



# March 2021

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

## In This Issue...

- **Question from Nigeria about Fellowship**
- **How Short Is "Too Short"?**  
| *Jefferson David Tant*
- **Genesis 22 - Jesus Died "Instead Of"**  
| *Pat Donahue*
- **"Set Your Mind"** | *Jim Mickells*
- **Put Away Lying** | *Mike Thomas*
- **Come And See** | *William Stewart*
- **The Christian And Gambling (Part 2)** | *Julius C. Nwankwo*
- **Matthew 24 (Part 4)** | *Patrick Andrews*
- **Finding Your Way to Truth**  
| *Roger G. Mattingly*
- **The Ruler of Elders** | *Keith Sharp*

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](http://christistheway.com).

## Question from Nigeria about Fellowship

### Question

Greetings and thanks for taking the time to answer questions on MOTT all the time.

2 John 9 "Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son." (KJV)

Galatians 2:11-14 11 When Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face because he stood condemned. 12 For before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. 13 The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray. 14 When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in front of them all, 'You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?'"

I have taken time to study your scriptural positions (from your website) on Women covering and asking question/s during bible study. I agree with your scriptural stand on those questions. However, I begin to be worried about the following:

1. In the year 2000, I was trained as a preacher in South-western, Nigeria. I was taught that it is unscriptural to fellowship with error and false brethren who will not uphold the truth. Honestly, I agree with that position, so I refused to receive support from the liberal brethren.
2. However, in the last 20 years, some preachers continue to hold and teach that women covering and asking questions during bible study are a matter of faith with a universal application. They posit that Preachers/Elders who teach and condone such doctrinal errors are leading men to perdition.
3. My question: Is it ethical and scriptural for Preachers/Elders in Nigeria to knowingly receive American supports from brethren who teach and condone doctrinal errors that lead men to perdition such as women not covering their heads in worship, and asking questions during bible study? Since the questions are matters of faith, at what point do we draw the line of fellowship?

### **Answer**

Thank you for your very thoughtful question. I will do my very best to give you a scriptural answer.

Your training concerning fellowship was good, and I concur with it (2 John verses 9-11).

The apostle Paul labeled the woman's head covering a "custom" (1 Corinthians 11:16) and commanded the women in Corinth both to wear long hair and an artificial head covering (verses 2-16), because the Gentile custom (Greek and Roman) was for women to do so (Ibid). But churches of Christ generally had no such custom (1 Corinthians 11:16). I learned in my first trip to Nigeria in 1992 that a Yoruba woman would be considered immoral if she failed to wear a head covering. Women who live where this is a custom should follow that custom.

Since I consider the feminine head covering a matter of opinion (cf. Romans 14:14, 23), I do not press my position (Romans 14:14), and I accept those who disagree with me, as long as they accept me (Romans 14:1-3).

It is sinful for a woman to teach the Bible over a man or men (1 Corinthians 14:34-35; 1 Timothy 2:11-12), but that doesn't mean a woman can't ask questions or make comments in Bible class, as long as she doesn't take charge.

It takes more than being wrong on a scriptural issue to make one a false teacher who should be marked and avoided. "False teachers" teach "destructive heresies" (2 Peter 2:1), things that if followed would cause one to be lost. Some disagreements don't involve sin or denial of the faith. We can disagree over what the "gift of the Holy Spirit" is (Acts 2:38; 10:45), as long as we do not claim to have miraculous spiritual gifts, including inspiration. We must be slow to label brethren as false teachers (Titus 3:10-11).

In Galatians 2:11-14 Peter was sinning by refusing to eat with Gentiles, and he was leading others to sin. We must oppose sinful acts, particularly those of influential leaders of the church (1 Timothy 5:19-20).

Even if we identify one as a "false teacher," some are to be handled differently than others (Jude 22-23). We don't treat a man who shows his honesty by willingness to study the same as one who stubbornly opposes the truth (Acts 13:6-11; 18:24-28). But, toward those who stubbornly persist in teaching damnable error or troubling the brethren over their opinions, we must contend earnestly with them (Jude 3), reject them (Titus 3:11), and refuse to share with them in their work (2 John 10-11).

Since I consider the woman's head covering and women asking questions in class matters of opinion, I don't have the problem of fellowship (Romans 14:1 – 15:4). Furthermore, just as an observation, my experience is that if you persist in opposing error, even with a loving attitude, you won't have to worry about fellowship. Those who teach the error will withdraw from you. It's happened to me repeatedly.

Nigerian preachers should honestly, openly let American supporters know their convictions. Americans should listen and discuss these matters openly. I know for a fact there are many outstanding Bible

scholars in Nigeria. Be slow to draw lines of fellowship, but never condone damnable error or sin.

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## How Short Is "Too Short"?

Jefferson David Tant | Hendersonville, Tennessee, USA

If you haven't noticed, the summer months are coming, which brings in the season for the shedding not only of winter coats, but also the shedding of modesty. Then the question is raised about "How short is too short?" This is a question that those professing to follow Christ must consider.

We are aware of Paul's instruction to Timothy: "Likewise, I want women to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly garments, but rather by means of good works, as is proper for women making a claim to godliness" (1 Timothy 2:9-10). We know that Paul is not condemning fixing hair or wearing nice things, but is saying the emphasis should be on her manner of life rather than her manner of dress. But he does mention "proper clothing, modestly and discreetly." So, what does that mean? "Proper" in the Greek means "orderly, i.e. decorous:--of good behaviour, modest." "Modestly" carries the idea of "bashfulness, i.e. (towards men), modesty or (towards God) awe:--reverence." And "discreetly" refers to "soundness of mind, i.e. (literally) sanity or (figuratively) self-control:--sobriety, sobriety." Then Paul says the way a woman dresses is to make a declaration that she claims to be serving God. The way she dresses should cause no one to suppose that she is not a God-fearing woman.

