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

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Finally, brethren

WHATEVER THINGS

are true
are noble
are just
are pure
are lovely
are of good report

PHILIPPIANS 4:8

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.

Censorship

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

Some social media platforms censor those whose politics they dislike. Our local newspaper refused to publish a Bible passage that condemns homosexuality. Our prominent politicians want to set up a "truth czar" to censor error (an idea common to Catholicism, Nazism, and Communism). Many religious people refuse to hear both sides of an issue. Why?

"And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that he deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God" (John 3:19-21).

Truth has nothing to fear from open investigation. those who love the truth want to hear all sides of every important issue. When false teachers in Jerusalem demanded that Gentiles be circumcised and keep the law of Moses, the apostles let them have their say before the whole church, answered them before the congregation, and truth prevailed (Acts 15:5-29). Those who hate the truth want to censor the truth (Acts

4:18). The best way to see that truth prevails is to freely, openly present all sides. The light of truth dispels the darkness of error.

Questions from Nigeria about the Lord's Supper

Question

I need your help in understanding the scriptural or otherwise of Small group or family worship, where members in a particular community come together in a member's house to gather for worship during the COVID 19 lockdown. You will recall that when the government restricted the gathering of people, members resulted in meeting in small groups in a brother house within the community to worship and congregation with multi-media facilities stream online worship.

For those who meet in small groups and family, the normal items of worship were observed like, singing, praying, teaching, sermon, taking communion, and giving of the offering. Since this is a pandemic period and we still have to worship, is such worship in a small group in truth and in spirit? Will it be acceptable worship? I know the first-century Christian worship from their homes on occasion, can that help in this circumstance to provide scriptural support for small group worship in the community during the COVID lockdown?

Answers

Thanks for this excellent, practical question.

American brethren have adopted a similar practice in which brethren simply stay at home and someone, usually a preacher, leads them in worship via a live ZOOM internet hookup. The New Testament specifies that the Lord's Supper is to be eaten in the worship assembly of the church, when the church is gathered together (Acts 20:7-8; 1 Corinthians 11:18, 20-21, 33-34). This approved example has spiritual significance; we "proclaim the Lord's death" (1 Corinthians 11:26).

The church is not the same as a group of saints from within the church (Matthew 18:15-17). The family consists of a father, a mother, and children (cf. Ephesians 5:22 – 6:4). The local church, as revealed in the New Testament, is a group of Christians in a given locality (1 Corinthians 1:2) who agree to worship together regularly (Acts 9:26-28; 20:7; 1 Corinthians 11:18; Hebrews 10:24-25) and to do the Lord's work collectively through the use of pooled resources (1 Timothy 5:16; 1 Corinthians 16:1-2) as an organized, functional body (Philippians 1:1) independent of all other organizations (1 Peter 5:1-2), human or divine.

No, I believe both the American practice and the Nigerian practice during the pandemic are perversions of the divine pattern (2 Timothy 1:13) for the Lord's Supper.

Was Jesus "Made To Be Sin" For Us?

Pat Donahue | Harvest, Alabama, USA

Was Jesus "Made To Be Sin" For Us?

It never ceases to amaze me that some gospel preachers reject what a verse says evidently because they think someone might get the wrong idea from the way the verse reads. For example, 2 Corinthians 5:21a says "For he hath made him to be sin for us," and my friend Bob Myhan wrote on Facebook on 3-31-14, "In a recent Facebook post, a certain woman preacher was called a heretic for teaching that Jesus became sin. And so she is!" You might wonder how Bob can call someone a heretic for basically quoting a verse. What I think is happening is Bob accepts the false Calvinistic addition of "guilty of" to this verse. And Bob knows the Bible doesn't teach the guilt of our sin was transferred to Jesus, therefore he rejects the actual wording of the verse. But instead of saying the verse is wrong, gospel preachers ought to say what the verse says is correct, and then explain what the verse means (if they feel they must).

Remember our longtime illustration where a preacher just quotes Mark 16:16 word for word, and a lady replies “that’s just your interpretation”? The point being the lady is really rejecting Mark 16:16 itself because an “interpretation” was not given to reject. I guess we’re going to have to quit using that illustration – since we are doing the same thing now on 2 Corinthians 5:21a (and Isaiah 53:6c).

But what does the verse mean? Well, it doesn’t mean Jesus took upon himself the guilt of our sin. It is impossible for guilt to be transferred. History (who done it) cannot be rewritten. 2 Corinthians 5:21a is saying the same thing as Isaiah 53:6c. God “made him to be sin for us” is equal to God “hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.” Let me illustrate: Suppose the Mob boss ordered a lowly underling to take the rap/fall (penalty) for a crime more important mobsters had committed. The mobsters let off the hook could accurately say – “For the boss hath made him to be dirty for us.” Wouldn’t that mean the low man on the totem-pole substituted for the big wigs, that he took their punishment for their crime, even though he wasn’t guilty of their crime? Likewise Jesus was made to be sin for us, that is, he took our punishment for us (Isaiah 53:5), not our guilt.

