

# March 2020

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

PHILIPPIANS  
4:8

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

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

## "We Are Going Down the Valley One by One

Patrick Farish

July 20, 1936 - March 17, 2020

My dear friend Pat Farish, long time gospel preacher, passed away after a lengthy decline March 17th at the age of 83. Pat was a regular writer in "Meditate On These Things."

His widow, Frances, is also in ill health and living in their home in Waxahachie, TX. You can write her at 1304 Shawnee Road, Waxahachie, TX 75165. The phone number is (972) 576-8222.

It was said years ago of my old friend Elmer Moore, Jr., "He didn't sell for what he was worth." The same was true of Pat. He didn't have a political or mean bone in his body, and he preached and taught the truth, all the truth, whether it was popular or not. It was my privilege to count Pat as a friend for 64 years!

## Ezekiel Akinyemi

Ezekiel Akinyemi of Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria, passed away February 25th. He has been a friend of mine since 1991, when he visited and ate in my home in Grenada, Mississippi and became the first black man and first African to preach in the pulpit of the Van Dorn Street Church of Christ. I have since eaten in his home in Ibadan repeatedly and preached in the pulpit of the Challenge Road Church of Christ repeatedly. He has written material for "Meditate on These Things." He was in charge of the preacher training school

which is a part of the work of the Challenge Road Church of Christ and not a separate, human organization. This is a good example of the right way to train young men to serve the Lord and the church, letting the local church, the organization God-ordained, do the Lord's work of training for service (Ephesians 4:11-16). He was a fearless defender of the faith against the onslaught of liberalism advocated by World Bible School and Church of Christ - Nigeria. His son Afolabi, a faithful gospel preacher in Lagos, will have his life story in a future issue of "Meditate on These Things."

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## Side Effects of Covid-19

Scott Futrell | Pampa, Texas, USA

It is with concern that I take the liberty to write on the side effects of Covid-19. I am not writing as a physician discussing the physical ailments of this pandemic virus; but rather, I write on behalf of the Great Physician regarding the spiritual side effects of this coronavirus. The last couple of weeks have been eye opening to the confusion that frankly I would have failed to anticipate concerning the worship of the saints. Please consider the following in light of the scriptures as we look into the New Testament for guidance.

First, I want to set forth that I am not writing because local congregations of the saints have cancelled the Lord's day assembly across our great nation and around the globe. For many, the decision to cancel was parallel to weather events or other extenuating circumstances that have caused similar decisions to be made hitherto. For sure, there are times of unforeseen circumstances that mandate the local church to forego assembling till the circumstance resolves. Moreover, saints have made similar decisions since the church began both individually and congregationally in times of pandemic, war, weather, illness, and other severe extenuating circumstances that deemed it necessary to refrain assembling as a local body.

Second, I want to commend those who have made intentional plans to study God's word or to offer some semblance of worship and devotion as a family or small group. Additionally, I understand many are watching streaming videos or listening to sermons, which I would encourage on an ongoing basis and on other days of the week! It is my prayer that continued study, devotions, and edifying interactions continue to take place long after we have conquered this virus. Indeed, it is refreshing and edifying to know that saints throughout the world are offering up prayers and songs and are spending time in study. May God bless you abundantly.

The issue at hand and area of concern is isolated to the Lord's supper observance. As suggested above in paragraph one, I would have metaphorically "lost a bet" regarding the variant practices and actions that I understand are being observed in private settings. In conjunction, I am equally in awe of the arguments and scriptures wrested in order to justify an action which I would have never anticipated transpiring to begin with. I will begin with the scriptures and at the end of this article show you the "arguments" and "proof" given by the opposition. I beg of you to study the issue at hand...

First, know this! I am not making the argument we have always done it this way! I am arguing we have been doing it correctly for 2000 years based solely upon the scriptures which we have followed diligently up until this time. Dear reader, ask yourself the following questions and consider doing it out loud if you have opportunity. Why have we assembled together as a local church for the breaking of bread over the eons of time? Why do we plan ahead and visit other local churches **intentionally** while traveling on business or vacation as we traverse the nation? Why have we diligently taught the new convert and the saints the necessity of assembling together on the first day of the week to break bread? Why have we insisted it was the local church that came together, many under the leadership of qualified elders, upon the first day of the week to break bread? Here is why! Four times in 1 Corinthians 11 the apostle Paul refers to a "coming together". Notice, verse 17 "...since you come together" verse 18 "... when you come together as a church" verse 20 "...when you come together in one place" verse 33 "when you come together to eat, wait for one another." Paul taught, "Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread" (Acts 20:7). Generally, we never mention verse 8 but consider, "There were many lamps in the upper room where they were gathered together." Who are the "they" that gathered together? Who were the "disciples"

that gathered? I have always preached it was the local church assembling at Troas where brother Eutychus fell out of a window. If it was not the local church assembling, pray tell me why the apostle Paul would violate his Holy Spirit [revelation] teaching written to the Corinthians. Moreover, enlighten me why he didn't break bread on the ship instead of tarrying seven days (Acts 20:6). [Which evangelist among us has not used that argument that he tarried to assemble?] These are the passages we have used for 2000 years to sustain the necessity and practice of the local church to come together to break bread upon the first day of the week. Historically, and by Divine edict, it is my understanding the local church has practiced the coming together on the Lord's day to break bread by the authority of God since the inception of the church. We must do all in word and deed by the authority of Christ (Colossians 3:17). In the past, many have taught that we do not have authority to take the Lord's supper to an individual at the hospital, a nursing home, or to a private dwelling for a sick individual that could not assemble at the gathering of the saints, the local church. In the main, saints didn't ask such and would not have participated had someone attempted such an action and for the reasons given above! I ask why, given the scriptural New Testament practice we have sustained by God's directive, do we now abandon ship and suggest varying alternatives? I cannot answer that question but ask you to consider an answer.