Now, back to the "shortness." We remember the story of Adam and Eve who realized their nakedness after eating the forbidden fruit. So "they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings" (Genesis 3:7). These "loin coverings" in other translations are rendered "girdles" or "aprons." We are aware that such a garment would cover the middle part of the body.

But we remember that God was not satisfied with this, for the text goes on to say, "The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife, and clothed them" (3:21). The "garment" God made for them is from the Hebrew "kethoneth," and according to **Gesenius' Hebrew and English Lexicon**, refers to "a garment such as a tunic, commonly reaching to the knee." That's interesting. The knee has long seemed to be a sensible "drawing line" for women's garments. Everybody has a knee, and knows where it is. And if God thought that was a proper length, that's good enough for me. And I hope it's good enough for our sisters, as well. How do our ladies' skirts measure up?

Then there is the beach wear. One piece, two piece, bikini, whatever. "Everybody else has a swim suit on, so I'm not out of place." OK, what about a nudist beach? "Everybody else is naked, so I won't be out of place." Just because "everybody else..." is not a good reason to do anything. If a swimsuit or shorts and halter is modest apparel, then why not wear it to church? Many years ago when I was a teenager in Texas, a girl we called "Sister" liked to compete in girls' events in rodeos. One time she was out of town for a Saturday event and planned to be back home Saturday night. But the car broke down and she had to spend the night away. Sunday morning she went to church in her rodeo outfit. That wasn't her normal "Sunday go to meetin'" clothing, but she was modestly attired. Suppose she had been at a swimming competition, or even a track meet with shorts. Knowing her as I did, she would not have gone to church in such attire. (And she didn't dress that way at any time.)

Mary Quant, the London fashion designer and mother of the mini-skirt, stated: "Mini-clothes are symbolic of those girls who want to seduce a man..." When asked where it was all leading to (miniskirts, etc.) she replied with one word "sex."

At a church near a university where many students attended, they had some difficulty in recruiting men to serve communion in the area where many students sat. When asked for an explanation, it was told that it was difficult to stand at the end of a row to pass the trays when there was often such an exposure of breasts due to low cut or otherwise revealing outfits.

In teaching a teenage class at summer camp, I asked the young people why girls wore revealing clothing. Almost universally, the teenagers summed it up in one word—"advertising." So... Ladies, when you go out in public, what are you "advertising," your godliness or your worldliness? In our summer work in Jamaica, we take several young people with us, and as we walk about the town, I recall being asked, "Are you Christians?" How could they tell? By the way we were dressed.

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## **Genesis 22 - Jesus Died "In The Stead Of"**

Pat Donahue | Harvest, Alabama, USA

We're all familiar with the Genesis 22 story (and typology) of God asking Abraham to offer his son Isaac as a burnt sacrifice. We also know from texts like John 1:29 which teach Jesus is the "Lamb of God" that all animal sacrifices in the Old Testament were a type of Christ. That would of course include the ram that ended up being sacrificed in Genesis 22:13 "in the stead of" Isaac. Let's don't overlook the significance of this "instead of" concept. As Maurice Barnett wrote in Gospel Truths in June 2012 - "Certainly, the ram was killed on the altar in the place of Isaac because the text says so."

So if the ram (being a sacrifice) was a type of Christ, what would that make Isaac in the typology? Wouldn't Isaac in a sense represent us? Just as Isaac was the one who was supposed to die that day but the text says the ram died instead, we are the ones who are supposed to die (spiritually) for our sins (Romans 6:23), but Christ the lamb died (physically) instead of us (1 Corinthians 15:3). This is what is meant by Jesus' "Substitutionary" death. Our sins were laid on Jesus instead of on us (Isaiah 53:6c); he became a curse instead of us (Galatians 3:13).

The ram dying in the place of Isaac then is a type of Christ (Heb 10:1) - therefore Christ died in place of us. See the proof? In order to oppose this argument, one gospel preacher (Gantt Carter) responded in an email to me on 4-26-2017: "I don't believe that 'any sacrifice before Jesus was a type.'" Gantt's problem was - how would you find a verse that teaches one animal sacrifice was a type of Christ, but another (i.e. Genesis 22:13) was not? It appears he feels forced to this conclusion. That's what this controversy has come to. In order to consistently oppose the Bible's teaching on the Substitutionary Death Of Christ, a person has to deny that "any sacrifice before Jesus was a type." Doesn't that fly in the face of passages like Isaiah 53:7; 1 Peter 1:18-19; Revelation 14:4, and the texts we've already mentioned?

I think we all agree Abraham's response to Isaac in verse 8, "God will provide himself a lamb," was not only a reference to the ram caught in the thicket in verse 13, but also has the double meaning of God providing a lamb (Jesus) to take care of our sins. Because of our sins, we are hopelessly lost and on the way to spending eternity in a burning fire with the devil, and there is no way we can solve this problem on our own. So God solved the problem for us! Louis Berkhof's comment says it well: "God might have demanded a personal atonement of the sinner, but the latter would not have been able to render it." God provided the solution - Jesus the Lamb of God. And if we take advantage of that by trusting and obeying (2 Thessalonians 1:8), now our relationship with God is restored and we are on our way to spending eternity with God in heaven. We should be so thankful Jesus died for our sins (instead of us having to do so) - that we are willing to serve him with all our heart and soul (Deuteronomy 10:12).

