthians 3:6). The fields need plowing, seed needs to be sown, and the plants need watering. Seed left in the barn will produce nothing. He is depending upon us to be workers in His kingdom. The wise man said, “Because of laziness the building decays, And through idleness of hands the house leaks” (Ecclesiastes 10:18). Is the Lord’s house, His church, decaying and leaking because of the idleness of the hands of His people?

**The use of our feet.** For the work of the Lord to be done it requires we get out of our recliners, turn off the T.V., leave the computer, silence the iPhone and go into the world with the good news about Jesus Christ. In the epistle to the Romans, the Bible says, “And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!” (Romans 10:15). Certainly, this is one way we can walk circumspectly, showing wisdom and redeem the time given to us by God (Ephesians 5:15-16). There is nothing greater which we can share with the world than the gospel.

**The use of our mind.** Notice what we are told to think upon. “Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy--meditate on these things” (Philippians 4:8). We should spend time each day meditating upon the word of God (Psalm 1:1-2; 1 Timothy 4:13-15), thinking about heaven (Colossians 3:1-2), having pure and holy thoughts. I am afraid there are far too many Christians who permit their minds to think things which are evil, wicked, and vile. Some even allow their hearts to be filled with hate and bitterness, even biting and devouring one another (Galatians 5:15). May our hearts and minds be filled with love, joy and peace, pleasing God and

being a blessing to others (Galatians 5:22).

**The use of our mouth.** James declares the tongue to be a little member, yet it can cause great strife and destruction (James 3:2-12). The apostle Paul says, "Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers" (Ephesians 4:29). How wonderful and pleasant it would be if each Christian would simply seek to encourage and edify one another with their words rather than to hurt or even destroy them with their mouth. Words are a powerful tool for good or for destruction, which are at the disposal of everyone. May we use them to honor God, encourage our brethren, and to teach the lost (Ephesians 6:19).

**The use of our ears.** We warned to take heed what we hear (Mark 4:24) and how we hear (Luke 8:18). There are some of us who are accused of having selective hearing. We hear what we want to hear. I'm sure this true in many instances. But is this not also true when it comes to hearing and heeding the word of God? Many know exactly what the Scriptures teach on a given subject, yet they refuse to do what they know is taught. Everyone needs the attitude of Cornelius, "So I sent to you immediately, and you have done well to come. Now therefore, we are all present before God, to hear all the things commanded you by God" (Acts 10:33). Will you listen?

When life on earth is over, either by death or by the Lord's return, may we be found presenting our bodies as a living sacrifice unto our Creator. It is then we will be assured of hearing these words, "His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord'" (Matthew 25:23).

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## The Lord Knows

Mike Thomas | Kokomo, Indiana, USA

The Bible makes the case that God is aware of everything about us. "And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account" (Hebrews 4:13). This should be a source of comfort to us when we are mistreated or falsely accused, because the "eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good" (Proverbs 15:3). But it should also serve as a stern warning when we are tempted to do evil, since "God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil" (Ecclesiastes 12:14).

In every disagreement, misunderstanding, or falling out between people, God knows who is the true victim and who is acting inappropriately, and will judge each person accordingly. Because of this Paul said:

*"Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord" (Romans 12:17-19).*

Instead of hating those who slander and attack us, we should love their soul enough to pray that they have a change of heart. God is aware of the situation and knows who is being deceitful and malicious, and who is being falsely accused. He knows! And in time He will rectify the situation when He comes in "flaming fire" to "repay with tribulation those who trouble" the innocent (see 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10). That is what we should be most concerned with when people oppress us. Eventually, "their love, their hatred, and their envy" will perish, and "Nevermore will they have a share in anything done under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 9:6). Then, they must go to God to answer for the evil they promoted in this world, which will be a far greater judgment than the "light affliction" they caused us. This is why Jesus did not lose heart when people mistreated Him. When "He was reviled, He did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously" (1 Peter 2:23). He knew His Father could see the truth and that the enemies of righteousness would eventually answer for their wickedness. They may have had the upper hand at the moment, but God always has the final say in judgment. He is "a just judge, and God is angry with the wicked every day. If he does not turn back, He will sharpen His sword"



and condemn the ungodly (Psalm 7:11-12). Jesus knew this and so should we when our spiteful accusers seek to harm us. We should be mindful of the eternal judgment that awaits them if they do not repent.