Jesus was “made ... to be sin,” that is, literally treated like a sinner by God. Not in the sense Jesus sinned - in any shape, form, or fashion. Instead I like the way David Lipscomb explained it on page 81 of his Gospel Advocate commentary on 2 Corinthians - “God had made Jesus who committed no sin to suffer as though he had sinned.” So 2 Corinthians 5:21a is teaching the same thing as Galatians 3:13. Saying Jesus was made to be sin for us is the same as saying Jesus was made a curse for us.

Some want to change “sin” to “sin offering” in 2 Corinthians 5:21a, but this Greek word “harmatia” is in the New Testament 174 times; in the King James Version it is translated “sin” 172 times, “sinful” 1 time, and “offense” 1 time. This “sin offering” rendering would make the Greek word “harmatia” mean opposite things (“sin” and “sin offering”) in the same verse. Doesn’t that run contrary to a standard rule of hermeneutics somewhere? And wouldn’t this word addition to the verse be counter to the main point of the verse - the irony that Jesus became what he never did?

There must be a reason no standard translation has “sin offering” in 2 Corinthians 5:21a:

KJV - For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin ...

ASV - Him who knew no sin he made to be sin on our behalf ...

ESV - For our sake he made him to be sin ...

NASB - He made Him who knew no sin to be sin in our behalf ...

NIV - God made him who had no sin to be sin for us ...

NKJV - For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us ...

RSV - For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin ...

Young’s Literal Translation - for him who did not know sin, in our behalf He did make sin ...

Would the reader be willing to admit - If all the standard translations are correct on this verse, the position this article takes is true? And the “sin offering” (no Substitution) position is only true if all the standard translations are wrong?

Instead of denying what a verse actually says (as Bob Myhan did with 2 Corinthians 5:21a; others do the same), wouldn’t it be better to accept what a verse says and then explain what it means? We are certainly no longer a “people of the book” anymore - when we feel the need to change the text of scripture to fit our doctrine.

The History of the Institutional Controversy (Part 10)

Jefferson David Tant | Hendersonville, Tennessee, USA

This emphasizes the need for each generation to be taught the basic principles over and over again. When

Israel came into the promised land, there were certain instructions that were given along these very lines. A stone memorial was to be placed at the crossing of the Jordan River as a perpetual reminder.

“And it came to pass, when all the nation were clean passed over the Jordan, that Jehovah spake unto Joshua, saying, Take you twelve men out of the people, out of every tribe a man, and command ye them, saying, Take you hence out of the midst of the Jordan, out of the place where the priests’ feet stood firm, twelve stones, and carry them over with you, and lay them down in the lodging-place, where ye shall lodge this night. Then Joshua called the twelve men, whom he had prepared of the children of Israel, out of every tribe a man: and Joshua said unto them, Pass over before the ark of Jehovah your God into the midst of the Jordan, and take you up every man of you a stone upon his shoulder, according unto the number of the tribes of the children of Israel; that this may be a sign among you, that, when your children ask in time to come, saying, What mean ye by these stones? then ye shall say unto them, Because the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of Jehovah; when it passed over the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off: and these stones shall be for a memorial unto the children of Israel for ever” (Joshua 4:1-7).

God’s ordinances were to be taught to successive generations.

“Now this is the commandment, the statutes, and the ordinances, which Jehovah your God commanded to teach you, that ye might do them in the land whither ye go over to possess it; that thou mightest fear Jehovah thy God, to keep all his statutes and his commandments, which I command thee, thou, and thy son, and thy son’s son, all the days of thy life; and that thy days may be prolonged” (Deuteronomy 6:1-2)

“And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be upon thy heart; and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thy house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thy hand, and they shall be for frontlets between thine eyes” (verses 6-8).

I remember gospel meetings as a boy in the 40s and 50s—tent meetings, camp meetings, etc. I often heard sermons on what was wrong with instrumental music in worship, but do not recall hearing a single lesson on the Missionary Society, yet these were the two prominent things that were a part of the division in the 19th Century. When the current division started 100 years later, it was not the instrumental music that was the issue, but Missionary Societies. They were not called Missionary Societies, for all knew they were wrong, but they didn’t know why they were wrong. Thus a generation that grew up untaught on a vital principle fell into error. Through the 50s and 60s, supporters of the liberal trends debated the issues, seeking to establish scriptural authority for their practices. But in time, they ceased to debate, as there was no solid ground on which to stand. Thus teaching on principles of authority became something of the past.

Now we have a generation that has grown up in institutional churches that has not been taught on the vital subject of how to determine Biblical authority, and as the result we see the increasing introduction of instrumental music and many other departures. In many places, by the time the older members die the instruments will be moved in without any objection. Let us learn from history, that the cycle not be repeated.

“In a private conversation in the late 1930s in the Gospel Advocate office, R.L. Whiteside told me that institutionalism would be the occasion of the next great apostasy.” (Irven Lee). And Whiteside’s prophecy has come to pass.

(Footnote: I must acknowledge the help of Homer Hailey, Ed Harrell, Steve Wolfgang and others in collecting much of the material in this treatise.)