For those concerned, here are the following rationales given for the "new side effects of Coronavirus." If the following makes scriptural sense to you then by all means follow your studies realizing you will give an account to God for your actions, as I most assuredly will as well. As for me? In accordance with 1 Corinthians 11, I will assemble and examine myself (28), and break bread when the local church gathers together (17), as the church (18), in one place (20), and tarry one for another (33), in the assembly where we are gathered for the communion of Lord. Note: This article is **not** about cancelling a service, or about families of the local church studying together, singing together, or praying together, or watching a streaming sermon or listening to one on Sunday or **any other day of the week**.

#### **Arguments advanced:**

**#1 The present distress.** Recently, I was told, we are "authorized" to do things "unauthorized" (only temporarily) as long as it is during a present distress and we vow to resume "all things according to the pattern" after the distress ends. [No! It was not worded that way, but that is/was the intent (the conclusion) of the argument] The example of Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians was the subject discussed. In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul suggests that it was better not to marry during the distress (27). Further, he stated there was no sin if you marry (28). Both alternatives were given, and no sin was committed in the decision made either way. For a parallel to be made, one would have to admit and teach we can break bread alone, or with family, or in small segmented groups, dividing the local church, in isolation of the general Lord's day gathering of the saints. Today, you can marry or not marry without sin. Can we continue the current, coronavirus side effect, alternative practice offered regarding the Lord's supper without committing sin? Inquiring minds want to know! If it's authorized it is authorized for all time as **truth applies everywhere to everyone for every when!** However, I have been informed that you can, "pluck heads of grain" and "eat showbread" (Mark 2:23-28). Also, don't forget when the "ox is in the ditch" (Luke 14:5). Is this the principle we will hang our hat on to withstand New Testament teachings? We live and breathe under the New Covenant! Take the following two scriptures for a test ride.

*"Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead" (Acts 17:30-31).*

Also consider Second John verse 9 "Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son". If there is an alternative to First Corinthians eleven, it must be proved and authorized by scripture in order for sin not to occur. Assumptions and speculation get us nowhere and are unprofitable for doctrine.

**#2 Conscience.** Conscience is a function of authorized liberties or matters indifferent to God (Romans 14). Choose your term. Conscience is not, nor ever shall it be, a benchmark concerning the "doctrine of Christ."

While I agree we have free-will, to sin or not to sin, it does not override the obedience to the Lord's will (Matthew 7:21-23). Can we practice "lawlessness" as long as our conscience is not defiled? So, if it violates your conscience to be baptized, or repent of homosexuality, or drunkenness, or lying you have liberty to refrain from repentance? Who teaches that? For sure, some will be lost due to sin that failed to violate their conscience. I'm suggesting we align our conscience to the doctrinal practices of the New Testament regarding the breaking of bread and all of the commands of God. Many have it backward. I'm praying your conscience will be trained to be violated when you fail to do God's will. Having a clean conscience in disobedience and lawlessness to God's will is not piety! In short, your conscience deals with your personal will regarding matters not sinful to begin with. You have liberty. Your conscience will not be considered before God regarding your disobedience to His Divine Will!

**#3 The Ethiopian Eunuch.** I have preached since 1984 but must admit I have learned more about the Ethiopian Eunuch in the past couple of weeks than in the whole of my studies (Sarcasm intended). I am truly amazed at what one can imagine from so few verses regarding our brother in Christ. I was not aware he went home and assembled alone and broke bread by himself till he could teach others and establish a congregation of God's people. I am still unaware! I can play the "silence of the scripture game as well." I could suggest the possibility of an existent local church already established by one of the other Apostles of which he joined himself. Paul stated in Colossians 1:6 that the Gospel, "which has come to you, as it has also in all the world, and is bringing forth fruit...". And, verse 23 regarding the faith, "which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister". **I am not making that argument** because the Scriptures are **silent** as to what our brother did! Similarly, silence is noted on the breaking of bread alone theory. I know he was reading from the Old Testament, namely, Isaiah 53. Phillip was not an Apostle, thus, could not lay hands on him (Acts 8:18). Did Phillip teach him on the spot, "all things that pertain to life and godliness" (2 Peter 1:3)? In the past, we have heard that it "doesn't say not to use instrumental music," or it doesn't say, "he that believeth not and is not baptized...". Christians have taught for years how to establish Divine Authority and have taught that making an argument from the silence of the Scriptures is not authorized and does not constitute permissive action! Are we wrong now? Is this but a side effect of this virus?

