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Editor, Keith Sharp

Designer, William Stewart



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

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Finally, brethren

**WHATEVER THINGS**

are true  
are noble  
are just  
are pure  
are lovely

PHILIPPIANS  
**4:8**

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

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

## Conversion

Albert Barnes, 19th century Presbyterian scholar

Notes on the Old Testament, comments on Psalm 119:59-60

"I thought about my ways,  
And turned my feet to Your testimonies" (Psalm 119:59).

This language most naturally refers to the time of conversion, and may be employed without impropriety to describe the process of a sinner's turning to God. It would seem to be descriptive of the experience of the author of the psalm when he became personally interested in the subject of religion. The first step in such a work is reflection on the course of life which has been led; on the guilt of such a course; and on the consequences. It is a pause in the career of sin and folly - a pause for reflection and thought. Compare Luk\_15:17-18. No one is converted without such reflection; and as soon as a sinner can be made to pause and reflect on his course, there is hope that he will be converted. Assuredly it is proper for all, whatever may be their circumstances in life, to pause from time to time; to reflect; to ask what will be the consequences of the course of life which is pursued.

"And turned my feet" - Changed my course of life. He himself did this in fact; and he does not hesitate to say that it was he who thus turned. His own agency was employed. He does not say that he "waited" for

God to turn him; or that he found he could not turn of himself, but that he turned; he paused; he reflected; he changed his course of life. This is true in conversion always. There is an actual turning from sin; an actual turning to God. The sinner turns. He leaves an old path, and treads a new one. He does this as the conscious result of reflection on the course which he was pursuing; and there is nothing in his actual turning, or in his whole future course, which is not the proper result of reflection, or which a proper reflection on the course of life would not lead to and justify. Man himself is always active in conversion. That is, he does something; he changes; he repents; he believes; he turns to God; it is not God that changes, that repents, that believes, that turns; it is the man himself. It is, indeed, by the grace and help of God; but the effect of that grace is not to make him idly wait; it is to rouse him to effort; to lead him to act.

"I made haste, and did not delay  
To keep Your commandments" (Psalm 119:60).

"made haste" - This language further describes the process of conversion. There was no delay; there was no excuse offered. He acted at once under his conviction of what was right. He did not ask permission to defer it to a future time; he did not attempt to avoid the duty; not plead inability; he did not give himself merely to the "use of means;" he did not rely on prayer, and reading, and reflection; but "he did the thing, and he did it at once." This is conversion; and if all convicted sinners would follow this example, and do at once that which they are commanded to do, and which they know they ought to do, there would be in no case any difficulty about conversion, for the main difficulty in conversion lies in the fact that the sinner is not willing to obey God at once; that he will not break away from his sins; that he endeavors to excuse himself; that he pleads for delay; that he waits for God to do what he himself ought to do.

"And delayed not to keep thy commandments" - I did not continue to go on in a course of sin, but I forsook my sin and obeyed.

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## **The Shame of Nakedness**

Ron Halbrook via "The Hickory Heights Messenger," edited by Jim Mickells,  
from "The Beacon," edited by Greg Gwin

Revelation 3:17-18 pictures a proud church like a poor, diseased man with inadequate clothes. clothes. If the church repented, Christ would supply every spiritual need, "that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear." This figurative use of inadequate clothing is based on the concept of the shame of nakedness and on the failure of some people to recognize this shame.

Nakedness may refer to nudity or to inadequate clothing. Adam and Eve were first nude but then partially clothed with "aprons" (girdle, loin-covering; Genesis 3:7). God replaced this inadequate clothing with "coats," proper and adequate garments "generally with sleeves, coming down to the knees" (verse 21; Gesenius, Hebrew & Chaldee Lexicon, 420). God replaced their shorts with garments covering from the shoulders down to the knees to cover the shame of their nakedness.

To uncover or see nakedness is a euphemism for sexual intercourse (Leviticus 18:6; 20:17). Nakedness with its sexual appeal and implications is a blessing in marriage, but a curse and shame when displayed outside marriage. Therefore, in addition to outer robes, the priests wore pants reaching from the waist to the knees "breeches to cover their nakedness; from the loins even unto the thighs they shall reach" (Exodus 28:42). Even heathen women knew the embarrassment of lifting their skirts to cross a river "make bare the leg, uncover the thigh. . . . Thy nakedness shall be uncovered, yea, thy shame shall be seen" (Isaiah 47:2-3). Exposing the thighs reveals the shame of nakedness.