Editors's Note: Thanks for this very edifying material, Brother Tant. Reader: When is the last time you heard a sermon on the authority of the Scriptures, the organization of the church, the work of the church, etc. As Brother Tant's grandfather, J.D. Tant, used to say, "Brethren, we're drifting."

Paul's Commendation To Those At Thessalonica

Jim Mickells | Lewisburg, Tennessee, USA

"For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come" (1 Thessalonians 1:9-10).

There are three great things said about those at Thessalonica which all people should imitate: how to become a Christian and how to remain faithful to the One whom they had chosen to serve. Notice these three words Paul uses as he describes their course of action; turned, serve, and wait.

They had turned to God. The word "turn" is defined as "to turn, to turn oneself; of Gentiles passing over to the religion of Christ" (Thayer's Greek English Lexicon). Notice Strong's comment about the use of this Greek word in the New Testament, "English Words used in **KJV**: turn 16; be converted 6; return 6; turn about 4; turn again 3; miscellaneous translations 4; [Total Count: 39]." We read of them turning to God when the apostle Paul and Silas came to Thessalonica reasoning with them from the Scriptures on three Sabbaths (Acts 17:1-2). Not only were Jews persuaded but "a great multitude of devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading women" as well. The gospel was God's power unto salvation then and it is still His power today which will cause men and women to turn to Him (Romans 1:16). Just as the apostle was ready to preach the gospel at Rome, so must you and I be ready to share this great message with all with whom we encounter.

From idols. This seems to indicate that most of those who turned to God, to Christianity on this occasion, were Gentiles. The definition of "idol" is, "idol, image; false god" (**A Concise Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament**). One can make an idol out of almost anything. It certainly could be a false god made with the hands of men (Acts 17:29). Yet it could also be material wealth (Colossians 3:5), pleasures of life (2 Timothy 3:4), or even one's self (Acts 12:21-23). Anything one would place ahead of God becomes his idol.

Their life was now lived in service to the Lord. It is interesting that Paul describes Jehovah as the "living and true God." This would be in opposition to the false gods made with hands which could not see, hear, or speak (Psalm 135:15-17). Those gods were false, yet the God of heaven is true, not fictitious or counterfeit. He is our Creator and Sustainer, the One through whom life is given. They were commended by Paul for their service to the Lord, "remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father" (1 Thessalonians 1:3). Those who are truly converted to Jehovah, must from that day forward serve Him with zeal and determination (Hebrews 6:10-12). One must obviously abstain from doing evil (1 Thessalonians 5:22), yet he must also be busy serving (Romans 12:11). The one who is great in the eyes of deity is the one who serves (Matthew 20:26-28). He serves the Lord and his fellow man.

Not only did they turn from idols to serve the living and true God, **they also patiently waited for the coming of His Son.** The word "wait" is defined as "to wait for one (i.e. to await one whose coming is known or foreseen), with the added notion of patience and trust" (Thayer Greek-English Lexicon). Certainly, Jesus Christ made a promise to come again (John 14:3-4). As He ascended into heaven after His resurrection, it was announced by two angelic beings to the apostles, He would return as they had seen Him taken up from them (Acts 1:10-11). The Christians in Thessalonica anticipated His coming, yet they did not simply sit idly by till those events took place. They were busy making preparation if such did occur in their lifetime. No one knows when that will occur (Matthew 24:36), though all must be ready when He

returns (Matthew 25:1-13).

It is my hope and prayer if one has not been converted to the true and living God, they will turn to Him - giving up any idols which may be vying for their affection, allowing the Lord to rule their hearts and minds (Luke 17:21), busy working in His kingdom, serving Him and others, patiently looking for the return of Jesus Christ. When He returns may He find us all watching and waiting with great anticipation, ready to go home and live eternally with our great God, His Son, and His Spirit.

Midlife Prizes

Mike Thomas | Bowling Greek, Kentucky, USA

We are told that a man of advancing years will enter a period of life known as a "mid-life crisis" because of his realization that his time on earth is coming to an end. He wrestles with how quickly life has passed and how it seems his best days are behind him. Some men respond to this period of time with a greater determination to find pleasure from whatever lusts remain from his youth. He may not have the strength he once had, but he is convinced he can finally find fulfillment in carnal, self-centered living. Unfortunately, he is deceived more than ever and will pay an even greater price than he did in his youthful ignorance, especially if he has a reputation as a family man, a man of wisdom, or as a Christian. It will be as Solomon warned, "Dead flies putrefy the perfumer's ointment, and cause it to give off a foul odor; so does a little folly to one respected for wisdom and honor" (Ecclesiastes 10:1). A midlife crisis can undo a lifetime of good deeds, love, generosity, and commitment, and will lead only to heartache, ruined relationships, and possibly a heart attack. There is way too much to lose to approach life like this.

