

# December 2020

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- unless otherwise noted, answers to questions by Keith Sharp -

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Finally, brethren

**WHATEVER THINGS**

are true  
are noble  
are just  
are pure  
are lovely

PHILIPPIANS  
4:8

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

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

## Accepting Adulterous Marriages Inevitably Leads to Accepting Gay Marriages

Pat Donahue | Harvest, Alabama, USA

A few years ago my daughter Leah found this quote on the internet where “pastor” Ken Wilson justifies his congregation’s change to accept gay marriages –

*“I have proposed a path for these pastors that allows them to embrace people who are gay, lesbian, and transgender and to accept them fully — welcome and wanted — into the company of Jesus. I wrote A Letter To My Congregation when I realized my views had changed and I needed to communicate the intense theological, biblical, pastoral, and spiritual process that I had been through to get to this new place. It began with a burr beneath the saddle of my conscience: why was I willing to let so many divorced and remarried couples know that they are welcome and wanted while refusing that same welcome to gay and lesbian couples? How could I say to the remarried couples, whose second marriage was clearly condemned by the plain meaning of scripture, ‘You are welcome and wanted,’ while saying to the two (lesbian, ptd) mothers raising their adopted child together, ‘I love you, but I hate your sin?’”*

So this is where most churches are heading in the future. It's the ole "being wrong to be consistent" logic (Matthew 19:9; Romans 1:26-27).

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## Why Is There So Much Immorality?

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

According to evolution, people are just apes who grew bigger brains, stood upright, and lost most of their body hair (I've lost more than most). One anthropologist wrote a book about mankind entitled *The Naked Ape*. According to Scripture, God made both the man and the woman "in His own image" (Genesis 1:27). The difference between evolution and creation is the difference between a naked ape and a child of God.

If we're just animals who happen to walk on two legs and have bigger brains, why should we have any higher moral standards than any other animal? Why not obey the law of the jungle, kill or be killed? Why not mate whenever and with whomever we feel like? Since most people accept evolution as a proven fact, is it any wonder that their morals, or the lack thereof, are like jungle animals - or worse?

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## Jesus' Sacrifice Makes God Just When He Justifies

Pat Donahue | Harvest, Alabama, USA

First John 4:10 reads, "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." According to dictionary.com the word "propitiation" means

*"that by which God is rendered propitious, that is, by which it becomes consistent with his character and government to pardon and bless the sinner. The propitiation does not procure his love or make him loving; it only renders it consistent for him to exercise his love towards sinners."*

Romans 3:24-26 bears out that definition by saying

*"Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus."*

Paul's point here?: Jesus dying on the cross allows God to forgive us for our sins while at the same time being consistent with his righteous and just character; meaning he isn't just "letting us off the hook." Jesus' sacrificial death declared God righteous in forgiving all those Old Testament saints (verse 25), and it does the same for believers in our dispensation (verse 26).

So we see true justice (for crime or sin) demands a penalty. God provided his Son to take the penalty we deserve ("God will provide himself a lamb" - Genesis 22:8). It seems my close friend Bob Myhan is overlooking the point of Romans 3:24-26 when he wrote in "The Error of Penal Substitution" the following:

*"Penal Substitution ... says that God demands the payment of the penalty for sin by a substitute in order to remain just while justifying man. In other words, God cannot justly forgive man unless the punishment for sin is suffered by a substitute for man. And, according to the theory, Jesus is that substitute. He died in your place ... that you ... might be justified ... and God might remain just."*

As we've seen from Romans 3, for God to forgive, penalty for sin had to be paid, else God would prove to be unjust (and capricious) - a concept Bob specifically denies.

This debate goes at least as far back as a discussion that Alexander Campbell had with Barton Stone in the pages of the "Millennial Harbinger." Here are a few quotes from Stone in that discussion which succinctly identifies the position this article is intended to refute:

- *"If the surety pays the debt, due according to law ... then is the person free from obligation, and is justified on the principle of law, not of grace; for there can be no grace, pardon, nor mercy in the justifier on this principle."* (Millennial Harbinger, July 1841)
- *"If the debt ... be fully paid ..., where is grace seen in the pardon of the debtor!"* (February 1841)
- *"... without the blood ..., the remission of the least sin could not be obtained, for the reason already given, because none without that blood could be led to believe in him -- none to repent ..."* (April 1841)
- *"The sacrifice of Christ then, in your opinion, has an effect on heaven – on God to propitiate him to man. "To propitiate is to appease one offended, and to render him favorable." Webster. Do brother Campbell, point us to the scriptures that say that sacrifices either under the Old or New Testament, were ever designed to propitiate God, or that such an effect was ever produced or effected on him."* (March 1840)
- *"The death of Christ influences the sinner alone, but produced no direct effect on God."* (February 1841)
- *" all the blood of the universe, the blood of Christ not excepted, could not take away our sin ..."* (April 41).
- *"on what grounds was this pardon granted? Not on the ground of sacrifice, but according to the greatness of thy mercy..."* (April 1841).