**#4 Redefining of terms.** This is actually taking hold with some. This too, is a dangerous side effect of the coronavirus. We are redefining local church assemblies by redefining the terms "**together**" and "**one place**." While I applaud the advancements in technology, I simultaneously disdain the concept of virtual assembling. I suppose we will tell the Lord we were virtually obedient by virtual assembling. The following **is not** a joke and I would never joke over matters of such serious consequences! It was posted recently by a "Family" that they assembled with the saints in a certain city in the State of Florida. (I am being benevolent and kind by being as anonymous as I can without naming names and specific places...respect this...but know I am not making this up at all). The clincher is that this family does not live in that area... they do not even live in the State of Florida! **True!** Moreover, they partook of the Lord's supper in the privacy of their home, in another city, in another State, with the saints of a local church in Florida that also were divided in their respective homes as the service was streamed. I am not worried or calling out a caution regarding a new standard many tell me are temporary. Let me be clear, I am calling into question the scriptural authorization for such capricious actions to begin with! If such is authorized by God and is **not sinful**, then there is no worry regarding such practices long after the virus ban is lifted. Elders, what flock do you oversee (Acts 20:28)? Are you equipped to feed, lead, guide, oversee, and discipline saints that want to become members a few States away? Or, will we just suggest they are not members, but were merely visiting and breaking bread as virtual visitors...a few States away? Brethren, we are doomed! It is one thing to watch a video or listen to a lesson, but it is another thing to claim you have assembled and were together in one place, technology notwithstanding! Recently, a denominational lady told me she was a member of a televised church in Dallas which is greater than 300 miles from where she lives. I wonder if they even know she is a member? Maybe they do if she sends them a check. (May I get by with an LOL here?) I believe God has a reason and rationale for commanding us to assemble together, as a church, in one place, upon the first day of the week to break bread. Elders, preachers, deacons, and saints, please... jump in the fight and help me teach against such folly. This is nothing new as

denominations have done this for years. Joel Osteen is a master at it! This is new for the church of the Lord and it is not the Biblical pattern regarding the organization, worship, and work of the local church.

**#5 House churches.** It was suggested to me, “Can a church meet in a private home”? Further, it was stated, “Many local churches met house to house in scriptures.” I responded, yes you can meet in a home, or a building, or any location suitable whether rented, free, borrowed, or purchased as the local church. That doesn’t touch the issue at all. When a single local church divides its members in segmented locations are you suggesting the intention is to disband and begin a new congregation of the Lord’s church in order to do God’s work with local worship, a collection (a treasury), and to comply with Paul in Acts 14:23, “ So when they had appointed elders in every church...”? If so, God speed with that! That’s not the intent, and many know that, and honesty demands we admit it. I am truly saddened that the attitude is to drop by and grab the elements (many times provided by elders and local churches) and tell the flock...just go home and do it! The caveat is that they will expect you back when this is over to, “Stand in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where the good way is, and walk in it; Then you will find rest for your souls” (Jeremiah 6:16). Hopefully, we will not see the results of the last words of that verse, “But they said, ‘We will not walk in it.’” Further, along this line, many have quoted Matthew 18:20, “For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.” First, many ignore the context so I suggest you read the previous verses. However, if a principle is to be drawn make sure you understand the “in my name” meaning. It means by the authority of Christ. Two or three can gather together to do a great many things and often do. I simply ask for a thus saith the Lord...a Book, Chapter, and verse for the practice of segmenting and partaking the Lord’s supper in violation of Paul’s Divine instruction. He put a halt on Corinth’s folly. What about us?

In conclusion, I want you to know there are other arguments equally untenable that have been advanced. I could deal with them as well, but these are written for a brief platform for future study. I implore you to not make the mistake of the Corinthian brethren. They added to and took away from the word (Revelation 22:18-19). They added or exchanged the elements of a common meal to the Lord’s supper and Paul told them

*“What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I do not praise you”* (1 Corinthians 11:22).

Paul further stated, “But if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home” (34). Moreover, they took away from the Word in failing to assemble together as factions and division existed (18-19). Paul, corrected this as well and told them to “gather together,” “as the church,” “into one place,” and “tarry one for another” (17, 18, 20, 33). As for the Covid-19 side effects? I ask, “By what authority are You doing these things? And who gave You this authority to do these things?” (Mark 11:28)? Think on these things.

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## **Am I Sinning By Not Assembling on Sunday?**

Joshua Welch | Columbus, Ohio, USA

I wanted to take a moment to address a question that's clearly been weighing heavily on the conscience of some Christians with good hearts: “Am I sinning by not assembling this Sunday due to COVID-19 precautions?” After all, the Bible says we should “not forsake the assembling of ourselves” and we know Christians assembled to partake of the Lord’s Supper and to contribute to the Lord’s work on the “first day of the week” (Hebrews 10:24-25; Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:1-2).

Let’s start with an illustration: when the police cars’ lights turn on and the officer begins driving well over the speed limit to get to the scene of a crime or an accident, do you think they are breaking the law? When the fire truck’s lights flash and they run a red light so they can hurriedly get to the fire do you think they are breaking the law? Well, of course not. Why not? Because our civil law allows these first responders to run red lights and exceed ordinary speed limits when it is for a higher purpose--the imminent and immediate safety of those in danger.