Instead of lamenting over what could have been, the midlife Christian will see his (or her) diminishing time on earth as a blessing to cherish, and extract as much value as possible from the time that remains. They understand the significance of offering the prayer in Psalm 90:12, "So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom." Age has given him a vantage point that allows him to look back and see how quickly life has passed, and how even more quickly the future days will be, if the Lord wills. His advancing years did not rob him of youthful desires as much as they provided him with "prizes" that he did not appreciate in his younger days. This is especially true regarding his family.

Despite what some religions teach, people will not participate in marriage after this life. I know that ruins a lot of people's plans and expectations, but it is the truth. Jesus said people in eternity "neither marry nor are given in marriage" (Mark 12:25). It is a relationship found only in this life. Because of that, the aging Christian realizes this and takes the time each day to appreciate his wife. He accepts the advice of Solomon who said, "Live joyfully with the wife whom you love all the days of your vain life which He has given you under the sun, all your days of vanity; for that is your portion in life, and in the labor which you perform under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 9:9). He knows the day is coming when that portion will be taken from him. He and his wife may have an even greater relationship awaiting them as individual souls around God's eternal throne (cf. Revelation 7:9-10), but their relationship of husband and wife will be concluded. A Christian with midlife "prizes" realizes this and cherishes every moment with her, and vice-versa.

A man counting his midlife prizes will also let his parents and siblings know he loves them, since life has shown him that those relationships will also cease one day. He has seen other people bury their family members and knows it is only a matter of time before he does the same with his. Therefore, "Listen to your father who begot you, and do not despise your mother when she is old" (Proverbs 23:22). The day is coming when their presence will be a distant memory. (I have yet to meet a Christian man or woman, whose parents have passed on, who did not say they would give anything to see them one more time to say they love them.) A man with midlife prizes gets it and takes advantage of the family blessings that remain.

As an older Christian, he sees the value of hugging his children and letting them know how much he loves them, no matter their age. It might be the last time he gets to see them forever. This is especially true if

some of them are not living by faith in God. He prays for them throughout the day and is motivated by the impending Judgment to not give up on encouraging and warning them when he can (cf. Genesis 19:14). He prays for them because his love for them is just as real as it ever was, and he wants more than anything to be at peace with them, but his love for Christ will not let him compromise God's word to accommodate or support their sinful lifestyle. Instead, he bears the burden of seeking first the kingdom of heaven and trusts in God to work out the rest. He is not sure how it will happen, but he stakes his confidence in God's promise to eventually "wipe away every tear" from his eyes (Revelation 21:4). Nevertheless, he embraces his children while he can; knowing that it too is a temporal relationship in life.

A Christian man in midlife is a tremendous asset to the Lord's church because of his perspective. He has lived long enough to know that fear is a façade (cf. 2 Timothy 1:7) and that anything is possible through courage, hard work, persistence, and patience. Consequently, he is a tremendous asset in seeking the lost and in sharing God's saving message (cf. James 1:21). He knows all too well of the mercy God has shown him and is more than ready to extend it to others. Because of that, he joins Paul in committing to a life of sacrifice for Christ. "Things" do not matter as much to him any more as do principle, purpose, and eternal expectation. Consequently, he says, "But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ... that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead" (Philippians 3:7, 10-11).

Thus, life under the sun is a beautiful journey for the child of God. His life "shall be as a prize to him" (Jeremiah 21:9) because of the valuable things God and time have shown him. Instead of squandering that insight on foolish living, the man (and woman) of God will view their midlife with tremendous gratitude and faith. Grateful for all that God has let them find and experience, but sensible enough to know He will see them through whatever trials remain. The only mid-life crisis they have is finding enough time and energy to do all the good they want to accomplish before they leave. But their intention is to die faithful in the Lord like all the other godly servants from times past. Hopefully, they will have it said of them like it was said of David: "He died at a good old age, having enjoyed a full life, wealth, and honor" (1 Chronicles 29:28). Until then, they "shall still bear fruit in old age" and still be "fresh and flourishing" in their final days (Psalm 92:14).

I Have Given My Word To The LORD

William Stewart | Odessa, Ontario, Canada

The words in our title were spoken by Jephthah, a judge in Israel. This man made a foolish vow to the LORD, stating:

"If You will indeed deliver the people of Ammon into my hands, then it will be that whatever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the people of Ammon, shall surely be the LORD's; and I will offer it up as a burnt offering."

(Judges 11:30-31)

One has to wonder what he expected when he returned from the battle. Would one of his best lambs come bounding toward him? Did he hope for a kid of the goats to run out to greet him? His was a foolish vow which would result in sorrow rather than joy upon his return.

Before we consider the fulfillment of his vow, it seems appropriate to discuss why the vow was not only foolish but selfish. In fact, had Jephthah trusted in the goodness of God, he would have found the vow unnecessary.

Jephthah is described as "a mighty man of valor" but the "son of a harlot" (Judges 11:1). His brothers, the sons of Gilead, drove him out from the family, for they would not have the son of a harlot share their inheritance with them (Judges 11:2).

Cast away by his family, Jephthah joined himself to a band of worthless men and became a raider with them (Judges 11:3). It is unfortunate that his new family were criminals and encouraged him in the same. How long Jephthah was pillaging from the land of Tob, we do not know.