God commanded women to "adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with braided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; but (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works" (1 Timothy 2:9-10).

Shamefacedness or shamefastness is an innate sense of honor which “shrinks from over passing the limits of womanly reserve and modesty, as well as from the dishonor” of such an act (Trench, Synonyms of the New Testament, pages 63-68). It is “a sense of shame” or “modesty which is ‘fast’ or rooted in the character” (Vine, Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words. 4:17).

Modesty, shamefacedness, and sobriety deeply rooted in a woman’s character cause her to shrink back from exposing the shame of her nakedness. This shame is exposed before men by her wearing skirts and shorts above the knees, miniskirts, low cut dresses and blouses (front or back), strapless or backless dresses, swimsuits, tube or tank tops, tight or form fitting attire (leotard, bicycle shorts, etc.), and the generally abbreviated uniforms worn by majorettes, cheerleaders, and flag or drill teams. A man in shorts revealing his thighs and without a shirt exposes the shame of his nakedness to women.

The sin of exposed nakedness is fraught with dangers. It creates temptations for the opposite sex, sears the conscience, and refuses the truth of God’s word (Matthew 18:6-7; Jeremiah 6:15; Hosea 8:12). It weakens the home by causing parents to fail in their duty to their children, or children to rebel against parental leadership (1 Samuel 3:13; Deuteronomy 21:18-21). When Christians are guilty, they conform to the world, start down the road of apostasy, set the wrong example, and bring shame on Christ and his church (Romans 12:2; Judges 2:10; Matthew 5:13-16; Ephesians 5:26-27). Souls will be lost over such sins (Galatians 5:19-21).

Christ can clothe us spiritually and teach us to dress properly when people in the world repent and are baptized to be forgiven through his blood, or when erring Christians repent and pray for forgiveness (Acts 2:38; 8:22).

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## Does 1 Corinthians 7:15 Allow Another Scriptural Cause For Divorce?

Pat Donahue | Harvest, Alabama, USA

Homer Hailey, James Bales, and many others have taught 1 Corinthians 7:15 permits another scriptural cause for divorce and remarriage (in addition to the plain one in Matthew 19:9). They reason the text is saying the Christian is not under “bondage” when deserted by their spouse, and assert “bondage” here refers to the marriage “bound” - therefore such deserted Christian is free to remarry.

However “bondage” in I Corinthians 7:15 is not from the same Greek word as “bound” (referring to the marriage obligation) in 1 Corinthians 7:27, 39, and Romans 7:2. Notice the difference in definitions ...

bound - to bind, tie, forbid - **Englishman’s Greek Concordance**

bondage - Acts 7:6, 1 Corinthians 9:19, Galatians 4:3, II Peter 2:19

- enslaved - **English Standard Translation**
- enslave - Strong’s, Young’s, Kubo, **Englishman’s Greek Concordance**
- to make a slave of, reduce to bondage – Thayer
- make someone a slave, ... enslave, subject – Bauer
- ... make a slave of, to bring into bondage – Vine’s
- to be a slave ... to be a slave to another, be subject to, to serve, obey -Liddell and Scott

Note further that if the Greek word translated “bondage” (which occurs in some form 133 times in the New Testament) refers to the marriage bound/obligation in 1 Corinthians 7:15, it would be the only place in all of scripture where this Greek word refers to the marriage obligation.

The fact the deserted believer is “not under bondage” is used to support the instructions “let him depart” and “God hath called us to peace,” not “you may remarry.” Verses 10-15 then are discussing if it is right to depart (they say nothing about remarriage), so Paul is just saying it is okay to be in a state of separation if

the unbeliever leaves you. It's not your fault.

Ask yourself this question - how could the deserted have a right to remarry when texts like Luke 16:18 show that even if such deserter remarries, the deserted may not remarry? It just doesn't figure.