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## **"Set Your Mind"**

Jim Mickells | Lewisburg, Tennessee, USA

*"If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth..." (Colossians 3:1-2).*

Paul encouraged the brethren at Colosse in this passage to be sure their mind was focused in the right place. The word “set” is defined as, “to direct one’s mind to a thing, to seek, to strive for” (Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon. 658). I am so afraid that far too many Christians are more mindful of the things on the earth rather than the spiritual blessings which come from heaven. The things on earth would be “terrestrial goods, pleasures, honors” (ibid, p. 114).

We should find ourselves meditating on our Heavenly Father, our Creator and Sustainer. As we contemplate Him, it should lead us to praise and honor His great name through the lives we live each day. He did make us in His Own image, has blessed us materially and spiritually, delivered us from evil countless times, and loved us as unlovable as we are. Our minds should think upon our Savior and Redeemer, the pain and suffering He endured to save us from our sins. It is only through Him and His sacrifice we can have access to His Father and enjoy fellowship with Him. Our thoughts should reflect upon the Spirit, His work as Revelator and Helper and the blessings we receive as the results of His efforts.

The Psalmist declared the man who is blessed is the one who finds “...his delight is in the law of the Lord, And in his law he meditates day and night” (Psalm 1:2). If our minds are set on things above, we will often be found with open Bibles, reading, studying, and contemplating God’s wonderful message given to us by His grace. Notice the description of the word of God given by the Psalmist:

*“More to be desired are they than gold, Yea, than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them Your servant is warned, And in keeping them there is great reward”* (Psalm 19:10-11).

In this same book, the writer tells us one of the great benefits of placing that word in our hearts and minds, “Your word I have hidden in my heart, That I might not sin against You!” (Psalm 119:11). What a great treasure we have in our possession, which is often taken for granted. Do you ever think about heaven? I am not just talking about when you hear the subject mentioned in a Bible class or sermon. Do you ever open your Bibles and read passages which speak about our eternal abode? Do you find your mind trying to comprehend how beautiful heaven must be? Do you try to grasp how wonderful it will be when you get there? There will be no more pain, suffering, or dying; God wiping away every tear. There will be no more disease to ravish one’s body as either seen or experienced here. Nothing defiling can enter that city; no more sin to contend with. Eternal bliss for all who will occupy this Heavenly Jerusalem. Our thoughts should go there often!

Can we identify those whose thoughts are on earthly things? I certainly believe we can! They are the ones who are always busy with secular things. When visiting in their homes or if they visit in yours, their thoughts are directed toward the things of the world. Very seldom if ever do they have discussions about spiritual matters. Even when at church services, before or after worship or Bible study, it is apparent they are more interested in their job, money, sports, shopping, vacation, etc. Look at their Bible; is it worn from use, or maybe they never have it with them? This problem may be easy to spot in others, yet what we each need to do is take a good look at self (2 Corinthians 13:5). Am I guilty? How often do I think on things above?

If our thoughts were directed more toward heaven, I believe the church would be much stronger. There would be more people converted, saints would be strengthened, less lost back to the world, and certainly God would be honored and glorified. Why not begin today by setting you mind on things above and not on the things of the world. You and those you love will be the ones blessed for your efforts.

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## Put Away Lying

Mike Thomas | Bowling Greek, Kentucky, USA

Three boys were late to school because they went fishing. They agreed to tell the principal their tardiness was unavoidable because of a flat tire. The principal heard their case then placed them each in separate

rooms and told them to write down which tire was flat. The boys failed the test. The Bible tells of a similar scene when two people, a husband and wife, told a lie about how much they gave to the Lord. Ananias sold a possession “and kept back part of the proceeds, his wife being aware of it, and brought a certain part” and gave it to the church (Acts 5:1, 2). Peter was aware of this and asked Ananias, “Why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?” Their crime was not in how much they gave to the Lord, since He lets us determine that amount (2 Corinthians 9:7). Ananias and Saphira’s mistake was in lying about how much they gave—most likely to receive praise from men like Barnabas had just experienced (4:36-37). The end result was God struck down the husband and wife that day (5:5,10) to confirm, among other things, His unwillingness to condone lying.

God makes it very plain that He does not want us engaging in lying. His word says, “Therefore, putting away lying, let each one of you speak the truth” (Ephesians 4:25). And, “Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds” (Colossians 3:9). Nevertheless, it is so easy for us to lie. Before we know it, because we do not want others to know of our unwise or sinful behavior, we try to cover our mistakes by committing an even greater mistake in lying. In a split second, we convince ourselves that we will get away with our deception and no one will discover the truth we are trying to hide. It is as if we first lie to our self before we lie to others. But the sad reality is we have only exacerbated our situation and have made matters worse. When we tell a lie, we have secured a path to hell and do not even realize it in that our conscience is not the only person aware of our dishonesty. Our all-seeing Creator knows what we have done as well since “there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account” (Hebrews 4:13).

The futility of lying is we can never successfully pull it off without getting caught. “A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who tells lies will not escape” (Proverbs 19:5). It is only a matter of time before the truth comes out, as Ananias and Saphira illustrate. It may take weeks and even years for our mischief to come to light, but it will come out one way or another. So, the better option is to acknowledge the truth, tell the truth, and accept the consequences of abiding in the truth. It is the only path that leads to peace, honor, and forgiveness. Dishonesty is from the devil (John 8:44) and never works to our advantage.