After Ammon began to make war with Israel, the men of Gilead petitioned Jephthah to return from Tob. They wanted him to lead them in the battle against the people of Ammon. If successful, he would be given authority over them (Judges 11:8-11).

He was given command over them (Judges 11:11) and contacted the king of Ammon to determine why he had attacked Israel. It was a dispute over land; land that the LORD had given to Israel several generations before. Jephthah encouraged the king of Ammon to be satisfied with the land he had. He provided a history lesson, demonstrating that for over 300 years, the kings of Ammon had made no effort to take the land in question. Why should he do so now? However, the king of Ammon did not listen to Jephthah.

The writer tells us,

Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthah... (Judges 11:29)

We are not told how the Spirit come upon him was manifest, but surely he knew it. Thus, it is perplexing that the very next thing recorded of Jephthah is a vow which would alter the course of his family forever. Quite simply, if the Lord was with him, there was no need for the vow. God would provide the victory as He had for so many of His people before. On the other hand, if the Lord was not with him, he'd not find success by trying to swing a deal with God. Either way, the vow was unnecessary, foolish, and would bring him sorrow.

He was acquainted with the history of the people of God, as evidenced by his message to the king of Ammon. He'd know about the victories of Moses, Joshua, Othniel, Deborah, Gideon, and the other leaders in Israel. His faithfulness, not his vow, would gain victory.

Well, did Jephthah kill his daughter as a sacrifice to God? I will be as plain as I can be - NO! It amazes me how many people will read this historical record and conclude that he must have bound his daughter, laid her on an altar, and set her on fire. It shocks me even more that folks can believe God would endorse or receive such a sacrifice.

Moses' law commanded:

There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire... (Deuteronomy 18:10)

Was it wrong to sacrifice your children to Molech (Leviticus 18:21), but okay to give them as a burnt offering to the Lord? Later in Israel's history, the kings of Israel, and even some in Judah would make their children pass through the fire (2 Kings 16:3; 17:17; etc.). Every time such an act is found among God's people in Scripture, it is identified as an abomination. There is no mention in Judges 11 of Jephthah committing an abomination.

Some may, through some twisted leap of logic, look at Genesis 22, and conclude that Jephthah certainly may have given his daughter as a burnt offering to the Lord, since that is what God expected Abraham to do with Isaac, his only son. Friend, do you really think that God wanted to smell the burnt flesh of Isaac on an altar? It was not Isaac that the Lord wanted, but Abraham. Genesis 22 was a test of Abraham's faith. As you may recall, Isaac returned with his father from the mount; God providing a ram caught in the thickets for a burnt offering. Do you think no alternative was available to Jephthah but to offer his only daughter as a burnt offering to God?

What if a sickly kid of the goats was the first to come out? Should he give it as a burnt offering? No, for Deuteronomy 15:21-22 says nothing with a defect could be offered. The same is true if it was a beast that

had born a burden or was an unclean animal. Jephthah's vow did not bind him to offer as a sacrifice that which was not lawful to offer. Was it lawful for him to give his daughter as a burnt offering to God? I maintain the answer to this is a resounding "NO."

I understand he said he couldn't go back on his word (Judges 11:35), and she agreed with him (Judges 11:36). Friend, this does not necessitate that he offered her on an altar as a burnt offering. Rather, he gave her to the LORD, not as a burnt offering, but as a dedicated person (see Leviticus 27:2-8). It may be that he couldn't redeem her due to his vow, and so she may have been devoted to service at the tabernacle, much as the case was with Samuel (1 Samuel 1:11, 22-28; 2:11). But she was a woman, not a man, like Samuel; and was not of the priestly tribe. In Luke 2, we read about Anna, a widow who "...*who did not depart from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day*" (Luke 2:37). Is there a reason this young virgin in Israel could not do the same?

Jephthah's daughter asked her father to have two months to herself before he carried out his vow. He granted it, and she departed for the two months, not to bewail her impending death - it was to mourn her virginity (Judges 11:37-38). At the end of two months, she returned and he carried out his vow. Notice what verse 39 states, "*She knew no man.*" If he sacrificed her as a burnt offering, that is an exceptional understatement of what happened! As the chapter closes out, we're told the daughters of Israel would lament the daughter of Jephthah each year for four days - not her death, but her virginity. Having been dedicated to the service of God through her father's vow, she would never marry.

The Christian and Gambling (Part 1)

Julius C. Nwankwo | Ahiaba, Nigeria

Gambling, both legal and illegal, is a phenomenon gaining unprecedented acceptance in our world today. Because it is so common, Christians must look at this activity critically from the Bible's view to determine its ethical and moral implications.

Gambling Defined

Advocates of gambling often try to place this activity in the same category as other ventures which involve risk, like farming, business, insurance, and even investments. They say these are gambling because the outcome is unpredictable and losses can occur. In this way they want us to believe that gambling should be given the same respectability of legitimate ventures.