Likewise, when the leaders of a local church suspend or forego services when it affects the imminent and immediate livelihood of its members they are not breaking any law at all. They are obeying a higher law. We all, in submission to the local church's decisions, are respecting a higher law. You see, it is possible for two laws to conflict. We actually see it quite regularly. A mother is called to worship on the first day of the week but God also calls her to care for her sick and contagious child. She misses worship on Sunday to care for her sick child. She has not broken any law. She has obeyed God's 2nd great commandment to love and care for her child as a mother. A heart surgeon or nurse is called to worship on the first day of the week. The hospital where he works has just had a patient arrive who requires immediate surgery or they will die. The surgeon/nurse throws on their scrubs and goes immediately to the operating room to save a patient's life. They have not broken any law. They have obeyed God's law of mercy. The local governing authorities tell all non-essential citizens to stay home in the midst of a catastrophic weather event (hurricane, tornado, blizzard, ice storm). So, people stay home from work or church so emergency personnel can do their job and so we do not unnecessarily put our lives at risk. Does God want you to go to work normally? Yes. Does God want you to attend the services of the local church normally? Yes. But, God also wants us safe and to respect the governing authorities He put in place for our good and safety (Romans 13:1-6; 1 Peter 2:13-17). You have not broken any law. You've obeyed a higher law.

Thus, we need not be riddled with guilt for not being able to assemble this week when it is for the good and safety of others. Jesus quoted Hosea saying, "I desire mercy and not sacrifice" when justifying his disciples' right to eat wheat on the Sabbath day for their sustenance. Jesus referred to the fact even the "priests" were working on the Sabbath when they attended their temple duties (Matthew 12:5). The laws requiring the priests to attend to the temple conflicted with the Sabbath laws. So, they were granted an exception to work. Likewise, Jesus would later argue, "What man is there among you who has one sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not lay hold of it and lift it out? Of how much more value then is a man than a sheep? Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath" (Matthew 12:11-12). Jesus does not refer to the man who is getting his sheep out of the pit as a law-breaker. He clearly calls his deed "lawful." Jesus does not say His disciples are guilty for eating on the Sabbath as they walked through a field. He calls them "guiltless" (Matthew 12:7). We need to wisely apply these principles of Jesus to our situations when "conflicting laws" exist.

Thus, we need not feel guilty when war, weather events or contagion keeps us from our regular assemblies. Out of love, mercy and kindness we are doing what is perfectly lawful.

Now, when that cop speeds down the highway with no lights on just because he wants to get somewhere quickly for personal reasons and thinks he's above the law, that's when we've got a problem...you know what I'm saying?

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## Questions from Nigeria

### Question One

Is it right for a local church to organize health talk by inviting a medical doctor (also a member) to speak on a prevailing disease in the environment after worship service and also carry out medical screening?

### Answer

The church is a spiritual relationship (Ephesians 1:3, 22-23), and its work is spiritual (Romans 14:17). It is "the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:14-15), but the truth it upholds is the Word of God (John 17:17). Individual Christians may do things the local church is not authorized to do (1 Timothy 5:16). Every good work is authorized in the Scriptures (2 Timothy 3:16-17), and we must not act without authority from Christ (Colossians 3:17; 2 Timothy 1:13; 2 John 9). Community health education is a legitimate work for individual Christians but not the local church (cf. Luke 10:30-37). If a member or members, acting apart from the local church, want to rent a hall for this purpose, that would be good. The church should not be involved.

### **Question Two**

Is it scriptural for a local church to have a leadership (e.g., youth president, youth secretary, youth treasurer, etc) and a treasury?

#### **Answer**

The only officers the local church is authorized to have are elders and deacons (Philippians 1:1). The church may have fellowship with a preacher or preachers (Philippians 4:15-16; 2 Corinthians 11:8; 1 Corinthians 9:14), but the preacher is not an officer in the local church as the elders and deacons are. A preacher is a preacher wherever he goes, not just in the local church with which he regularly works.

The local church is an organization in that it has oversight (1 Timothy 5:17), pooled resources (Acts 4:34-35), and a work common to all its members (1 Timothy 5:16). It is the only organization the Lord has authorized for His church (1 Corinthians 1:2). No organization larger than, smaller than, or other than the local church may be attached to it. If the young people of the church have leadership and a treasury, it is implied they are doing an organized work common to the young people of the church. This is a violation of the divinely authorized plan for the church and is condemned (Colossians 3:17; 2 Timothy 1:13; 2 John 9).

### **Question Three**

Is it right for the mother of a new born baby to present her baby before the congregation for prayer by the preacher?

#### **Answer**

If you are describing a “dedication” ceremony, this is a step toward infant baptism, and is a dangerous precedent that will lead to a falling away (Colossians 2:8). It is certainly right to seek the prayers of godly men during important milestones of life, such as the birth of a child, but the best ones to seek are the elders of the church (James 5:13-16).

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## **Question from Kenya about Permission to Eat Human Meat**

### **Question**

Concerning food written by Paul to Timothy in 1st Timothy 4:1-6: Is it true that we are allowed as believers to eat everything in the world? If so, does it include human meat?

#### **Answer**

Generally speaking, we may eat any kind of meat, even that declared unclean under the Old Testament (Leviticus chapter 11; Deuteronomy 14:1-21). Exceptions are we cannot eat blood or meat with the blood still in it (Acts 15:28-29), and we cannot eat human meat (cannibalism), since that involves murder (Romans 13:8-10).

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## **The History of the Institutional Controversy (Pt 1)**

Jefferson David Tant | Roswell, Georgia, USA

Those who have a general knowledge of churches of Christ today are aware of the fact that a division took place during the last half of the 20th Century. This division took place over doctrinal issues concerning the organization, work and mission of the Lord's church.

In many respects, this division reflected many of the same issues that caused division during the latter half of the 19th Century which resulted in two distinct groups—the Christian Church and churches of Christ. In the ensuing years, the Christian Church itself has suffered a division, with the more liberal element identified as the Disciples of Christ, and the more conservative part identified as the Independent Christian Church. In a convention of the Disciples group some years ago, they acknowledged, “We are a denomination, and we might as well admit it, and get on with the business of being a denomination.” That

is not an exact quote, but expresses what was said, as it was reported to me.