I agree with what Campbell said in refutation, for example – *"no repentance nor amendment of life, without shedding of blood, could obtain remission."* (May 1841) – Hebrews 9:22b. And I really don't understand how the following passages teaching Jesus paid for sin can be denied:

- Acts 20:28 Jesus "purchased" the church with his own blood
- Titus 2:14 Jesus did "redeem" us ("... payment ..." – Thayer)
- 1 Timothy 2:6 Jesus was a "ransom" for all ("price" - Thayer)
- 1 Corinthians 6:20 Jesus "bought" us with his blood ("buy" - Thayer, "to acquire the possession of ... by paying ... an equivalent" - dictionary.com)

In other words, Jesus paid for our sins instead of us paying for our sins. That's what's meant by Substitution. Just a decade or so ago I never would have imagined any gospel preacher feeling forced to deny Jesus paid for our sins. Unfortunately that's what this issue has come to.

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## **The History of the Institutional Controversy (Part 8)**

Jefferson David Tant | Hendersonville, Tennessee, USA

Mike Cope, a preacher at Highland church of Christ in Abilene, and a teacher at A.C.U. wrote, "Of course, I think this brother (Mack Lyon—jdt) is wrong. Way wrong. I'm becoming more and more convinced that only time will take care of this." This Highland church is the sponsor of the national Herald of Truth radio and TV program.

By the way, the Highland church, where Herald of Truth originated, has moved in instrumental music beginning in 2014.

The Bible is quite clear about women in leadership roles. "But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet" (1 Timothy 2:12). Paul goes on to say that this was God's order from the beginning. But that doesn't deter those who insist on their own way. For example, from New York: "West Islip Church of Christ is led by a group of gifted shepherds known collectively as the Council." The website then names nine individuals, including five women. The website also mentions "Our ministers, Katie Hays and Lance Pape." By the way, the last word was that Katie was preaching for the Lawrenceville, Georgia First Christian Church. Lance Pape had a webpage dedicated to "Gender Justice" in churches of Christ seeking to encourage women's roles as "deacon, elder, minister, worship leader, preacher, teacher, etc."

The 4th Street Church of Christ in Franklin, Tennessee had a Lipscomb graduate named Lauren King whom it recommended as an intern minister for the church.

The Cahaba Valley church of Christ in Birmingham has a picture of their elders on their webpage. Their five elders include two women. How do they deal with I Timothy 2:12?

*"From the indications inside the letters themselves, it appears that these books came from a period around 115 AD and were put together by those people leading the churches that Paul founded in his life-time, attributing the material, as they believed its content to be, from Paul himself. Therefore, most scholars believe that, at times, what is found in I and II Timothy and Titus reflects more about what is going on in the churches of 115 than Paul's own views. This is true of the view of the law found in these letters, along with various other teachings about faith, the church, and even Jesus himself found in these letters."*

It seems they deal with Timothy by simply dismissing it as "uninspired."

Then there are such promotions as "Coon-huntin' for Christ" and "Gymnastics to the Glory of God" sponsored by churches. From there we go on to challenges about the authenticity of Scripture.

*"It is consistent to believe that the Bible is authoritative in matters of faith and practice, but may be incorrect in geographical or historical details. Once a person abandons the concept of divine dictation, he must abandon the idea of inerrancy"* (William Abraham, a Christian College professor).

Note the following ad in the Jackson, Tennessee Sun, April 21, 2011.

----- Holy Week Services April 18-22 -----

Monday: First United Methodist Church, Service by Kenneth Grizzell  
Of Campbell St. Church of Christ

Tuesday: Skyline Church of Christ, Service by Randy Carter of Northside  
Assembly of God

Wednesday: St. Mary's Catholic Church Service by Charles Fillatreau of  
All Saints Anglican Church

Sponsored by Jackson Area Ministerial Alliance

A love offering will be shared among Area Relief Ministries, RIFA, and  
Salvation Army

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To be honest, that ad is hard to understand. Evidently Kenneth Campbell and the Skyline Church of Christ think they are on the same par as the denominations. And the Salvation Army is a bonafide, registered church. Yes, they do much charity work, but they claim to be the "Salvation" army. So we have a church of Christ raising funds for a false church. Why not also give to Catholic Charities? If not, why not?

The East Cobb church of Christ in Marietta, GA sent out a big ad. Some of the text read:

"Upcoming Community Events

– July 15: Concert on the Green, 7 p.m. Bring blanket and picnic.

Live music. Pizza and concessions available.

– September 9-10: The Children's Garden Consignment Sale. Quality items at  
60-80 off retail!!! Sellers and volunteers needed. Contact..."