Another reality about God's omniscience is that He also knows who is hypocritical and trying to live in secret sin. Namely, "The Lord knows those who are His" and "let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity" (2 Timothy 2:19). This is in contrast to those who "profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work" (Titus 1:19). Granted, we all struggle with sin and must constantly rise above it (see James 3:2). However, we should never remain in sin or convince ourselves that the only thing to fear is getting caught. This is pure hypocrisy and worthy of fiery judgment. Living in secret sin is futile because God is already aware of it. He saw the behavior of Israel's enemies and said, "My eyes are on all their ways; they are not hidden from My face, nor is their iniquity hidden from My eyes" (Jeremiah 16:17). So who are we to doubt that and attempt to live in private sins ourselves? Do we honestly think He cannot see that "secret" sip, that "secret" peep, that "secret" relationship, that "secret" thought, or not hear say that "secret" statement? Are we so blind that we forget that we live within view of "the eyes of the Lord, which scan to and fro throughout the whole earth" (Zechariah 4:10)?

The only way to respond to sin is in humility and repentance, by either obeying the gospel (Acts 2:38) or in being restored as an erring Christian (Acts 8:22). Only then are we prepared to meet a God who knows everything about us. He is the only person we will ever know who may boldly say, "'Can anyone hide himself in secret places, so I shall not see him?'" says the Lord; 'Do I not fill heaven and earth?' says the Lord" (Jeremiah 23:24).

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## Watch And Pray

William J. Stewart | Odessa, Ontario, Canada

After sharing the Passover with His disciples (Luke 22:15) in which He instituted the Lord's Supper, a memorial of His impending death at Calvary (Luke 22:19-20), Jesus and His disciples departed the upper room in Jerusalem and made their way to the Mount of Olives. On this short hike from the city to the garden (compare Matthew 26:30; Luke 22:39) Jesus revealed to the eleven, "All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night" (Mark 14:27). This had to be a difficult thing to hear since they had left all to walk with Jesus. In fact, just before saying this, He acknowledged, "...you are those who have continued with Me in My trials" (Luke 22:28). But soon their devotion would fail.

One disciple objected vehemently, "Even if all are made to stumble because of You, I will never be made to stumble" (Matthew 26:33). Sadly, this was not faith; it was pride and arrogance. Not only did Peter contradict Jesus, but he stood against the prophetic word given by God's Spirit. Jesus had cited Zechariah as His proof, "I will strike the Shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered" (Zechariah 13:7).

A short conversation ensued between Jesus and Peter. The Lord unveiled the larger picture for the apostle, saying, "Simon, Simon! Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren" (Luke 22:31-32). Despite this additional information, which included as assurance of his return to faithfulness, the stubborn disciple argued further, "I am ready to go with You, both to prison and to death" (Luke 22:33). Peter could not fathom a scenario in which his devotion to Jesus would fail. Once again, this is pride, not faith. Faith is trust in God; pride is trust in self. Unable to get through to Peter, the Lord bluntly predicted, "...the rooster will not crow this day before you will deny three times that you know Me" (Luke 22:34). And even then, Mark tells us Peter "...spoke more vehemently, 'If I have to die with You, I will not deny You!'" (Mark 14:31). Hearing such passion from their companion, the rest of the disciples began to affirm their resolve to die with Him if needed as well (Matthew 26:35; Mark 14:31).

Coming to Gethsemane, Jesus instructed the disciples, "Sit here while I pray" (Mark 14:32). According to Luke, He also told them to "Pray that you may not enter into temptation" (Luke 22:40), and then He went

about a stone's throw from them and knelt down to pray Himself. The synoptic writers use words like "troubled and deeply distressed," "exceedingly sorrowful," and "agony" to describe the turmoil the Lord experienced in the garden that night. Luke even tells us "...His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground (Luke 22:44). It was an exceptionally stressful situation and time. The instruction "pray that you may not enter into temptation" was not just for the apostles; it was for Himself as well. And so He prayed, "Abba Father, all things are possible for You. Take this cup away from Me..." (Mark 14:36). Humiliating torture culminating with a cruel death were mere hours away. If there was another way, Jesus desired it. He faced the temptation to set the Father's will aside, to find an easier more appealing way. Praying in faith He overcame, concluding, "...not My will, but Yours, be done" (Luke 22:42).