Some may wonder why it takes 50 years for a division to become complete. There are some issues that brethren must take time to study. There are ties of friendship and brotherhood that are slow to be broken. My father, Yater Tant (1908-1997), went to school with many preachers that ended up on the other side, and they often worked together in meetings in their younger years. I knew these men, as they were in my parents' home, and I in theirs. But now my own children have no association with these men, thus in the third generation the lines of division are pretty well drawn.

Sadly, bitterness and wild charges often accompany division. Conservative brethren were oft called "orphan-haters" and "anti-cooperation", and were thus labeled "antis." This is the same appellation that was given to those who were opposed to instrumental music and missionary societies in the 19th Century. "While there are a few places where "anti-ism" is still a real threat to the true faith, it is generally of no consequence. Isolated little groups of 'antis' still meet; but they are withering away and are having no appreciable effect on the brotherhood at large." This speaker went on to say that this "false doctrine" was "antagonistic to clear Bible teaching," and the "typical 'anti' usually cut his own throat by his arrogant and malicious acts and statements" and was "quick to draw the line of fellowship and exclude himself from the larger portion of our brotherhood" (Rubel Shelley, **Freed-Hardeman Lectures**, 1970).

Nine years later Ira North, editor of the **Gospel Advocate** (an influential journal among churches of Christ) estimated that the "antis" composed 5% of the churches, and pleaded with them to "come back home...to the old paths...and preach again in the great churches," claiming that the "anti doctrine cannot build churches, inspire missionaries, and encourage pure and undefiled religion." One college professor argued that those who believe Christians could "visit the fatherless and widows by taking them in your home" have "taken the narrow, crooked pig-path of radicalism." (That sounds like a pretty "radical" statement!)

In this treatise, we want to take a look at the past and see where we are today. I acknowledge the research of Homer Hailey, Steve Wolfgang, Ed Harrell and others, which has been of great help in preparing this material. In fact, a good bit of the first part of this was taken from a tract Wolfgang wrote several years ago.

### **The Bible and Apostasy**

The Old Testament was full of apostasy. Prophecies concerning this were made even before Israel entered the Promised Land.

*"Now therefore write ye this song for you, and teach thou it the children of Israel: put it in their mouths, that this song may be a witness for me against the children of Israel. For when I shall have brought them into the land which I sware unto their fathers, flowing with milk and honey, and they shall have eaten and filled themselves, and waxed fat; then will they turn unto other gods, and serve them, and despise me, and break my covenant. And it shall come to pass, when many evils and troubles are come upon them, that this song shall testify before them as a witness; for it shall not be forgotten out of the mouths of their seed: for I know their imagination which they frame this day, before I have brought them into the land which I sware"* (Deuteronomy 31:19-21).

The people prospered, grew fat and fell away. Time and again we have the story repeated—a period of faithful service, apostasy, oppression, repentance, restoration, etc. But finally, God's patience ran out, and Israel was no more.

New Testament history presents a similar picture, with warnings about apostasy. Paul charged the Ephesian elders:

*"Take heed unto yourselves, and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit hath made you bishops, to feed the church of the Lord which he purchased with his own blood. I know that after my departing grievous wolves shall enter in among you, not sparing the flock;*



*and from among your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them” (Acts 20:28-30).*

Paul also warned Timothy:

*“But the Spirit saith expressly, that in later times some shall fall away from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of demons, through the hypocrisy of men that speak lies, branded in their own conscience as with a hot iron” (1 Timothy 4:1-2).*

Then we note in Hebrews 3:12: “Take heed, brethren, lest haply there shall be in any one of you an evil heart of unbelief, in falling away from the living God.”

Within the second century we see the trend beginning with the hierarchal system that culminated in the Catholic system’s pope. This began in the local church with one elder becoming predominant, and the presiding elders in churches in a given area forming a council. Within this area, one elder came to preside, who then joined with presiding elders in other areas, which obviously led to a supreme bishop or pope. This is a clear departure from Biblical directives.

*“The elders among you I exhort, who am a fellow-elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, who am also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Tend the flock of God which is among you...” (1 Peter 5:1-2).*

The only flock, or church, which elders are to tend is the one “among them,” not somewhere else!

Although there is evidence of small, persecuted groups following the New Testament order through the centuries, they were scattered and isolated. These centuries are called the Dark Ages, with more than one application of meaning.

### **The 19th Century—the Beginning of Restoration**

The 16th Century saw the start of efforts to “reform” the Catholic Church. It had grown in power and corruption, and in many respects came to rule much of the civilized world. Augustine, born in 354, is considered the “Father of Roman Catholicism,” and formulated a doctrine that greatly contributed to the political power of the church, which gave the pope authority over even kings and emperors. In commenting on this matter, Alexander Allen says:

*“The church was here by divine appointment, and if so it was the divine will that all men should come into it; and if they would not come of themselves, they must be forced to do so; and if the church lacked the power of compulsion, it was the sacred duty which the state owed to the church to come to its rescue, and by the might of the sword ‘compel them to come in,’ that the church might be filled” (V. G. Alexander, **The Continuity of Christian Thought**. 152-3).*

Luther, Huss, Zwingle and Calvin rebelled not only against the corruption in the church, but also against its political power. These efforts began in earnest in the early 1500s. But their efforts fell short in that they sought merely to reform a corrupt system, rather than to return to the original system. This culminated in the formation of a multitude of denominational bodies, which we have as their legacy today.