Yes as Christians we must admit that "Life does have its normal risks which one must accept with faith and courage." These normal risks are in no wise equal to the risks in a game of chance. Gambling creates artificial risks in the hope of excessive gain far beyond what the investment of time, money, or skill would justify. In gambling the chance is unrelated to any creative effort called for by the farmer or the business man in the responsible investment of his mental, monetary, and physical funds.

To distinguish gambling from risks involved in legitimate venture it will be helpful to recognize three factors that are very integral to gambling: (1) An incentive consisting of money or merchandise is offered. (2) The prize is acquired primarily on the basis of chance. (3) A payment of money or other consideration is required to become involved in the chance taken.

Gambling then is recognized as any activity in which wealth changes hands, mainly on the basis of chance and with risk to the gambler. Creative effort, useful skills, and responsible investment are not integral factors.

Because gambling exists in many forms and people in increasing numbers are exposed to its temptations, the responsible Christian must form an opinion concerning its propriety. The legalization of gambling by governments of the world or its acceptance by some religious bodies cannot be a criterion for evaluation.

The Christian attitude must be determined by the principles of Scripture (the word of God).

God's Attitude Toward Gambling

God's people in Bible times apparently were not greatly tempted with gambling. It seems the vice manifested itself only when Israel was dominated by heathen nations. When gambling did occur God clearly indicated His attitude concerning it.

During their Babylonian captivity the Israelites came under the influence of people who gambled. As a result some of the captives also became involved. To these people God through Isaiah said, "Ye are they that forsake the Lord, that forget my holy mountain, that prepare a table for that troop, and that furnish the drink offering unto that number" (Isaiah 65:11, **KJV**). As indicated in some modern translations of the Bible, the Hebrew words translated "troop" and "number" were names of the heathen gods "Gad" and "Meni." To the heathen, Gad was the giver of good luck. Meni was the god of bad luck.

The sin for which some of the Israelites were condemned was trusting in luck rather than God. Isaiah made it clear that trust in God and trust in luck cannot coexist. If people rely on chance it is evident they do not rely on God. Isaiah described those who trusted in gambling as "they that forsake the Lord" (Isaiah 65:11).

Biblical Principles

A careful reading of Scripture makes it clear there are numerous biblical principles which indicate gambling is an evil to be avoided. When people recognize God's authority they will honor the principles which indicate gambling is evil.

1. Gambling is wrong because it is a disregard of responsible stewardship. The Bible clearly teaches that all things belong to God. "The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it" (Psalm 24:1). Since all things belong to God, people are placed in the position of stewards who must give a proper accounting for everything given to them in trust. The first step in a faithful administration of this stewardship is the giving of self to God. Believers must recognize they are not their own (1 Corinthians 6:19). They have been redeemed with a price, not of silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Jesus (1 Peter 1:18-19). The churches of Macedonia set a worthy example of personal dedication when "they gave themselves first to the Lord" (2 Corinthians 8:5). Life, with all it involves, is a stewardship to be administered for the glory of God.

People who honestly dedicate themselves to God will also recognize that all they possess must be handled as a stewardship. The Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30) indicates that the good and faithful servants administered the talents entrusted to them in such a way that the master was pleased. The wicked and slothful servant failed in his administration and suffered the appropriate consequences.

When people recognize their stewardship responsibilities they will not consider gambling in any form a proper administration of divinely bestowed resources, time, and ability. Even the ethics of the world will not tolerate those who gamble with resources put in their trust. Christian responsibility transcends all other responsibility, and for the Christian, gambling is wrong. It is a total disregard of the principle of stewardship. It is a prostitution of God-given assets which should be used to glorify God and advance His kingdom. (to be continued)

Matthew 24 (Part 3)

Patrick Andrews | Conway, Arkansas, USA

For a long time, I have been urging people to make their faith; their faith. What you or anyone else believes on any given biblical topic has to come from an honest investigation of the Scriptures. Each person must decide if what they believe harmonizes with what God's Word teaches or not. Your faith cannot be the faith

that your granny handed down to your mama which, she in turn, handed down to you. That's not to say that you and your granny can't both believe the same truth; it means that each one of us must be convinced by his own study.

We must believe what we believe because it is truly what we believe and not because it's the family religion. Your faith has to be your faith. Your walk with God is based on the footsteps you take throughout your life. We are not going to be judged in groups and remember that God doesn't have any grandchildren!

The things that I write on Matthew 24 and other topics are things that I believe to be truth. You have to decide if I am following truth or if I've stepped off the path. I do not tell other people what to believe nor do I want them to believe something simply because it is what I believe. Paul told the Corinthians to follow him...as he followed Christ (I Corinthians 11:1).

The opposite of this is what the Pharisees did. The Pharisees went out of their way to convert people, not to truth, but to their way of thinking and their doctrine. In so doing, they caused people to become twofold more the children of hell as they were themselves (Matthew 23:15).

There is a world of difference in teaching someone the truth and manipulating them to believe as you believe solely because it is what you believe.