We also have the Northlake church of Christ in Decatur, GA hosting a "Rootin-Tootin' VBS featuring "Midway Rides and Games." T.I.M.E. Taco Salad Bar and All-Church Talent Show. Admission \$5.

THE ULTIMATE! The Southern Hills church of Christ in Abilene, Texas is opening a satellite church called the "Bar Church." The church meets in the "Memories Country and Western Bar." So, what's this all about?

They explain:

*“Why a bar? Why not a school or an empty building? We wanted to locate Bar Church in a bar in order to place ourselves in a position to be in relationship with people who:*

- 1) were fed up with church;*
- 2) had dim views of church and especially church people;*
- 3) perceived themselves to be unworthy or far from God.*

*“Will Bar Church include the use of instruments in worship? Yes. Due to the fact that we anticipate that many of those who attend Bar Church will have no background in acappella singing, we will use instruments for the purpose of making the singing of hymns less threatening and providing a musical sound path for all to follow. “Is Bar Church a part of Southern Hills? How closely are they affiliated? Bar Church is a satellite location of Southern Hills, and therefore under the oversight of our eldership. Think of it in terms of our being one church with several locations.*

*“Will alcohol be served? Yes. Bar Church meets in a bar, so alcohol will be present and available beginning at noon on Sundays. With Bar Church’s stated mission to meet people where they are, we anticipate that alcohol most likely will be consumed sometime during the meeting of Bar Church.”*

*“Sermons will be short and alcohol will be served only when the service is over.”*  
(I’m sure they will do an ID check to be sure no minors are drinking!)

I have a confession to make. Words fail me!

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## **A Follower of Christ**

Jim Mickells | Lewisburg, Tennessee, USA

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

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

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

To the second man in this story, Jesus says, “Follow Me” (Luke 9:59). His response was he needed to first go bury his father. This certainly seems to be the respectable thing to do, showing honor to a deceased love one. Yet the Lord said, “Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God”

(verse 60). Those who are spiritually dead can provide the burial for those who are physically dead. This seems, at least to us, to be harsh and unreasonable. Yet I believe the Lord is teaching us a valuable lesson in having our priorities in order. Far too many Christians put other things in life ahead of serving God.

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

The third man in Luke's story steps forward, saying, he would follow but he needed to first go bid those of his house farewell (Luke 9:61). This seems harmless enough; and if he only said "goodbye" surely this would not have taken very long. Were there to be some festive activities associated with his departure, wasting valuable time? Would those of his house persuade him to change his mind? Regardless, there is always danger in delay. Christ said, "No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62). His focus needed to be on the Lord and His kingdom.

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

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

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## "Wow, You Don't Drink?"

Mike Thomas | Bowling Greek, Kentucky, USA

When it involves intoxicating drink, the apostle Peter said there will be those who think it strange that a person will not imbibe. Here is how he penned it in 1 Peter 4:3-5:

*"For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles—when we walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries. In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you. They will give an account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead."*

Notice that the outcast is the one who chooses not to engage in drunkenness, celebratory drinking, and social drinking. It is not the one who partakes in it. The world will always turn to alcohol (and now narcotics) for recreational purposes, and frown upon those who do not participate. The **New American Standard** says it this way, "In all this, they are surprised that you do not run with them in the same excesses of debauchery, and they slander you" (verse 4). You would think this contrast can only be made between a Christian and non-Christian, with the latter being surprised by the former's refusal to drink. But unfortunately, there are Christians who now think it strange that other Christians do not drink. Yes, you

read that correctly. There are preachers, elders, and members within the Lord's church who are defending the use of intoxicating drink for entertainment and social purposes. In fact, I would be surprised if there are not some at the congregation you attend who think that way. I hope not, but it wouldn't surprise me.

More and more Christians believe that when Jesus turned water into wine, He gave His stamp of approval for consuming intoxicating drink for social purposes. (This is in contrast to the use of intoxicants for medical reasons, which we all should agree is sometimes necessary. See 1 Timothy 5:23.) Many interpret Jesus' miracle of John 2 as His consent for the use of modern wines, liquor, beer, and now marijuana for pleasure purposes. Never mind the fact that it is a sin to get drunk (Galatians 5:21) or to encourage someone else to get drunk (Matthew 18:6-9), or that the Old Testament is replete with warnings against the use of strong drink (Proverbs 23:29-35). People see what they want from the Scriptures. And when they want to find justification for getting drunk, they find it in Jesus making wine. Well-played, Satan. Well played.