Beginning around 1800, we see serious efforts being made at restoring the ancient order of things. Much has been written about the important work of Thomas and Alexander Campbell in this matter, but there were several others who also had much influence in this great movement. Around 1793, James O’Kelly and others left their Methodist conference when their efforts to restrict the power of the clergy were not accepted. They formed what they called “The Republican Methodists” in Virginia. In a formal meeting on August 4th, 1794, Rice Haggard stood up with a New Testament in his hand, and said, “Brethren, this is a sufficient rule of faith and practice, and by it we are told that the disciples were called Christians, and I move that henceforth and forever the followers of Christ be known as Christians simply.”

Around the same time, Abner Jones and Elias Smith in New Hampshire left the Baptist Church and

became pioneers in the search for undenominational Christianity. Meanwhile, in Kentucky, Barton W. Stone was on his own journey. He had been ordained a Presbyterian minister and began preaching at Cane Ridge, KY in 1798. He already had misgivings about the Confession of Faith, and began his break with Presbyterianism at the "Great Revival" at Cane Ridge in 1801. Stone's movement had a great influence in the return to Bible-based Christianity.

The work of Thomas and Alexander Campbell deserves special attention. Thomas was born in Ireland in 1763, and was ordained as a minister in the Seceder Presbyterian Church. Thomas came under the influence of the followers of John Glas, a Scot who introduced weekly observance of the Lord's Supper, a plurality of elders in each congregation, and the principle that the Scripture is the only standard of both doctrine and practice. For health reasons, he came to America in 1807.

Shortly after his arrival, he was asked to preach for a Seceder church near Pittsburgh. His views on the Lord's Supper offended some, and the Presbyterian Synod subsequently tried him for heresy. He left the Presbyterian Church, but continued to preach to a group of people who, like him, looked for freedom from sectarian narrowness, a closer walk with God and a union based upon Scriptures.

At one of the meetings of these people, Campbell spoke at length about the desire for unity among all believers based upon the Scriptures, and made what has become a well-known statement concerning the rule they would follow: "That rule, my highly respected hearers, is this, that where the Scriptures speak, we speak; and where the Scriptures are silent, we are silent." This statement had a tremendous effect upon the religious thinking of the nation in the ensuing years.

Realizing the need to make his views of Scripture clear, Thomas delivered his famous "Declaration and Address" on September 7, 1809. The entire document filled 54 pages and was a masterpiece of reasoning from the Scriptures. W. E. Garrison summed up the major points of Campbell's address:

*"...first, that the will of Christ included the revelation and imposition of a definite doctrinal and ecclesiastical program. Second, that the Scriptures give an inerrant report of the teaching of Jesus and His apostles and the procedure of the church of the first century, so that any verse in the New Testament could be quoted with perfect assurance of his historical accuracy...Third, that the teaching authority of Jesus had passed over undiminished to the apostles, so that both the injunctions and the examples of the apostles possessed complete authority over the church for all time, that their teachings were as commands of God, and that the practice of the church of the apostolic age constituted a pattern which the church must permanently follow"* (Winfred Garrison, **Religion Follows the Frontier**. 95-6).

Shortly before the "Declaration and Address," in 1809, Alexander and his mother and sisters arrived in the United States. Alexander had already been influenced towards reformation by men in England and Ireland, and happily found similar thinking in his father. In 1810 a meeting house was built in Brush Run, Pennsylvania, and by the following year these brethren formally organized themselves into an independent congregation, soon realizing that their attempts to identify themselves with any denominational group was fraught with failure.

Following the principles set forth by his father, Alexander soon realized he had not been baptized scripturally, for Presbyterians did not immerse. Soon the whole family was immersed, and in a short time, nearly the whole congregation was made up of immersed believers. This event was the occasion of the change in leadership from father to son. The father had enunciated the principles, and the son recognized the full implications of the principles and put them into practice.

Alexander began publishing **The Christian Baptist** in 1823, which had a wide influence. He also had several highly regarded debates, and was even honored to address the U.S. Congress on one occasion. In his 1843 debate with Presbyterian H. L. Rice in Lexington, Kentucky the noted Henry Clay presided as

chairman over the two weeks' debate.

Campbell's famous Sermon on the Law in 1816 had caused much prejudice among the Baptists with whom he had been associated, and this reflected a general ignorance of denominational preachers concerning the Bible and the distinctions between Old and New Testaments. Alexander and Barton W. Stone met for the first time in 1824, and by 1832 the two groups had joined forces, recognizing they were on common ground. (To be continued)

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## Lives That Refresh

Jim Mickells | Lewisburg, Tennessee, USA

In Paul's short epistle to Philemon, the apostle commends this brother for refreshing the hearts of fellow saints. "For we have great joy and consolation in your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed by you, brother" (Philemon 7). The word refreshed is defined as, "to cause or permit one to cease from any movement or labor in order to recover and collect strength, to give rest, refresh; to refresh, the soul of anyone" (Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament). It seems the actions of Philemon often encouraged and strengthened fellow Christians. He was like a cool breeze to those who were hot and exhausted from their labors.

How did Philemon refresh the hearts of his brethren?