The truth is we lose so much more in lying than in accepting the consequences of truth. We all are inclined to show mercy to the one who takes responsibility for his actions and admits his mistakes – provided he sincerely repents. The general rule is: “He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy” (Proverbs 28:13). We extend this mercy not because we condone whatever sin was committed; we extend it because we know what it is like to fail and seek forgiveness. We know what was needed in overcoming our own failures (which was to take responsibility for our mistakes) and are ready to do the same for someone else. But that mercy will never be offered as long as there is deception and guile. We have seen that it is the truth that sets a person free, and we expect others to realize the same in finding forgiveness. And, frankly, we are not the only one who demands it. Our Creator has the strongest stance possible on lying in warning that “all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone” (Revelation 21:8). If that does not motivate us to put away lying, we are without hope.

Thus, good friends, let us abide in the light and suffer the consequences of truth. It might bring us pain and shame when we have done wrong, or even cost us a sale, a job, or a relationship, but in the end, we will have our God and our conscience by our side for acknowledging the truth. And that is a greater benefit than anything we can gain in being deceptive.

*“LORD, who may abide in Your tabernacle?  
Who may dwell in Your holy hill?  
He who walks uprightly,  
And works righteousness,  
And speaks the truth in his heart;  
“He who does these things shall never be moved” (Psalm 15:1-2, 5).*

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## Come And See

William Stewart | Odessa, Ontario, Canada

One of the big concerns for preachers and churches today is how to effectively reach our communities with the gospel. Should we have an ad in the local paper? How about social media? What should we advertise? Our services? A correspondence course? An upcoming gospel meeting? A weekly study at a coffee shop? How can we optimize our web site for outreach? Does door-to-door still work? There are several ideas and methods we could and should put to work. That said, when we look into the New Testament, we do not see the Lord's people deliberating the merits of various evangelistic programs or techniques. In fact, many of the approaches which occupy today's discussions about evangelism were not available to the early church. So, what did they do? How were souls reached with the gospel? Let's notice from John 1 the power of an invitation.

Seeing Jesus and knowing He was the Messiah, John the Baptist directed two of his disciples to follow Him, to "go and see" (John 1:29-37). The Lord asked them, "What do you seek?" which seems to have caught them off guard. Of the many things one might ask when coming face-to-face with the Messiah, "Where are You staying?" is an unusual place to begin. But the Lord's response was wonderful, "Come and see." (v 38-39). So, they did. In fact, John says they remained with Him through the day. Being convinced this was the Saviour, one of the two, Andrew, went to Simon, his brother, declaring, "We have found the Messiah!" (v 41). No doubt, Andrew urged Peter to "come and see." He "brought him to Jesus" (v 42) and Peter also believed. In John 1:43, while Jesus made His way to Galilee He came upon Philip. He called him, saying, "Follow Me" – which served as an invitation for Philip to "come and see." Soon thereafter, Philip, excitedly went to his friend Nathanael, claiming, "We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote – Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph" (v 45). Nathanael was less than convinced. In fact, he questioned not just the thought that the Messiah would come from Nazareth, but that anything good should come from such a town. Philip simply responded, "Come and see" (v 46). He did, and before long, Nathanael confessed, "Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" (v 49).

In John 1, invitation after invitation was extended for people to check out Jesus, to meet Him, to hear Him, to "come and see." A teacher invited his students, a man invited a family member, the Lord invited a stranger, a man invited his friend. This is evangelism at its very core – inviting souls to meet the Saviour. And it works. In John 1:29, there is no mention of anyone following Jesus – John saw Him and urged two of his disciples to pursue the Lord. By the time we get to John 1:49, there are at least five souls who had been brought to Jesus. There was no complicated plan to execute. There was no expensive program to fund. There was no waiting for flyers from the printing press. Evangelism simply happened. Those who were believers in the Messiah told those who were not to "come and see," to check Him out. It was impromptu. It was instinctive. It was infectious. It was faith in action.

The five weeks have been exciting for the Lord's church here in Kingston, Ontario. We are a small group and growth has been slow and sporadic, often two steps forward one step back. And at times, it has felt like one step forward and two steps back. On a Saturday afternoon in mid-February (2021-02-20), I took my daughter skating at an outdoor rink where she met a couple of children. As the children played, their father and I began to chat. At first about the weather and about the pandemic, but soon about spiritual things. We had a great conversation touching on several topics, including the Sabbath and baptism. Blake had been tuning in with the local Seventh Day Adventist group online; not a member, but at one time an occasional attendee before the coronavirus pandemic. We exchanged contact info and I invited him to worship with us in-person the next day – to "come and see." I was delighted to see him the next morning, along with his two children and their mother. They joined us that afternoon for a potluck at our home, which gave us further opportunity to visit and study together. Two days later (2021-02-23), after a bit more back and forth via text message and phone, Blake desired to be baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of his sins.

He posted something on Facebook about his baptism a few days later. A childhood friend whom he had not seen in some time congratulated him on being baptized. Blake saw the opportunity and began chatting with his friend about the Bible. He extended an invitation (come and see) for Will to come to our Wednesday evening Bible class (2021-03-03). After class ended, we stayed at our meeting place to study with Will. He expressed his desire to be baptized into Christ, and that night he put on Christ.

The following Wednesday (2021-03-10), Blake slipped out of Bible class to go pick up his younger brother at the nearby train station. He let Adam know he was going to be in a Bible class and invited him to come in (come and see). As the class went along, Adam had several questions, and so we spoke to him from the Scriptures about sin, forgiveness, and salvation. It seemed like another soul might be ready to obey the gospel, but alas, despite his interest, Adam was not yet ready to obey the Lord. But he had the opportunity, for he received an invitation to come and see; and if the Lord grants him time, perhaps he will eventually respond favourably to the word.