Nevertheless, I return to Peter's observation about strangeness. How will anyone consider us strange if we are drinking alongside them? "Oh, but I don't get drunk. I just drink enough to relax and socialize." Sure you do. And the person next to you knows that too, right? You are meeting your obligation to let your light shine and glorify God with good works, by sitting at a bar or restaurant with a drink in front of you, correct? Is that the story you are telling yourself? How about your overall example? Will the cashier at the grocery store believe you oppose drunkenness when you buy beer and wine? Will the people who drive by the liquor store and see you coming out conclude you oppose revelries? Will the people on social media know you do not participate in drinking parties when they see you in pictures with a drink in your hand? Sorry friend, I don't buy it. You're going to hell and you just don't realize it. And lest you take issue with me, please read Peter's statement again. He said to avoid every one of these activities in going to heaven (1 Peter 4:3).

But Peter was not the only one who gave this warning. The apostle Paul wrote:

*"Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness... drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God"* (Galatians 5:19-21).

The bottom line is you cannot engage in drunkenness and things like it and still go to heaven. It's that serious!

We each will be judged for how we respond to the use of intoxicants (1 Peter 4:5). And we will either be on the side that used it or the side that refused to use it. There is no other alternative. So I ask you once more, who is considered strange when it comes to alcohol: the person who imbibes or the person who does not? Who has spent enough of their past lifetime in foolishness and ignorance, and is now determined to go to heaven: the person with a drink in their hand or the one who refuses to touch it? Who was Peter encouraging to maintain their course: the drinker or the non-drinker?

Alas, good friends, be wise. Be sober. And be about the business of going to heaven. The former drinkers at Corinth were told, "And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Corinthians 6:11). Paul would have never said that if they had continued drinking. Instead, he celebrated the fact that they were wise enough to put away their drunkenness (verse 10) and find mercy in Christ by having their sins washed away in baptism (Acts 18:8). This proves there is always hope in overcoming the bottle and committing to a better way of living. It's strange to live like that, for sure, in a world that turns to alcohol for every aspect of life, but it will all make sense when we meet the Lord in judgment. We will then be glad that we chose to "not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit" in holy living (Ephesians 5:18). So, come to the narrow path and join the rest of us weirdos. You might actually find that you enjoy it a whole lot more than the misery and shame of drinking.

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## What Is Truth?

William Stewart | Odessa, Ontario, Canada

After He was betrayed by Judas and arrested by the Jewish authorities, the Lord was ridiculed and tortured throughout the night. When the morning came, they took Him to Pilate, expecting the governor to put Jesus to death. Pilate was not as accommodating as the Jewish leaders expected; in fact, he declared, “I find no fault in Him” (John 18:38; 19:4, 6).

Pilate asked His accusers what He had done but they would not respond. They simply said:

*If He were not an evildoer, we would not have delivered Him up to you.* (John 18:30)

Being pressed for an accusation, they stated:

*We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar, saying that He Himself is Christ, a King.* (Luke 23:2).

In Pilate’s conversation with Jesus in the Praetorium, the governor ignored the first and second accusations, but focused on the third—that He claimed to be a king. Let’s notice the questions he asked the Lord.

### Are You A King Then?

Jesus answered Pilate,

*My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here* (John 18:36).

And again,

*You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.* (Luke 23:2).

I’m not aware of any other text where Jesus made a verbal claim to be king, but His actions and the response of the people in texts such as Matthew 21 reveal that He was accepted by many as the promised king. Just a week before He was brought before Pilate by the Jews, Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey,

*...that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying: ‘Tell the daughter of Zion, Behold, your King is coming to you, lowly, and sitting on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey’* (Matthew 21:4-5).

Indeed, Jesus is a king. In fact, He is identified in the Bible as the “King of kings” (1 Timothy 6:15; Revelation 17:14; 19:16). Yet Pilate was made to understand that His kingdom was no threat to the Roman empire, for His kingdom is not of this world; it’s an eternal and spiritual kingdom.

### What Is Truth?

As Jesus finished His short discourse with Pilate, He made two statements about truth:

- He had come to bear witness to the truth, and
- Those who are of the truth will hear His voice.

In response to this, Pilate asked, “What is truth?” (John 18:38)

There are times when reading the Scriptures the purpose and tone of words spoken are evident. There are other times when it would be helpful to hear the tone of voice used by the speaker. I’ve often wondered what Pilate’s tone was when he said these words. Was he inquisitive? Were these the words of a jaded man? How did he say such an important question? Sadly, it appears he did not stay for the answer, for the text tells us,



*Pilate said to Him, 'What is truth?' And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews, and said to them, 'I find no fault in Him at all.'* (John 18:38)

What does the Bible say about truth?

### **God's Word Is Truth**

Just a chapter earlier, Jesus identified truth for us. He said in prayer to the Father,  
*Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.* (John 17:17)

When we read the Bible, we can have confidence that what we are reading is truth. God's words are true (2 Samuel 7:28; Psalm 119:142, 151). Paul tells us that God and His word are trustworthy, for God cannot lie (Titus 1:2).

It doesn't take us long in this life to realize that we cannot trust everything and everyone. Some people are perpetual liars. Some businesses misrepresent their products. At times, even those who may seem close to us might not be truthful with us. God is always true; His word is always trustworthy.