Conclusion: Matthew 19:9 proves there is only one exception to God's no divorce law. So I Corinthians 7:15 cannot be another exception.

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## The Stewardship of Elders

Jefferson David Tant | Hendersonville, Tennessee, USA

When we speak of the stewardship of elders or shepherds, quite naturally the thought of their responsibility for the Christians or "sheep" in their care comes to mind. Indeed, the writer of Hebrews makes it abundantly clear that they have such a responsibility.

*"Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit to them: for they watch in behalf of your souls, as they that shall give account; that they may do this with joy, and not with grief: for this were unprofitable for you"* (Hebrews 13:17).

Christ is pictured as the "chief shepherd" (1 Peter 2:25; 5:4). Thus those whom the Holy Spirit has appointed would be considered as "under shepherds," and are answerable to the chief shepherd. "Take heed unto yourselves, and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit hath made you bishops, to feed the church of the Lord which he purchased with his own blood" (Acts 20:28).

While we are aware of the charge to care for the flock, there is another area of stewardship that some elders seem to have neglected. That is the realm of their oversight of the financial resources of the flock—the church treasury. And no, I do not mean that elders do not get the bills paid, or neglect to see that the Sunday contribution is counted. My comments are directed to the unwise expenditure of the Lord's money, and the opposite problem of hoarding the Lord's money.

**(1) Unwise expenditures.** There is nothing wrong with having an attractive and comfortable meeting place. But sometimes brethren go a bit overboard in their extravagance. This is particularly seen among institutional brethren, who sometimes seem to want to compete with the denominations as to who can provide the most magnificent edifice. One church in Atlanta has recently built a one-and-a-half million-dollar atrium/café/study area/gymnasium, or whatever. While we might agree that such is not only extravagant, but also unauthorized, we must recognize that even among conservative churches there may be a temptation to compete. But we must remember that our main focus should not be to impress, nor to serve ourselves, but to use our resources in a way that reflects our mission. It must be admitted that this is not yet a serious problem among conservative churches, but as time and affluence progress, it is something to consider.

**(2) On the other hand, there does seem to be more of a problem of elders sitting on the treasury, saving it up for a "rainy day."** Yes, there are situations where money is being put aside for a new building or some renovation, but in other cases I have seen enormous sums (at least it's enormous to me) that are kept in reserve, but with no stated purpose in mind. I knew of a church that I was told had about \$167,000 sitting in the bank. Another church had \$50,000+ in the bank, and I was told there was no specific goal for that money. But when a member of that church (in good standing) was going overseas on a mission trip, the elders could not see fit to spare even one dollar to help fund the trip. At other times these elders were asked for some assistance, but evidently the pocketbook was closed tightly.

And yet another church had gotten down to about \$50,000 in its bank account (a temporary dip in their finances), and the elders were so concerned that they cut off support to some men in the field, even foreign nationals, who often have a very difficult time in living, much less in raising support. I must admit I fail to understand such thinking.

I write from some personal experience in this, for at times I have been supported by other churches and have had a substantial amount of support cut off for some arbitrary reason. And my long-time association with the Lord's work in Jamaica, and in particular working with the late Jerry Angelo, who lived there for eight years, has produced some egregious abuses of the Lord's treasury.

Brethren, souls are dying every day who are lost forever in the fires of hell. We have in our hands the most powerful force in the world—the gospel of Christ. “For I am not ashamed of the gospel: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth...” (Romans 1:16). That gospel has been entrusted into our hands, and elders have a particular responsibility to see that the spread of the gospel continues.

We borrow money to build buildings, and will spend almost to the “bare cupboard” in order to buy some new pews or make some other renovations. I don't know that I have ever heard of a congregation borrowing money in order to keep supporting preachers rather than cut them off while work is done on increasing the contribution.

If you have never had to raise support, especially as a foreign native, then you have no idea of the difficulty this entails. I have seen cases of foreign nationals who really suffered because their support was cut. I have seen deaths, when adequate support may have provided medical care that would spare a life. I am convinced that stress contributed to the death of one preacher, and a lack of adequate support had a factor in that stress.