A month to the day after Blake and I met (2021-03-20), he called me, asking for material to study with someone. He and his son had been driving, and he saw Sheila along the street. She is a homeless woman whom he has known for some time and has provided help to at times. He drove by her but commented to his son about her and the struggles she faced. The boy sweetly said to his father that God would want them to help her. They stopped, got her a bite to eat, took her to the hospital to get an injury tended to, and gave her a place to stay. He studied with her and invited her to come to worship the next day (come and see). She did. Afterward, she expressed a desire to be buried with Christ in baptism, and so it was my delight to watch Blake baptize her into the Lord Sunday afternoon (2021-03-21).

And just last night (2021-03-31), Blake invited (come and see) his older brother to our midweek class. He'd already been teaching him things that he's learned over the past couple of days. Keith sat and listened intently to the lesson. Afterward, we began to chat. Very soon, he expressed his need and desire to be forgiven of sin and added to the body of Christ through faith and obedience to God's word. Shortly thereafter, Keith was baptized into the Lord.

We give praise to God for His word. The scriptures tell us "...the word of God is living and powerful..." (Hebrews 4:12), "...it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes..." (Romans 1:16). If it is followed, it will turn souls from the paths of sin to the paths of righteousness. We pray for these new Christians in our midst and look forward to working with them and helping them grow in faith.

The events of these past several weeks have been a wonderful witness to the power of an invitation. We need to be inviting people to come and see. Some will accept the invitation, some will not. Some will come and see and want to obey the Lord, some will not. But one thing is certain - if we do not extend the invitation, it is doubtful they will ever do so. As hockey legend Wayne Gretzky once said, "You miss 100 percent of the shots you don't take." May we not allow the fear of rejection or past failures keep us from inviting people to come and see the Lord.

One final tidbit – Blake confided in me recently, when he and his family first came to our assembly, he almost left. He saw a very small group and thought, "Nah, this place can't have the truth." Thankfully, he decided to not just come and leave, but to come and see. He sat down. He listened to and participated in the Bible class. He was engaged in the worship and paid attention to what was said in the sermon. And because he did so and continued to study and ask questions and seek answers, he learned the truth and was added to the Lord's kingdom. May we encourage people to pursue truth, not what looks good, not what feels comfortable, not what we find appealing, but the truth of God's word.

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## **The Christian and Gambling (Part 2)**

Julius C. Nwankwo | Ahiaba, Nigeria



## **2. Gambling is wrong because it involves a chance of gain at the expense and suffering of others.**

The nature of gambling is such that a person has a chance of gain only because others have suffered loss. The economic benefits come only to a very few. The financial loss is borne by many who usually can least afford it. The fact that people involved in gambling are commonly referred to in derogatory terms by its promoters is an indication of the status to which they are reduced. Whether or not the financial loss is excessive, gamblers are basically the losers while the operators of gambling establishments are the winners.

**The suffering caused by gambling is totally inconsistent with the teaching of Scripture concerning love.** Not only is the Christian to love those who are lovable, but even enemies. God's people are to love their neighbors as themselves. The principle of love will prevent Christians from gambling because of the damage it does to others. The principle of love will cause Christians to oppose any effort by the state or any other organization to legalize any activity based on a weakness of people which degrades society.

The persistent appeal to covetousness is fundamentally opposed to the unselfishness which was taught by Jesus Christ and by the New Testament as a whole. The attempt (inseparable from gambling) to make profit out of the inevitable loss and possible suffering of others is the antithesis of that love of one's neighbor on which our Lord insisted.

**3. Gambling is wrong because it is inconsistent with the work ethic of Scripture.** Throughout Scripture the importance of work is emphasized. In several places the correlation between working and eating is stated. The Old Testament reminds us, "He who works his land will have abundant food" (Proverbs 12:11). In the New Testament the same principle is stated with great forcefulness. To the Thessalonians Paul wrote, "When we were with you, we gave you this rule: 'If a man will not work, he shall not eat'" (2 Thessalonians 3:10).

Not only does the Bible require that one should work for the necessities of life, but it also warns against the something for nothing, get-rich-quick approach. "One eager to get rich will not go unpunished" (Proverbs 28:20). "He that hasteth to be rich hath an evil [envious] eye, and considereth not that poverty shall come upon him" (Proverbs 28:22, **KJV**). "Dishonest money dwindles away, but he who gathers money little by little makes it grow" (Proverbs 13:11). In the wisdom of God work was assigned in the garden of Eden even before the Fall (Genesis 2:15ff; cf. 1:28). Though sin resulted in a change of the nature of work (Genesis 3:17,19), the responsibility of working was never rescinded. Any effort to circumvent the work ethic of Scripture can result only in failure. Gambling, whether to secure wealth in a hurry or to place bread on the table, is inconsistent with what the Bible teaches about work.

**4. Gambling is wrong because it tends to be habit forming.** Gambling, like other evils, has a tendency to become an addiction. As in the case of alcoholics and drug addicts, compulsive gamblers are dominated to the extent that they risk not only money, but everything meaningful in life. They have lost control of themselves. This condition is contrary to the teaching of Scripture. The Word of God points out that a Christian will refuse to be brought under the power even of lawful things (1 Corinthians 6:12). The person indwelt by the Holy Spirit will be characterized by temperance, or self-control (Galatians 5:23).