### **The Truth Shall Make You Free**

Earlier in John's gospel, Jesus told us what the truth will do for us. We read:

*As He spoke these words, many believed in Him. Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, 'If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.'* (John 8:30-32)

Again, the truth is God's word. Jesus said we need to abide in it—dwell in it—live in it. We can't be happy with a casual knowledge of the Bible. It must be an essential part of our life. Those who seek to know what the Lord has said and make application of it, Jesus identifies as His disciples or followers. Since they hear and live according to the truth, He promises they will be made free. Free from what? Sin, guilt, eternal punishment, the bondage of the devil. Hear what David wrote about 1,000 years before Jesus came to earth:

*With my whole heart I have sought You; O, let me not wander from Your commandments.  
Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You!* (Psalm 119:10-11)

If we have His word at the center of our lives, we will be equipped to overcome the advances of the devil (Ephesians 6:10-13).

### **John's Focus On Truth**

The apostle John wrote a lot about truth. In his three short epistles, there are 17 references to the truth. Most deal with our relationship to the truth. Here are two in particular where the apostle is as clear as he could be:

*If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth* (1 John 1:6)

*He who says, 'I know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him* (1 John 2:4)

Are we practicing the truth? Do we keep His commandments? That is the only way for us to be His followers, to have the forgiveness of our sins, and the hope of heaven. Will you hear, believe, and obey the truth of God?

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## **What Was the Purpose of Miracles? (Part 4)**

Julius C. Nwankwo | Ahiaba, Nigeria

**In Man's Word Enough?**

Let us say in the beginning that no claim of miraculous power to speak in tongues, heal the sick, or perform any other supernatural act should be accepted at face value. Just hearsay or some isolated case where I heard cannot be accepted as a factual happening. Human claims are not absolute facts in religion.

There must be an absolute standard by which all men evaluate and consider these claims. That standard is the New Testament. This great Book of God must sit in judgment upon human actions--not the other way, where human actions sit in judgment of the Bible.

Not that man is not honest and sincere when he makes a claim like this, but he could be honestly mistaken. Many millions imagine in their heart that they have cancer, or some other disease they have read about and may become sick over worry about that very disease. The feelings of one about these diseases can either be verified or denied only after a careful examination by a qualified doctor. We claim that the Bible is the place to check these claims to verify or deny this mania. Feelings alone will not suffice. An examination is necessary.

### **There Have Been Miraculous Tongues!**

There is no evidence that the gift of miraculous tongues was ever associated with the worship of God in the Old Testament period. There are several references to this great miracle in the New Testament. They are:

On the first Pentecost following the resurrection of Christ, the Holy Spirit came upon the twelve apostles in a baptismal measure. These men had been told to wait for the promised power in Jerusalem after the Lord's ascension; and in Acts 2:4 we read, "And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." This was from God and fulfilled his promise to guide them into all truth (John 14:26; 16:13). After inspiring these men with divine truth through the power of the Holy Spirit, an effective way of communication had to be provided. Since the group of people assembled were from many nations (Acts 2:5) and spoke different languages, some miracle had to make possible their understanding in their own language. They heard these apostles, who were all Galileans, speak in their own tongue or language (Acts 2:8).

The apostles then spoke in other languages in order to teach the truth, and it was to give understanding. It was not ecstatic gibberish (which came from emotions) that no one could understand. It was not an unknown tongue. The word unknown in the **King James** translation appears in italics, which means that this word is not found in the original Greek, but the translators added this word. Paul later deals with people speaking in a tongue or language where no one understood and he commanded that they were to keep silent, unless there were an interpreter who could give the meaning (1 Corinthians 14:27). Every tongue then had to (1) be from God for the purpose of teaching the truth and (2) be in some language that people could understand. As a result the Jews believed and were baptized and were added to the church (Acts 2:47).

**Cornelius and his household.** In Acts 10 we find the next instance of miraculous tongues. Cornelius was a great moral man who was devout (Acts 10:1-2), but was still in his sins (Acts 11:14). After Peter was sent to him to guide him into truth, he began to "speak with tongues and magnify God." This occurred when the Holy Spirit fell on all of them that heard the word (Acts 10:44-48). The Jews who had accompanied Peter to Cornelius "...were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out upon the Gentiles also" (Acts 10:45).

The purpose of this gift of tongues was to convince Jewish Christians that ". . . God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life" (Acts 11:18). God wanted all men to be saved. The gospel was to be for every creature (Mark 16:15). It was ". . . for the Jew first and also for the Greek" (Romans 1:16). Therefore, God brought the Gentiles into His great family by the same sort of miracle he had used for the Jews on the day of Pentecost, about ten years before.

As a result of Peter's preaching and this great miracle to convince the Jews that God would accept

Gentiles, Cornelius and his household were baptized into Christ (Acts 10:47, 48). They became Christians, and now all nations (Jews and Gentiles) were brought to a knowledge of truth.