Returning to His disciples, He found them asleep. All slept, but when Jesus spoke, He addressed just one disciple. "Simon, are you sleeping? Could you not watch one hour? Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation." Peter had boasted about his zeal - nothing would cause him to forsake Jesus. Blinded by his arrogance Peter didn't find a need to pray. The Lord cautioned him, "The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Mark 14:37-38). His claim to faithfulness affirmed in the comfort of friends would be put to the test when surrounded by harshness of enemies.

Twice more Jesus went away to pray. His flesh would not defeat His spirit, for He knew the value of prayer in the face of temptation. Jesus did not insolently approach the trials of that night - He humbly and prayerfully brought Himself into subjection to the Father's will. And doing so, He was victorious.

Twice more Jesus returned to find the disciples, Peter included, sleeping. Before morning dawned, Peter would discover the willingness of his spirit was not greater than the weakness of his flesh. After a momentary but misguided attempt to defend the Lord with the sword, Peter followed his Master at a distance. While Jesus stood in the bitter cold being ridiculed and beaten by the religious leaders, the once bold apostle stood afar, warming himself at a fire. When recognized as a follower of Jesus, he denied it, even cursing and swearing that it was not true. And then a rooster crowed, "...The Lord turned and looked at Peter..." who "...went out and wept bitterly" (Luke 22:61,62).

Friend, may we learn from Peter's failure.

1. Do not contradict God. The Lord knows what is and what should be. Not only does He know the truth, He is the truth (John 14:6).
2. Understand the value of prayer. Prayer is communication with the God whom we serve. In times of trial, it is an essential appeal for His presence and help.
3. Always be aware of the spiritual battle within. Hear the apostle Paul: "...the flesh lusts against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another..." (Galatians 5:17).

Watch and pray always!

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## Pondering Prophecy

Sean P. Cavender | Bald Knob, Arkansas, USA

One of the strongest arguments for belief in the Scriptures is the fulfillment of prophecies. Prophecies were made centuries before their fulfillment. Consider some of the obvious prophecies about Jesus Christ: His birth (Isaiah 7:14; Micah 5:2), His death (Isaiah 53), and His resurrection (Psalm 16:8-11). These prophecies alone were not mere conjecture – these prophecies were made at least 700 years before the birth of Christ; some prophecies were made closer to 1,000 years before His birth. Prophecy is a means that the Lord uses to convince people to believe in Him.

A prophet was one who was a proclaimer, or spokesman for God. We see how the term was used in Scripture. God described Aaron, the brother of Moses, as a prophet (Exodus 7:1). Aaron would be the one to speak for Moses. Moses was given the words from God, then Moses would tell Aaron what to say. Finally, Aaron would proclaim that message (Exodus 4:15-16). These verses illustrate exactly how

prophets worked – they were given a message and they would proclaim that message to the intended audience.

Prophecy is not always predictive in nature. We tend to think that prophecy is always predicting future events. While that is sometimes part of the work of the prophets, it is not the majority of their work. In all actuality, a majority of the time, prophets would describe the current spiritual conditions of peoples and nations, warning them of God's wrath, and exhorting them to repent while reminding them that God was slow to anger, desiring for all to come to repentance. See Jonah 3:10 and Joel 2:13 for examples. When God did give His prophets a message involving future events, it was based upon God's foreknowledge. Foreknowledge is defined as "to know in advance." It comes from the Greek word "*proginosko*," which is where we get the English word "*prognosis*." Foreknowledge is simply advanced knowledge. It is not a foreordination or predestination of something that must come to pass by the decree of God. Foreknowledge is based upon what God has chosen to know.

Foreknowledge is an attribute of Deity. It is something that we do not possess. I cannot tell you who will win the World Series, the Super Bowl, or on much more serious matters when the Lord will return.