Those who have studied gambling addiction seem to agree there are six symptoms characteristic of compulsive gambling: (1) The activity becomes chronically repetitive. (2) It becomes a mania which precludes all other interests, including the home. (3) A pathologic optimism replaces the ability to learn from previous losing experiences. (4) The ability to stop in a winning situation no longer exists. (5) In spite of initial decisions to gamble only so much the addict invariably risks too much. (6) The activity seems to produce an enjoyable tension consisting of both pain and pleasure.

It is obvious that habitual gamblers are under the control of the compulsion to gamble. Rather than being servants of God, they are servants of a desire they cannot handle. Paul described the condition clearly when he wrote, "Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you

are slaves to the one whom you obey?" (Romans 6:16) Because of the degrading possibility of addiction, gambling should be considered an evil.

### **Christian Responsibility in Relation to Gambling**

When the various truths of God's Word are considered, Christians cannot adopt a neutral stance toward gambling. There are responsibilities which they cannot ignore. When the Bible instructs believers, "whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31), it certainly precludes gambling. God is not glorified when people put their trust in chance rather than in the Lord.

When God's Word teaches that we should "avoid every appearance of evil" (1 Thessalonians 5:22) it precludes gambling. There is no way in which a practice can be considered anything other than evil when it violates principles of God's Word concerning stewardship, consideration of others, and the dignity of honest labor.

Those who want to live according to Scripture will refrain from participation in any form of gambling. As the salt of the earth (Matthew 5:13) they will also do all within their power to discourage the legalization of gambling, whether to raise money for charity, church, or state. It is evil and must be avoided by any that calls himself a Christian.

Thanks and remain blessed.

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## **Matthew 24 (Part 4)**

Patrick Andrews | Conway, Arkansas, USA

Last month I pointed out that verses four through thirty-five of Matthew twenty-four are all related to the answer given by Jesus to his disciples as to when the Temple in Jerusalem would be destroyed. I also pointed out that these same verses could be divided up into three sections, each of which would be preceded by signs that would signal just how close their destruction was getting.

It's very important to notice here that there will be particular signs preceding these different periods that will culminate in the destruction of Jerusalem. Also, as we get deeper into the answers Christ gave, you will notice a shift in certain words and phrases that will also distinguish which of the two questions that Jesus is answering.

It is also very important to notice that all of the events in this first section of time are taking place outside of Jerusalem and the Jewish nation. They're not happening in Jerusalem, but those in Jerusalem would be aware of all the wars and geological upheavals taking place in other parts of the world.

Last month we spent a little time on the first section of time that the Scriptures call, "The Beginning of Sorrows", Matthew 24:4-8. We will now pick up with the second time period that I call, "Nearer Signs".

This next section, "Nearer Signs", is going to take place in Israel, by the Israelites. It's not going to be any foreign nation that is persecuting the Israelites. A foreign enemy will be coming later, but during this second period of time it's only Israelite against Israelite. One would only have to read through the book of Acts and the rest of the New Testament to see that this prophecy of Christ was fulfilled. Jewish leaders persecuting Jewish citizens and Jews who were still clinging to a dead law (Romans 7:1-4) persecuting those who were now following the law of Christ (verse 9).

Looking at the last two verses in this section (verses 13 and 14), what do you think the following phrases are referring to? I will tell you what I believe later, but for now, you choose. Remember, your faith should be based on your study, not mine or others.

(a) "...endure unto the end..." Verse 13

(b) "...and then shall the end come" Verse 14

Keeping the topic of discussion in your mind and staying within the context of the warnings and signs of trouble that are coming, what "end" is Jesus speaking of here? Is he speaking of the end of the universe (2 Peter 3:9-12), or is it the end of the political Jewish nation (Matthew 23:38), when the Temple buildings will be leveled (Matthew 24:2)?

You decide which, but I warn you that if you make the wrong choice here, you will be forced to twist other passages in a futile attempt to make them agree with your erroneous answer. You will have to alter the definitions of words throughout the Bible so they will agree with your "wrong answer." You will have to change figurative passages into literal and literal passages into figurative in an attempt to bolster your error.

You eventually will have to explain plain passages away by believing that what they say is not what they mean. This is what those who call themselves Preterist have been forced to do every time they get backed into a corner. For instance, When Peter says, "But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men"(2 Peter 3:7). See also verses 8-12 of this same chapter.

This verse is very clear and easy to understand, but the Preterist are forced to deny that the heavens and earth will be destroyed by fire. They will tell you that this verse is not teaching what its teaching. Also, they have to do away with the "Day of Judgment" because that goes against other parts of their false doctrine. They believe that this passage is talking about the Law of Moses.

Look at one more example: "Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation" (John 5:28-29).

A Preterist will read these verses and explain it in the following way:

1. There is not a specific hour coming; not really.
2. All those in the graves will not hear the voice of Christ.
3. Those that were dead will not come forth from their grave.
4. There will be no resurrection of life.
5. There will be no resurrection of damnation.

I could list many more passages that they claim mean the opposite of what the verse says, but these two will suffice to show that if you take an erroneous position somewhere in the Scriptures and are too proud or dishonest to admit it, you will eventually reach this point. You too, will have to twist and malign God's Word to fit your error.

Keep these thoughts in your mind as you are answering the questions above. When Jesus is referring to "the end" in verses 13 and 14; what end is he speaking of?

In the first section of time leading up to the destruction of the temple, we are told that there is a lot of civil unrest in other parts of the world. In the second section, we are told that there is going to be a lot of civil unrest in Jerusalem. The Jews would turn upon one another. There is no mention of some foreign nation causing any trouble for the Jews during this point in time.