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## **Changing Oversight (Part 2)**

Timothy Massawe | Moshi, Tanzania

### **Reply from Daniel Gaines about Tanzania Missions**

(edited for length)

Neither the Bear Valley church, nor the Hoover church have oversight of the church in East Africa, nor even in Tanzania. In fact, they do not have oversight of any other congregation, and it is a misrepresentation of the truth to suggest otherwise. They do, however, have oversight of the work and funds of the mission. We are certainly not the only entity who are working in the interest of the Lord's church in East Africa, but our efforts have had impact across the region with ACSOP graduates conducting evangelism in several East African nations. The mission trains these men. The mission may continue to partner with local churches and evangelists to support their efforts in various ways. The partnerships are freely entered into, and can be freely withdrawn from by either party at their discretion and in accordance with the terms of their specific agreements.

Hoover oversees funds collected, employees, and schools or other institutions that they may establish, but they do not oversee other churches.

### **Answer**

(also edited for length)

I was requested to write a biblical review regarding the change in oversight. I would appreciate a response that focuses much on biblical point of view rather than just a good judgement.

Nevertheless, Hoover will be the custodian of the funds from other congregations and oversee them on behalf of those congregations. This practice is unbiblical.

If the oversight of the Hoover or Bear Valley has nothing to do with local congregations in East Africa per your statement, that would be great. But we will then have one issue to resolve: whether the elders can use the collections of the saints to pay and oversee the works done by manmade institutions.

An eldership is a divine duty the authority of which should only be exercised within a local congregation (1 Peter 5:1-3; Acts 20:28). I am deeply concerned about the eldership that is exercised 10,000 miles away. If you have justification for this restore me to the sound doctrine as a brother.

Again, you mentioned that collections of the saints are involved in the oversight and yet that which is being overseen is not a congregation and its work. Please justify with scriptures and I will be willing to listen.

Funds collected from congregations are called collections of the saints for the saints (1 Corinthians 16:1; Romans 15:26). Collections of the saints should be transferred/ taken directly to a local congregation to support the needy saints.

First Corinthians 16:3-4 shows that Paul didn't even want to act as a middle man or agent to deliver the gift. That's why he suggested the following: "Then, when I arrive, I will give letters of introduction to the men you approve and send them with your gift to Jerusalem. If it seems advisable for me to go also, they will accompany me."

Collections of the saints should also be transferred directly to a preacher or evangelist (Philippians 4:15-16). There is no example in the Bible where collections were used to hire a company or an agent of the

church to deal with local preachers and evangelism.

It is undisputed that your efforts have made tremendous impacts in the region with the school of preaching. I acknowledged this in the first paragraph of the review document.

The issue is not whether people have benefited from the mission but is whether the existence of the mission has the force of scriptures.

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## **Raising Money for the Lord's Work: How and by Whom? (Part 3)**

O. Lesley Egharevba | Lagos, Nigeria

### **Quibbles That Backfire**

It is always in the nature of men to find ways of defending their practices. Indeed, the originators and promoters of this scheme have put up some defenses in an attempt to justify their practices. Each of the defenses will be examined one after the other, to identify the loopholes. For each quibble, it would be shown how it backfires.

### **The Bible Nowhere Commands Us Not To Raise Money For The Church**

One of the quibbles that were introduced by the facilitators of this scheme is that there is no command in the Bible, which states, "Thou shall not raise funds for the church to buy a land." The simple answer to that is that the Bible must not expressly have that exact wording for us to know such is wrong. Once the Bible specifies whose work it is to raise funds and how such funds are to be raised, it excludes every other group from doing so. For example, if a father writes in his will, "Give the blue car to my last son," he has specified whom he wants to give the blue car and that excludes any and every other child. The father needs not say "You Shall not give the blue car to my first son" before it would be understood. It would then be out of place for the first son to argue and say, "My father never said in the will that the blue car should not be given to me." No competent lawyer in the world would make such argument before a reasonable judge.

### **People Sold Their Lands In The Bible And Brought The Money To The Church**

Yes, they did. But those who sold their lands and brought the money to the apostles' feet were members of the same church that the money was brought to. They also did that on individual basis; a spontaneous reaction to a non-created need. They never did that as a group, separate and apart from the church (Acts 4:34-37; 5:1-2). They never formed COC Jerusalem Land Owners Association to carry out the help.

### **COC UNIBEN ALUMNI Is Not A Separate Body From The Church, But A Part Of The Church**

This is another weak argument advanced in support of this scheme. How could a group of people with a separate name, purse, leadership, goals, etc. not be said to be an organization or a body? This argument even shows the ignorance of those who made it; because, even the alumni letter calls the group "a body," which is separate and apart from the congregation. Note the following statements from the letter, which is attached at the end of this work:

*"Already, this body has raised a little over #500,000. The Uniben Congregation can raise up to 4.5 million."* (paragraph 11).