A man can be honest, but if he doesn't study God's Word for himself, he will be led down the wrong path. Satan will make sure of that. There are people in the world that do study, but they are not honest. Satan will delegate to them the job of leading the honest, but ignorant people down the road to hell (Hosea 4:7). We have to study the Scriptures for ourselves and be honestly searching for truth. Your faith has to be your faith!

With these thoughts in mind, let us continue on in Matthew 24.

In Matthew's account the disciples ask Jesus three questions, but you could say that they only asked Him two, because the last two are talking about the same thing. At this point in time, the apostles had not been guided into all truth by the Holy Spirit (John 16:13), so they could have erroneously asked three separate questions, not realizing how the last two questions are inseparably connected. Whatever they knew or however many questions they asked is irrelevant because the Lord only answers two questions and in so doing links his second coming with the end of the world.

Matthew 24:4 "And Jesus answered..."

Jesus answers both questions in the order that the questions were asked. The first question concerns the destruction of Jerusalem when the temple buildings would be destroyed. Jesus answers this first question in verses four through thirty-five. I will show you why I believe this, but you have to make up your own mind whether my views harmonize with the Truth or not. We can understand what Jesus is teaching here if we will just break it down in sections and take note of a couple of words that automatically divide one section from another and one topic from another.

In verses four through thirty-five, Jesus is answering their first question about the destruction of Jerusalem. These verses (4-35) are separated into three different sections that tell of three different periods of time. It is very important to note that in every one of these sections, there will be signs preceding each period of time and each period of time will be leading up to "the when" of when Jerusalem will be destroyed. These first three sections will answer the first question. Notice:

(a) Signs referred to as, "**The Beginning of Sorrows**" (Matthew 24:4-8)

(b) We could call this second section, (Matthew 24:9-14) "**Nearer Signs**".

(c) The third section could be called, "**The Signs That Destruction Is Knocking at the Door**" (Matthew 24:15-35).

Please note that Jesus is warning the disciples about a future time when many will make false claims to be The Christ and many people will be deceived by these false claims. So far as I've been able to understand, nobody ever made this false claim while Jesus still walked the earth (Matthew 24:5). These false claims started some time after Christ's ascension, but before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. These signs and these deceptions are the topic of Jesus' answer to the first question.

The second sign of the "The Beginning Of Sorrows" shows that these world upheavals would happen in other places, outside of Jerusalem. They couldn't be taking place in Jerusalem or everyone would know it and they wouldn't be just rumors. When the disciples, who were in Jerusalem, heard of wars and rumors of wars in various places, then they would know that their destruction was getting closer to them.

I will stop here for now. If God is willing, I will pick up here in March's issue of MOTT

Complacency

O. Lesley Egharevba | Lagos, Nigeria

Merriam Webster's Dictionary defines complacency as "a feeling of being satisfied with how things are and not wanting to try to make them better." This definition is invaluable to this discussion. Some folks are sincerely but ignorantly carried away by the swelling current of complacency and perhaps mediocrity. Little do they know that their lackadaisical attitudes towards the things of God and their nonchalance towards errors are detrimental. In Proverbs 1:32, the Bible says "For the waywardness of the simple will kill them and the complacency of fools will destroy them," and in Revelation 3:16, Jesus said to the church in Laodicea, "So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth." These passages are clear that complacency is wrong and destructive. A lukewarm church is a complacent church, and Christ says He will vomit such out of His mouth.

Kyle Butt summarizes the meaning of complacency when he said:

"Few and far between are those brave individuals who have the fortitude to swim against the swelling current of mediocrity and the status quo. Most are content to sit by, occasionally complaining about this situation or that, never making bold, decisive moves in an attempt to make their world a better place by standing for what they think is right regardless of the cost. Undoubtedly, some are guilty of this and several reasons are behind complacency. Sometimes, out of unnecessary fear of the unknown, people prefer to allow 'the sleeping dog lie.' It could also be lack of faith and conviction of what one believes. Often, when a doctrinal discussion is going on, the attitude of certain people is to keep reiterating the refrain; 'Let us stop the arguments and let love lead.' They prefer the ecumenical spirit which is obviously a disguise for compromise and they are just satisfied with the way things are going that they would not want any 'noise' or 'dust' to be raised. Are we not commanded to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered? (Jude 3)."

While it is true that we must let love lead, we must realize that true love does not rejoice in iniquity (1 Corinthians 13:6). And so, the right attitude towards doctrinal differences is not to remain silent and allow anything and everything to go.

Pricilla and Aquila would have done much havoc if they had just simply ignored the great preacher, Apollos, when they heard him speak, knowing that he was oblivious of the baptism enjoined by Christ (Acts 18:25). They understood that it was sinful for them to fail to do something when they knew the right thing to do (James 4:17).

The Antioch church was not complacent when a strange doctrine was introduced to them (Acts 15:1-3).

The apostle Paul was always in the act of defending God's Word and tackling errors (Acts 15:1-2; 18:19; 19:8). In his letter to the Philippians, he declared that he was "set for the defense of the gospel" (Philippians 1:17) and just like Christ, he was "doing and teaching" (cf. Acts 1:1). Also, the great preacher Apollos was said to have "mightily convinced the Jews" (Acts 18:28). This was not done by being quiet or ignoring the religious confusions in his time.