During this second period of time, the enemy that Israel will face will be Israel. The Israelites will be enemies to one another. There will be hatred, fighting, betraying and killing one another because by this time their iniquity will be abundant (Matthew 24:12).

We have now covered two of the three periods of time preceding the destruction of Jerusalem. In next month's article, we will begin a discussion on the last period of time and the signs that will culminate in the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple.

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## Finding Your Way to Truth

Roger G. Mattingly | Lleida, Spain

*"Have you ever had a dream, Neo, that you were so sure was real? What if you were unable to wake from that dream? How would you know the difference between the dream world and the real world?"*

asks Morpheus from the movie, "The Matrix".

A few scenes later, he familiarizes Neo with the computer-dependent society then existing:

*"When you're inside, what do you see? Business men, teachers, lawyers, carpenters... the very minds of the people we are trying to save. You have to understand, most of these people are not ready to be unplugged. And many of them are so inured, so hopelessly dependent on the system that they will fight to protect it."*

A parallel can certainly be drawn between the dream-like world that Morpheus described and our present real world. In our own lives, we too are exposed to a barrage of lies and deceptions which serve to confuse us even though they may stand in stark contrast to what can actually be perceived by the senses and rationalized by the mind to be true. And yet, how often we find ourselves accepting that falsehood and later wondering how we managed to wander so far from what is right.

To be sure, it can still be a nearly insurmountable challenge to try and separate the truth from the lies, when we already know that their source is from someone untrustworthy. But when they emanate from our own government, religious leaders, medical associations, scientists/university professors, school teachers and even our own trusted friends and family, it is then no small wonder if we begin to doubt our sanity and question whether or not we are the ones in error. Be careful not to fall into that "crisis of confidence" hole! It's a difficult one to dig yourself out of when the sides appear to be caving in around you. But if you already have, don't despair. Take comfort in knowing that others were there before you, and with the right tools they were able to extract themselves successfully!

The burning question now for each of us should be, "Where then or to whom can you turn for the answers?" Just like in the film, very few people you are acquainted with actually know the truth or can point you in the right direction. If that astonishes you, then turn this next thought over in your mind. After a great deal of study has taken place, and much effort has been expended on your part, by and by you will finally feel you have a firm grip on the important issues that matter and are in a position to help your friends and those you love. That's great news! But, don't become too confident. Otherwise, you may be setting yourself up for the ground to fall from under your feet when you discover that practically no one wants to hear what you have to say, and many of those who do will fight to the bitter end to defend their personal systems of belief. But at least then, you will no longer doubt your own sanity! You'll doubt theirs! As someone has said, but apparently not George Orwell, "In a time of universal deceit, telling the truth is a revolutionary act."

If it is not from those who hold the reins of political power, or from them who occupy the seats of great learning that we can obtain truthful answers to the momentous questions of life, from whence do the answers come? It may be that an analogy at this juncture would be of crucial importance. When we want to determine the dimensions of a table, what do we do? Obviously, we make use of a standard of some sort, a tape measure, perhaps. Or, when we want to bake a cake, a scale meets our needs quite well. Doesn't it seem reasonable then that there must also be a standard by which we can measure the truths of life? If so, what would it be?

In his book, **Every-day Reasoning; or, the Science of Inductive Logic**, published in 1877 by Claxton, Remsen & Haffelfinger (Public Domain), author George P. Hays wrote:

*“The very first prerequisite to entering on investigation, therefore, is a singleness of mind that will accept any truth that may reveal itself, however it may contradict some previous notions. There is required a like readiness to discard any error, however it may have been cherished, the moment its character is detected.”*

He continued with,:

*“In all ages, scholars and philosophers have exhausted their power of language in laudation of truth, and the Son of God, as if to emphasize its importance, called Himself ‘the way, the truth, and the life.’ Truth is our only guide to safety, and if, adopting error, we escape folly and peril, it is by accident.”*

Truer words have never been spoken. Indeed, to determine the truth about anything, so as to reject lies and deception, requires an approved standard capable of accurately measuring the item in question. To measure life’s truths, we need the standard furnished by the One who gives life to all (Acts 17:24-25). That is, God Himself. The Bible states:

*“For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12).*

And again:

*“All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17) .*

By following God’s instructions found in the words of the Bible, we have all we need to know how to live decently, to courageously face the problems that may arise and, in the end, to inherit eternal life. The Apostle Paul instructed Timothy to “Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.” The ESV version of the Bible says, “Follow the pattern of sound words...” (2 Timothy 1:13). Consequently, if this standard is rejected, then there remains no other means through which the truths of life may be measured. If a person is thus so inclined as to reject God’s standard, then perhaps a reread of George P. Hays earlier quote would be in order.

Though not written primarily to be a science or sociology book, the Bible anticipates many, if not most, of our basic questions and provides satisfying answers about the universe and the planet on which we live. It also answers relevant questions about our ancestral past and provides information on what the future holds for those of us alive today. In addition to the kind of relationship that it teaches we should have with God, it also contains considerable information about our dealings with one another and how we should proceed in order to lead quiet and peaceful lives.