*"Some members of this team would reach out to you privately either through phone calls or chat"* (paragraph 16).

The COC UNIBEN ALUMNI is referred to as "this body" in their own published letter. Why is it members of "this team" and not members of the church in Uniben? Why is "this body" and the money it has raised different from "UNIBEN Congregation" and the amount it can raise? And why was the letter "Signed on behalf of the COC-UNIBEN Alumni Adhoc Leadership Team" and not on behalf of the church in UNIBEN? Why would the "church need us" (paragraph 10) if "we" are not separate and apart from the church?

*"The church intends to pay for the land early next month (October) ... She believes that God will use us here to do so" (paragraph 12).*

Reference is made that the UNIBEN church is depending on "us here" to raise the money. The words, "us here" is in reference to the COC UNIBEN ALUMNI and it suggests a group of people separate from the church and in a different location. The church would not depend on people elsewhere if the people are with or part of it.

*"...exactly one year after we did commit ourselves as Alumni of the Uniben Campus congregation, to raise the sum of #15 million to assist her get a good piece of land as permanent site" (Paragraph 3).*

The fact that they are called "alumni of the Uniben campus congregation" shows that they are not currently students of UNIBEN or members of the church in UNIBEN. The words "Uniben alumni" indicate that they are graduates of the University of Benin. Surely, they would not dare to say that all the members of the alumni currently attend or worship at the UNIBEN church every meeting day. While it is granted that some alumni may place their membership at the campus church, the alumni is a body, separate and apart from the church. And if they claim, as some do, that the alumni is part of the Universal church, does that mean there are multiple bodies that God gave? No! (Ephesians 4:4). Inasmuch as the said Alumni body is not a congregation that meets every first day of the week, it is alien to the body of Christ!

### **Giving Is Never A Sin**

A preacher, in an attempt to justify the unscriptural action of the COC UNIBEN ALUMNI, said "giving is never a sin" and that the alumni does not sin by giving to the church money to buy land. One question that is yet to be answered is this: If giving is never a sin, could this preacher give out money to support the course of prostitution? Could he consider it righteous for a student to give money to a lecturer in order to pass his course? Would he give money to a lazy member of his congregation who has refused to work? (2 Thessalonians 3:10-14). Would he give money to a young girl who is willing to abort her pregnancy? Would he provide or give answers to a student who is writing an exam in the hall if he has the opportunity to supervise the exam? If giving is never a sin, it would be justified in all the aforementioned instances. A man may give to a person out of a genuine mind and still commit sin if he is not the right person to do that OR if the course he is supporting is not a good one. When Uzza gave unauthorized assistance to stabilize the Ark of the Covenant, he paid with his life under the Old Covenant (1 Chronicles 13:9-10). The aforementioned preacher need to study Ecclesiastes 8:11 and realize that and realize that we should not continue in sin for grace to abound.

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## **Matthew 24 | Part 2**

Patrick Andrews | Conway, Arkansas, USA

### **Matthew 24:1-3**

In order to understand this chapter and its parallel passages, you have to first look at the context of what's going on. Who's asking the questions and how many questions are asked. The answers to these three questions will help a lot in understanding most of Matthew 24. Let's concentrate on the first three verses of Matthew and the parallel accounts.

*"And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and his disciples came to him for to shew him the buildings of the temple. And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down. And as he sat upon the Mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" (Matthew 24:1-3).*

In Matthew's account:

- Christ's disciples are remarking on the buildings of the temple.
  1. We don't know which disciples are showing and asking if we only go on Matthew's account.
- Christ says, (sometime in the future, Pat) these buildings of the temple will be completely destroyed. Notice here, that Christ doesn't say when the Temple Buildings will be destroyed; just that they will be.
- Matthew's account has "the disciples" coming to Christ and asking him three questions.
  1. When shall these things be?
  2. What shall be the sign of thy coming?
  3. (What shall be the sign, Pat) of the end of the world?

We're just looking at Matthew's account right now. We will get to Mark and Luke, but just notice Matthew right now. Some people want to say that the disciples only asked one question. I disagree for a couple of reasons. First, the questions are talking about different things and secondly, we will be able to tell how many different questions were asked by studying how many answers Christ gave.

A person is forced to **assume** that the disciples are equating the destruction of the temple with the second coming of Christ. I don't know why they would connect the two, but it doesn't matter. We should never just **assume** something when our souls are on the line. Even if someone did **assume** it was only one question that was asked, then that **assumption** falls apart once Jesus begins to answer. It is definitely more than one question...as we will see.

I want to leave this for just a little while and look at Mark's and Luke's account. As we go through all of this, see if you can pick out which question Jesus is answering and take note of when he begins to answer a different question.