*"I thank my God, making mention of you always in my prayers, hearing of your love and faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints, that the sharing of your faith may become effective by the acknowledgment of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus"* (Philemon 4-6).

These verses tell us plainly how he refreshed others, by his love and faith that he had shown toward the Lord and all the saints he met.

Others no doubt had reported to the apostle about the love this man had manifested toward fellow Christians. "Hearing of your love and faith..." (verse 5). True love will be visible in one's life. John said, "My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth" (1 John 3:18). That is the kind of love we must show toward others so that their souls will be refreshed as well.

In the song, "Room In God's Kingdom," we find several expressions used which illustrate love that will refresh. Notice verse one, "There is room in the kingdom of God, my brother, for the small things that you can do; just a small, kindly deed that may cheer another is the work God has planned for you." Then in verse two, "Just a cup of cold water in His name given may the hope in some heart renew." It is the little things that we all can do that will often make the difference in the lives of others. It may be mowing the yard, raking the leaves, baking a pie, cleaning someone's house, a visit in the hospital or any number of other things that we can do to show our love. These things have a refreshing effect on others.

I have seen people who were discouraged and downtrodden in spirit, simply needing a word of encouragement. Such words will refresh the spirit of that individual so that they can press on in their service to the Lord. Paul said, "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). I've known several people through the years that have often refreshed my soul by their tender words of love and compassion. Even words of rebuke that are offered from a heart filled with affection and care for the person they are spoken to will encourage one to do the right things. Such will prove to be refreshing to that individual.

May God help us to live in such a way that our lives will refresh others that we encounter. The writer in the book of Hebrews tells us to "imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises" (Hebrews 6:12). Philemon is worthy of our imitation.

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# Plucking Out Our Eye

Mike Thomas | Bowling Green, Kentucky, USA

Jesus told people, "If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell" (Matthew 5:29). He said the same things regarding the hands and feet. From His perspective, it is "more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell" (verse 30). What did He mean by these statements?

For one, we can know He was not referring to actual body parts because these are not the problem with sin. A physically blind or impaired person can be just as immoral as a person with eyesight and full mobility. Ray Charles was blinded at a young age and lived to be an old man. Yet the movie that depicted his life revealed a troubled history of drug abuse and fornication. Thus, physical blindness is not a safeguard against sin.

If we plucked out our eye, especially just the "right eye," like Jesus said in Matthew 5:29, we will have just as many temptations and desires as before. This is so because sin is never a result of the physical body. Jesus said elsewhere, "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies" (Matthew 15:19). We live the way we live because of our desires and choices, and not because of physical bodies that are beyond control. We may develop certain conditions that cause our bodies to twitch or shake and lose their natural functions, but that is not the cause of sinful behavior. No one is forced to violate God's law. We may sin because of our ignorance, deceit, fear or rebellion, but we still did it. Sin is always a choice. And more often than not it is because we have "a heart trained in covetous practices" (2 Peter 2:14). James 1:13-15 says it best:

*"Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death."*

The second part of Jesus' statement in Matthew 5:29 says we should pluck out our eye because it is better that "one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell." This confirms He is using figurative language because the bodies that we possess in eternity will be spiritual. Paul said, "The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body" (1 Corinthians 15:42-44). Obviously, then, Jesus had something else in mind when He encouraged us to lose body parts to save our body from hell.

Whenever Jesus tells us to pluck out our eye, He is telling us to get rid of anything that is a stumbling block to sin and a constant source of temptation. In the context, He said "whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew 5:28). Since He expects us to be holy as He is holy, we must give all diligence to remove anything that corrupts our heart or continually tempt us — even if removing that influence will be as inconvenient as losing an eye or as impairing as removing a hand or foot. For some, it may mean staying off the internet, avoiding certain books, or discontinuing certain television programs. For others, it may mean avoiding particular people, deleting certain apps, or finding another job. It may seem impossible to contemplate life without these advantages, but it is better to lose these luxuries than to hold on to them and continually sin, and wind up in hell (Galatians 5:19-21). "Therefore, put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness" (Colossians 3:5).

Ironically, when we perform this spiritual surgery on ourselves and pluck out our sinful members, we will see more clearly and feel less enslaved to temptation. Our understanding will increase as we comprehend what the Bible means when it says, "In the fear of the Lord there is strong confidence, and His children will have a place of refuge. The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life, to turn one away from the snares of death"

(Proverbs 14:26-27). And in time, we will discover that "the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding" (Philippians 4:7) is far superior to the entanglements of sin.

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## Jesus - Our Good Samaritan

William J. Stewart | Odessa, Ontario, Canada

As we consider this parable spoken by our Lord, there are many lessons which one might come away with. Certainly the parable of the Good Samaritan teaches us of the goodness of compassion and hospitality. We are reminded of the evils of prejudice and of the fact that we should love all men, even our enemies. Jesus gave a complete response to the question which prompted the parable in the first place, "Who is my neighbor?" However, let us look today at the 'good Samaritan' as a type of Christ.

### The Coming of the Good Samaritan

"But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was..." (Luke 10:33)

Both the priest and Levite, before even reaching the man passed by on the other side of the road. They were uninterested and unwilling to help. However, as the Samaritan came to the man who had fallen among thieves, he "...came where he was..."

Note concerning our Lord, He has not passed by on the other side, but has truly come to man's aid "...where he was..."