When we take our minds back to the Reformation, despite the several theological concoctions that were prepared by the Roman Catholic Church and shoved into the throat of the people at that time, there was this brave man, Martin Luther, who stood against those things he considered wrong.

Kyle Butt describes him thus:

"He was a daring, courageous man who wanted the general mass of people to experience what he considered to be the true grace of God, free from the oppressive practices that were then taking place in the Catholic Church. In 1517, the nail he drove through his 95 theses simultaneously drove a separating wedge between his followers and the Catholic Church."

Brethren in the churches of Christ in the past have stood seriously for the gospel of Christ. Several of them were so skilled in polemics and engaged in public oral and written debates to defend God's Word. Men like Joe S. Warlick (1866-1941), who had 399 religious debates with several people including folks from various denominations, was known for his doggedness in the defense of God's word. Twenty three times, he debated Ben Bogard (1868-1951), who is perhaps the greatest Baptist debater that ever existed and who was disturbing the religious world in America with the Baptist blunders.

Another great mind was W. Curtis Porter (1897-1960), who participated in 77 debates and dissolved several Baptists aspirins as well as defended the Book of God. His first debate was held in 1916 with D.N. Jackson, a noted Baptist debater of that time. At this time, Brother Porter was only 19 years old, and he unmasked sophistry in a masterful way. He was the last person who debated Ben Bogard in 1948. Bogard had 237 public debates in his lifetime.

A lot could be said of others including C.R. Nichol (1876-1961), Harold F. Sharp, Sr. (1915-1987), Leslie Diestelkamp (1911-95), Roy E. Cogdill (1907-85), Cecil Willis (1932-1997), etc. and the list is endless. Some of these brethren left their comfort zones and risked their lives traveling to various countries to propagate the gospel of Christ. A lot of them trained their children in the way of the Lord, and they carry on the propagation of the Gospel.

Brother Harold Sharp's children are great preachers of the gospel. During his lifetime, Brother Harold had several debates and the most notable of these was with Dr. Cobb in 1954 where C.R. Nichol served as Harold's moderator and D.N. Jackson moderated for Dr. Cobb.

Time and space will not permit me to talk about others. Where are the voices of our leaders today? Most complain about the influx of heresies in the religious world but never attempt to do anything about it.

Some want to adopt the sponsoring church arrangement before they could do God's work. Others wish to do it through a human organization. These men never adopted any of these, but they turned the world upside down during their lifetime.

How often do you preach the gospel? What is your attitude towards doctrinal errors? The COVID-19 pandemic has made some people to relent in their evangelistic work. Since most cannot go out, they resolved not to do anything. Brethren, "to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin" (James 4:17). Let us wake up and do something!

Reference

Advertisement Censored by Our Local Newspaper

The Ad We Sent

Does God Approve Homosexuality?

Keith Sharp

"For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty for their error which was due" (Romans 1:26-27). How does it read to you?

The Paper's Response

Following up with you,

First thank you so much for informing us that your contact info has changed.

Below was the email I sent last week,

- I wanted to reach out and confirm we have tried to get this ad approved but the legal department and layout have decided that this specific content cannot be run.

I apologize for the late notice but if you have any other ads/content ready to run we are welcome to run as of now we will refund and cancel this run.

Let me know if you have any questions.

Thank you so much for your patience.

My Reply

Thank you for being honest and up front with me about the reason the ad was not run. And thank you for making a sincere effort to get the ad approved.

The First Amendment to our Constitution reads in part: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press..." The same section of our Constitution that guarantees a free press also insures freedom of religion and freedom of speech. How can the staff of the "Baxter Bulletin" claim freedom of the press while denying freedom of speech and of religion? Perhaps they should study how freedom of speech and of the press were denied in the rise of such totalitarian regimes as Nazi Germany and the USSR.

I do not deny anyone the right to defend homosexuality or to be a member of a church that defends it. In fact, I have participated in two public debates over homosexuality in which the opposing speaker was a practicing homosexual and a bishop in the Metropolitan Community Church, a denomination that openly advocates homosexuality. One of those discussions was conducted in the building of a church of Christ. Why should I be denied the right to oppose a practice the Scriptures so plainly condemn that the "Baxter Bulletin" refuses to print the verses?

Christians have been fearful for some time that religious persecution is coming, and the refusal to publish a simple, direct quote of Scripture is a form of such persecution. Christians are not allowed to simply quote without comment in the paper what the Lord in His Word says about homosexuality. Those connected with "Baxter Bulletin" who made this decision should hang their heads in shame for censoring the Word of God.

I hope the staff of the "Baxter Bulletin" will reconsider their terrible decision. It has huge ramifications for the freedom and righteousness of our nation. Until they do so, the Highway 5 South Church of Christ will cancel all advertisement in the paper.

"Righteousness exalts a nation, But sin is a reproach to any people" (Proverbs 14:34).

Again, thank you for trying to get the ad approved.

Sincerely and Without Malice,
Keith Sharp



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