Foreknowledge is a power that uniquely belongs to the Almighty God. When we understand that foreknowledge belongs to God, then that also tells us the source and nature of prophecy. Prophecy comes from the mind of God. Prophecy is the word of the Lord. That is how many of the prophets introduced their ideas. For one of many examples, "Moreover the word of the Lord came unto me, saying,..." (Ezekiel 17:11). The apostle Peter explains that prophecy came to men by inspiration of God, moved by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:21). The words of prophecy did not originate from men, but from God (2 Peter 1:20). Thus, people expected the words of prophets to come to pass. The prophecy ought to have been the message of God. God's words are certain. If a man's prophecy did not come to pass then he was to be identified as a false prophet (Deuteronomy 18:20-22; 1 John 4:1).

Pondering the prophecies of God can be challenging, but incredibly beneficial to us. We see the mind of God when we study the prophets. We understand the nature of God. We gain a better concept of morality. We see how we are to approach God in worship. By studying prophecy we grow stronger and we should heed the warnings that are contained in the prophecies of Scripture.

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## Visit Orphans and Widows

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

Years ago, when we moved to a new town, my wife introduced herself to a neighbor. The neighbor coldly stated, "Oh, you're those folks who don't believe in taking care of orphans." We must be doing something right if folks so malign us! "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake" (Matthew 5:11).

The essence of the religion of Christ is righteous living and good works rather than religious ceremony. James states:

*"If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless. Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world"* (James 1:26-27).

How shall we care for widows and orphans?

### Past Ages

God has always required that His people care for the poor and helpless. The righteous conduct of the patriarch Job included caring for widows and orphans (Job 31:16-22). The Lord taught Israel to be compassionate toward those who were helpless and easily oppressed (Deuteronomy 10:18; 14:28-29; 24:19).

## Law of Christ

We also must be compassionate toward them. The help of our needy brethren in Christ will be a basis of the final judgment (Matthew 25:31-46).

We don't do this by sending a little money to a distant institution. M.R. Vincent in his **Word Studies in the New Testament** remarks on the word "visit" in James 1:27:

*"James strikes a downright blow here at ministry by proxy, or by mere gifts of money. Pure and undefiled religion demands personal contact with the world's sorrow: to visit the afflicted, and to visit them in their affliction"* (**Vincent's Word Studies**. 1:736)

We also must honor our parents by caring for them when they are too aged and infirm to care for themselves (Exodus 20:12; Matthew 15:1-9; Ephesians 6:2-3).

## How to Do It

But the Lord doesn't just command care for the needy. He gives us guidelines how to accomplish it.

Each of us individually should care for the needy, including parents, widows, and orphans, who are kin to us. "But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever" (1 Timothy 5:8, cf. Verse 4). My "own" includes more than those of my household. They encompass my own parents, my brother's children, and others to whom I am close kin, as exemplified in the Old Testament "near of kin" redeemer (cf. Leviticus 25:47-49).

In contrast, the local church is only to permanently care for those who qualify as "really widows" (1 Timothy 5:3-10). The church should offer emergency, temporary help to its own needy members (Acts 2:44-45; 4:32-35; 6:1-4). Congregations may assist directly other congregations which are unable to care for their own needy (Acts 11:27-30; Romans 15:25-26; 1 Corinthians 16:1-4; 2 Corinthians chapters 8 - 9).

If a Christian is caring for widows or orphans that are his kin, and he is unable to fulfill this responsibility, then he is needy, and the local church where he is a member should assist him (Acts 2:44-45; 4:32-35). If this becomes too great a burden for one congregation, other congregations should help this needy church (passages previously cited).

The local church is the specific organization for the Lord's people to do His kingdom work (1 Corinthians 1:2). In His divine wisdom He has given the church everything it needs to discharge its own work (Ephesians 3:8-12). He has given elders to oversee the church (1 Peter 5:1-4), deacons to administer the benevolence of the church (Acts 6:1-6), and members to provide the funds (1 Corinthians 16:1-4). In the apostolic age the local church discharged its own benevolent work without building or contributing to institutions begun by men (Acts 6:1-6). We must do the same today.