- He came to our humanity and took it upon Him (John 1:14; Philippians 2:6-8)
- He came to our sorrows and bore them for us (Isaiah 53:3-5)
- He came to our temptations and endured them (Hebrews 4:15; Matthew 4:1-11)
- He came to our curse and removed it (Galatians 3:13; Ephesians 2:15)
- He came to our sins and bore them in His own flesh (2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 2:24)
- He came to our death and made us alive again (Ephesians 2:1)

### The Compassion of the Good Samaritan

"...and when he saw him, he had compassion on him" (Luke 10:33)

The sight of a man stripped of his clothing, having been wounded and left for dead touched this traveller. Though he did not know him, his tenderness of heart would not allow him to pass by as the priest and the Levite.

No greater compassion has been shown than that of Jesus for us. Mark records, "...Jesus, when He came out, saw a great multitude and was moved with compassion for them, because they were like sheep not having a shepherd. So He began to teach them many things" (Mark 6:34). God's love for man would not allow Him to leave man dead in sin, but rather He "...demonstrated His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). Jesus Himself said, "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. You are My friends if you do whatever I command you" (John 15:13-14).

### The Care of the Good Samaritan

His compassion for the man wounded and left for dead motivated him to tend to the man's needs. Note if you will:

- "...he went to him..." He did not continue into town and then send another back for the man. He went to him himself. Likewise, our Lord did not send another but served us Himself.
- "...and bandaged his wounds..." As the man had been left for dead, it was likely that his wounds were serious. The Samaritan's immediate reaction - provide relief from the wounds. Jesus, seeing the wounds of His creation provided the means of relief from the same (Isaiah 53:5).
- "...and he set him on his own animal..." A seat of prominence was given to the wounded man. The

Lord has also provided a seat of prominence for those who receive His tender care (Ephesians 2:6).

- "...brought him to an inn..." The Samaritan sought out a place where the man could have rest. Jesus came, that we might have rest (Hebrews 4:1ff; Matthew 11:28).
- "...took care of him..." He did not simply lay the man down on a bed and then leave him. He stayed up with him, he tended to his needs. The Lord has not left us to fend for ourselves. Peter says to cast "...all your cares upon Him, for He cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7).
- "...took out two denarii..." It came time for the Samaritan to continue on his journey, however, before doing so, he left provisions for the wounded man. The Lord has richly supplied His elect, for He has "...richly blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ" (Ephesians 1:3). And by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul penned, "...my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19).

What a wonderful type of Christ we find in the good Samaritan. As the man in Jesus' parable extended great kindness, the Lord has done likewise for us. He came near to help us when we were helpless. He had compassion upon those who had despised Him. He bestowed upon us the greatest care possible, having healed us and made us whole.

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## Miracle Worker?

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

Helen Keller is one of the most famous women of modern times. Her life story is amazing. She was born in 1880 in Tuscumbia, Alabama to a well to do family. She was a healthy, normal child until age 19 months, when she contracted "brain fever" (perhaps meningitis or scarlet fever). When she was eventually well, her mother discovered that Helen had become both deaf and blind. How could she learn anything? Her situation seemed hopeless. Most such children of that day were committed to an asylum.

Helen's behavior was atrocious. In her frustration she pitched fits. She had no manners and was completely unkempt. She learned to lock people in their rooms and would hide the key, delighting to feel the floor vibrations as they struggled to get out. She enjoyed pinching family members so hard that sometimes they bled. At meals she would shove into her mouth what smelled good on her own plate and then walk around the table, pulling good smelling food off the plates of her family members. Some of her kin folks wanted to put her in an asylum.

Before Helen was 7 years old her parents hired a young woman from Massachusetts named Annie Hutchinson to try to educate Helen. Annie was fresh out of college with no experience, had a horrible background, and could barely see herself. Remarkably Annie was able not only to educate little Helen, Helen Keller became one of the best read, most accomplished speakers of the 20th century. She lectured to crowds and was welcomed by national leaders throughout the world. She met every American President from James Garfield to John Kennedy.

People called Annie Hutchinson a "miracle worker." Annie was indeed a brilliant, gifted, dedicated teacher and is properly held in the highest esteem, but she did not work miracles. Miracles are events for which there is no natural explanation. Jesus raised Lazarus from the tomb after he had been dead four days (John chapter 11). That cannot be explained naturally. It is truly a miracle, the direct intervention of God into the realm of nature.

Annie Hutchinson's accomplishments with Helen are amazing, but the explanations are both simple and natural. She used and wisely adapted advanced methods of teaching she learned in college. But before she could do that, she very wisely demanded the freedom to discipline Helen, so Helen could learn self discipline. She never injured Helen, but she forced her to use manners at the table, to stop playing tricks on people, to stop throwing fits, and to pay attention. Once she had taught Helen self-discipline, then she could educate her.

Parents, if you want your children to learn, you must first discipline them, so they will learn self-discipline. Only then can they be educated both in the knowledge of the world and the knowledge of God.

“He who spares his rod hates his son, But he who loves him disciplines him promptly” (Proverbs 13:24).  
“Chasten your son while there is hope, And do not set your heart on his destruction” (Proverbs 19:18).  
“Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; The rod of correction will drive it far from him” (Proverbs 22:15).  
“The rod and rebuke give wisdom, But a child left to himself brings shame to his mother” (Proverbs 29:15).  
“Correct your son, and he will give you rest; Yes, he will give delight to your soul” (Proverbs 29:17).  
“Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live?” (Hebrews 12:9).  
“Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it” (Hebrews 12:11).



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