#### **Mark 13:1-4**

*"And as he went out of the temple, one of his disciples saith unto him, Master, see what manner of stones and what buildings are here! And Jesus answering said unto him, Seest thou these great buildings? there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down. And as he sat upon the mount of Olives over against the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew asked him privately, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign when all these things shall be fulfilled?"*

The reason I believe that these are parallel accounts is not only their similarity, but also, why in the world would the disciples continue to show Jesus the same temple buildings, over and over again.

Notice in Mark's account:

- One of the disciples pointed out the buildings of the Temple to Christ. (We are not told who it was here.)
- Mark records the same response as Matthew...(Destruction of the Temple buildings. (We are not told here when it will occur, only that it is going to happen.)
- Mark records that it was Peter, Andrew, James and John that posed at least two questions to Christ:
  1. Tell us when shall these things be? (Destruction of Temple)
  2. "...and what shall be the sign (singular sign) when all these things (Plural Things) shall be fulfilled.

Obviously, Mark's account seems to be asking only one question. Notice the phrases, "these things" twice in the same verse. However, we can't just rip these four verses loose from the Bible and try to build a doctrine on them. As we go through Mark's account, we will once again, see that Christ is answering more than one question. There is more than one subject that Jesus is dealing with here.

Let's leave Mark's account and move to Luke's:

### **Luke 21:5-7**

*And as some spake of the temple, how it was adorned with goodly stones and gifts, he said, As for these things which ye behold, the days will come, in the which there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down. And they asked him, saying, Master, but when shall these things be? and what sign will there be when these things shall come to pass?*

Luke's record is a little different from Mark's and Matthew's. It's enough to note here that there are similarities in all three texts.

If God is willing, we will probe even deeper into these questions in part three. Keep studying brothers and sisters. All scripture is God breathed. It is inerrant. There are no mistakes. What seems to be amiss can be explained if you just study it out.

*"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2Timothy 3:16-17).*

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## **Is Conscience A Safe Guide?**

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

*"Then Paul, looking earnestly at the council, said, "Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day" (Acts 23:1).*

The popular admonition is, "Let your conscience be your guide." This is used to justify all the religious division around us, whereas the Lord prayed for believers in Him to be united (John 14:6). Is conscience a safe guide?

### **Definition**

What is "conscience"? The English word "conscience" is composed of the prefix "con," meaning "with," and the root "science," meaning "knowledge" or "to know." Thus, "conscience" literally means "to know with oneself."

"Conscience" is a consciousness of one's own guilt or innocence. "For then would they (animal sacrifices - KS) not have ceased to be offered? For the worshipers, once purified, would have had no more consciousness of sins" Hebrews 10:2 The word translated "consciousness" is the same Greek term translated "conscience" in every other New Testament occurrence.

The function of conscience is to bear witness of one's guilt or innocence to that person himself as he compares his own thoughts, words, and actions to whatever standard of right and wrong he has accepted (Romans 9:1; John 8:9). It's like a speed control device on a car or truck. It is valuable as long as it is properly set and effectively works.

### **Our Guide?**

Can conscience alone safely guide? Conscience is within each person, subjective, and we are incapable of being our own guides. "O LORD, I know the way of man is not in himself; It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps" (Jeremiah 10:23). In the days of the judges in Israel, "everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 17:6; 21:25). To read Judges chapters seventeen through twenty-one, examples of the way Israel lived at the time, is to be appalled by their moral and spiritual depravity. Jesus had to die for our sins because "We have turned, every one, to his own way" (Isaiah 53:6).

Some consciences are incapable of exerting the proper influence. Some are too weak to be a proper influence, and some lack proper guidance (1 Corinthians 8:7). Thus, some people have consciences that fail to exert proper or strong enough influence (1 Corinthians 8:10-12). Some have “defiled” consciences because they have repeatedly violated them or are just plain filthy minded (1 Corinthians 8:7; Titus 1:15). Some have so seared their consciences by continually violating them that they are useless (1 Timothy 4:1-2). They are past feeling (Ephesians 4:17-19).

Saul of Tarsus exemplifies the problem. He persecuted disciples of Christ “unto the death” (Acts 8:1-3; 9:1-2; 22:4), yet his conscience approved (Acts 23:1; 26:9). Nonetheless, he was a vile sinner (1 Timothy 1:12-15).

### **When Useful?**

Is conscience ever a safe witness? Before Saul learned the truth his conscience was unsafe (1 Timothy 1:12-15), but after he learned the truth, his conscience bore true testimony, and he properly heeded it (Acts 24:14-16).

### **Conclusion**

Conscience, to bear proper testimony, must itself be properly guided. That guide is not human feelings but divine revelation, the Word of God (2 Corinthians 5:7; Romans 10:17). We must not look within to subjective feelings for direction but outside ourselves to the objective, divine standard, the Bible.



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