## Institutionalism

Most brethren today shift their responsibilities. Rather than doing their own work of benevolence, they want the churches to do it for them. Then, rather than allowing the church to do the work, they send off a contribution to a distant institution, where orphans are institutionalized without the love of real parents.

## Conclusion

Christians should personally "visit" orphans and widows rather than delegating them to an institution. For years David and Flora Tant took in pregnant, single girls and assisted Christians in adopting children. If you want to learn more about adoption, google "Sacred Selections." To date the Sacramento, California couple who do this work have placed 314 children with adoptive families.

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## The Ages

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

*“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).*

Have you built an ark yet? God plainly commanded, “Make yourself an ark of gopherwood” (Genesis 6:14-16). That command was to Noah, you say, and not for us.

True. But the command, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins” was to Jews 2000 years ago. Why must we obey it?

This, above all else, pertains to the concept of “the ages.” “From the beginning of the ages” God purposed the salvation of all who would come to Him by obedient faith in Christ. The “principalities and powers in the heavenly places” see in the church, God’s saved people in Christ, the manifestation of the Lord’s many faceted wisdom in fulfillment of His eternal purpose (text). What are “the ages”?

### **Innocence**

When the Lord God created the man and woman and placed them in the paradise, they were in a state of innocence. They did not know “good and evil,” and they had no sin. The Lord spoke directly to them and commanded, “Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” (Genesis 2:16-17). They disobeyed and ate of the forbidden fruit, and, as sin entered the world, they lost their innocence and direct fellowship with God. They died spiritually that very day. They were driven from the garden and lost access to the tree of life (Genesis chapter three).

This first age was that of innocence, God spoke to them directly, and, because of their innocence, they enjoyed direct fellowship with God.

### **Fathers**

After sin entered, the knowledge and will of God were passed down by tradition from the fathers to their families. It was the duty of the father to teach his family the will of God and to command them to obey it (Genesis 18:15-17). Some fathers, such as Abraham, were prophets, to whom God spoke directly (Genesis 20:1-7), but it has always been the duty of every father to teach his family the will of God (Deuteronomy 6:6-7; Ephesians 6:4). The failure to pass on the knowledge of God by tradition from generation to generation was the ruin of the Gentiles (1 Peter 1:17-19).

This was the age of the Fathers, who were to teach their families about God and command them to obey His will. Thus, it was a family religion.

For Israel, this age lasted until the Lord gave them His law through Moses from Mt. Sinai. For the Gentiles, non Jews, it lasted until Christ, for they, unlike Israel received no special revelation from God (Acts 17:29-31).

### **Moses**

But to one nation God gave a special revelation. The Lord God made a covenant, contract, through Moses with Israel, the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, when He revealed His law to them from Mt. Sinai (Deuteronomy 5:1-3). The purpose of the law was to prepare Israel for the coming of Christ (Galatians 3:23-25), so that through them the saving gospel, the good news of salvation in Christ, might go to the

whole world. Thus, since the law had fulfilled its purpose, when Christ died on the cross, the law was removed (Colossians 2:13-17).

Moses was the spokesman of God to Israel, so this was a national religion.

### **Christ**

Now God speaks through His Son (Hebrews 1:1-2). Because His death removes the guilt of sin, thus reconciling men to God, Jesus was made the mediator of a new covenant (Hebrews 9:13-15). His message is universal, for all people everywhere (Mark 16:15). This is the last age (1 Corinthians 10:11), and it will last until the end of time (1 Corinthians 15:22-26).

Today Jesus Christ the Son of God is the spokesman for God to the whole world. Therefore, the religion of Christ is universal.

### **Conclusion**

Since the first century, in fulfillment of divine warning, men have arisen claiming to receive new revelations through angels. Muhammed claimed that angels revealed "surahs" to him in a cave, from which came the Qu'ran. Joseph Smith asserted an angel showed him golden plates on the hill Cummorah, near Palmyra, New York, from which he translated the Book of Mormon. Even if these men spoke truthfully, the angels who supposedly came to them were accursed. We must not receive any other gospel than that which came through Christ (Galatians 1:6-9).

The Lord God commands, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!" (Matthew 17:5)



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