The Bible, especially the Old Testament, is chock-full of examples regarding difficulties that God’s people of the past had to face, the decisions they made and the outcomes they experienced, whether good or bad. It is marvelous to learn from our own successes and mistakes, but perhaps sometimes it is better to learn from the joys and disappointments of others. Those true stories in the lives of real people who lived during Bible times were written for our learning. They constitute some of the most relevant counseling of God for how to conduct our everyday lives and will always be the very best advice we can receive. Correctly understood and applied, the lessons learned can’t help but bring confidence to our actions, comfort of mind, and a lifetime of peace and joy for those who will take them to heart. Lastly, God’s promise of eternal life to those who obey the gospel places death into its proper perspective and helps us to see that it is merely a doorway through which we must someday pass to be with Him and those we love forever.

In the fifties and sixties institutional brethren broadened the rule of elders beyond the scriptural limits. They placed the elders of one church over the evangelistic work of man congregations when they concocted the Herald of Truth and other sponsoring church schemes (now usually called "overseeing elderships"). I personally know of elderships in American congregations which oversee the work of brethren in Kenya, Tanzania, and the Samoan Islands.

Fifty years ago Charles Holt led a charge to the opposite extreme, denying elders any rule in the local church. For the last thirty years some have been arguing for popular, democratic rule in congregations.

With the Scriptures as our compass, we must chart a course away from all false positions and to the truth.

### **What authority does the Lord give elders to rule?**

God has assigned leadership in every divinely ordained relationship. The husband is head of the wife (Ephesians 5:22-24), and parents rule the children (Ephesians 6:1) in the family. The Lord ordained rulers in civil government (Romans 13:1-7), and elders are to rule in the local church (Acts 20:28; 1 Timothy 5:17; 1 Peter 5:1-4).

To rule is to make decisions that others are obligated to follow (Exodus 18:21-26). To refuse to follow the scriptural rule of God-ordained rulers is to rebel against God. When Miriam and Aaron rebelled against Moses, they rebelled against God (Numbers chapter 12). When Korah, Dathan, and Abiram revolted against Moses and Aaron, their rebellion was against the Lord (Numbers 16:1-40; especially verses 1-3, 7, 11).

The Father wills that each local church develop and appoint elders (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5). Rule in the local church is the function of elders. They are called "overseers" (Acts 20:17, 28; 1 Peter 5:1-4). This is the Greek word "*episkopos*," translated "bishop" in Titus 1:7. It means "*an overseer, a man charged with the duty of seeing that things to be done by others are done rightly, any curator, guardian or superintendent*" (Thayer. 243). They are to rule (1 Timothy 5:17), i.e., "*to be over, to superintend, preside over*" (Thayer. 539).

This doesn't give elders the right to determine truth or faith for the members. When there was a doctrinal disagreement in the Jerusalem church, the whole church came together to study the matter (Acts 15:6-7,12). The false teachers were given the opportunity to speak (Acts 15:7; Galatians 2:4), the appeal was to divine revelation (Acts 15:7-18), the leaders of the church stated the position of the church (Acts 15:19-21), and the whole church concurred (Acts 15:22-29). No man or men have the right to "lord it over your faith" (2 Corinthians 1:24, **NASB**).

In 1991 I had a debate in Camden, Arkansas over the issue of church benevolence. Ten couples from the congregation that practiced error admitted I had taught the truth but excused themselves by asserting, "The elders decide; it's not my business." Wrong! "Savage wolves" who devour the flock and men "speaking perverse things" arise from among elders (Acts 20:29-30). You must decide for yourself what the truth is.

How is the rule of elders limited? All human rule is subordinate to and limited by divine authority (Acts 17:24; 5:29). No civil ruler (Acts 5:29), employer (Colossians 4:1), parent (Ephesians 6:1), or husband (Colossians 3:18) has the right to ignore the will of God or require of another what God disapproves.

Elders rule only the local church where they are members (1 Peter 5:1-4). The elders of a congregation have no say in the affairs of any other congregation. No American eldership has the approval of the Lord for making decisions for brethren in Kenya, Samoa, Tanzania, or any other country. No African elder has authority in any congregation other than the one where he is a member.

Elders must not be “lords over” those whom the Lord has entrusted to them (1 Peter 5:3). In fact, this is the principle behind all service in the kingdom of Christ (Matthew 20:25-28). This does not eliminate the rule of elders but limits that rule (cf. Luke 22:24, 29-30).

Jesus is the perfect example of this rule. He has all authority (Matthew 28:18; Colossians 3:17), but He served (John 13:13-15). In love He seeks what is best for His bride (Ephesians 5:25; 1 John 5:3). He does not simply issue orders but has set an example how to live (1 Peter 2:21-22).

Even within the church of which they are members, the authority of elders is limited. Elders do not have the right to enact laws or to lead the church in unauthorized paths (James 4:12; 2 John 9; Acts 20:28-30), to forbid a preacher to preach any Bible truth (Acts 20:26-27; Titus 1:10-13), to tell members what they may study (2 Corinthians 1:24), or to tell Christians how to run their private lives in matters of opinion (Acts 5:3-4). Nor should the elders enforce their own will in matters of liberty against the will and/or good of the congregation (Titus 1:7). Certainly no elder should seek preeminence in the church (3 John 9-10).

In making decisions for the church, elders should learn and consider the needs and opinions of the congregation (Acts 6:1) and inform the whole church of decisions that affect the whole church (Acts 6:3; 15:19-20).

For years I have heard brethren talk about the shortage of preachers. The real shortage in the Lord’s church is of qualified, dedicated elders. I know of many congregations that have existed for years and have no elders. The Lord’s will is elders in every church (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5). Elders must discharge their work with the serious dedication of those whom the Lord will hold accountable for those in their charge (Hebrews 13:17). The members should so behave toward the elders that we would deserve to have good elders (1 Timothy 5:17-18).



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