*“Swiftly we're turning life's daily pages, Swiftly the hours are changing to years:  
How are we using God's golden moments? Shall we reap glory? Shall we reap tears?”*

*“Millions are groping without the gospel, Quickly they'll reach eternity's night;  
Shall we sit idly as they rush onward? Haste, let us hold up Christ the true light.”*

*“Souls that are precious, souls that are dying, While we rejoice our sins are forgiv'n;  
Did he not also die for these lost ones? Then let us point the way unto heav'n.”*

*“Into our hands the gospel is given, Into our hands is given the light.  
Haste, let us carry God's precious message, Guiding the erring back to the right.”*  
(Mrs. Roy Carruth)

Brethren, when the Lord returns, let not one church be found sitting on a large sum of money, with no purpose in mind; let no elders be charged with hoarding the treasures that are to be used to take the gospel to the world. Paul's charge in 1 Corinthians 4:1-2 is worthy of consideration: “Let a man so account of us, as of ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. Here, moreover, it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.”

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## The Rich Fool

Jim Mickells | Lewisburg, Tennessee, USA

On one occasion when a crowd of people were gathered a man asked Christ to tell his brother to divide the inheritance with him (Luke 12:13). The Lord's response was He was not an arbitrator in such matters (Luke 12:14). Jesus then warned of covetousness, stating “one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses” (Luke 12:15). After making this statement, He gave the parable of “The Rich Fool” (Luke 12:16-21). There are a great number of lessons for all of us in this parable, yet let me share with you three of them.

**He was more concerned about himself than God.** Eleven times in this text we find the words “I” and “My.” Did he ever once think of the God of heaven who had blessed him with all this material prosperity?

Not at all it seems. Someone said, “An ungrateful person is like a pig under an oak tree eating acorns, but never looking up to see where they came from.” Yet this is true with far too many people in the world and also with some who claim to be servants of the Lord. In Luke 17:11-19, Jesus entered a village and met ten leprosy men. They asked the Lord to have mercy on them, which He did, and they were all healed of this terrible disease. Yet only one returned and “with a loud voice glorified God” (verse 15). Christ asked, “Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine?” (verse 17). We sit at the Lord’s table and eat His food, we drink His water, breathe His air, and if we are Christians partake of all the spiritual blessings in Christ, and yet how mindful are we of Him who has supplied all these things? “So is he who lays up treasures for himself, and is not rich toward God” (Luke 12:21).

**His great plans.** He had an abundance of crops and not enough space to store them. The solution, I will build even greater barns (verses 17-18). Notice “He thought within himself” (verse 17). Not anything wrong with making plans; most of us do this every day. James warns, “Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that” (James 4:15). How many barns did he build? None! He didn’t need them because he had no more crops to store. I asked some teenagers in a Bible Class on one occasion what they planned to do when they got out of high school. The reply was going to college. Then what? Get a job. After that? Get married. Next? Have a family. Then what will you do? Grow old and retire. Last of all? Die! Once you die what will happen? Spend eternity somewhere. The sad truth is many will perish from this life before most of their plans are fulfilled. There are only two eternal dwelling places, heaven or hell. The plans we have made in life will be reflected in where we spend eternity. Our plans should always include serving the Lord (Joshua 24:15).

**Time versus eternity.** Why did the Lord call him a fool (verse 20)? He thought he had many years ahead of him to retire, eat, drink, and be merry (verse 19). The reality was he would die that very night (verse 20). In Luke 16, we have Jesus relating to us a story about another rich man, though it says nothing about it being a parable. It relates to us what happened to this rich man after his death. He was in torments in Hades (Luke 16:23), wanting Abraham to send Lazarus back to his five brothers to warn them so they might repent and not come to this place of suffering (Luke 16:27-28). He was told by Abraham his brothers have Moses and the prophets, the writings of these great men (Luke 16:29-31). In life they could learn the will of the Lord for them and be led to repentance. This rich man had those same writings he could have read and been obedient to before his death and obviously he had refused. It was too late now. These rich men both died, as all will (Hebrews 9:27), though they both died lost. Why? In life neither was concerned about serving the Lord.

Would the Lord call us a fool? He would if we are busy laying up treasure for ourselves and are not rich toward Him. Are our affections set on things above or on the things of the earth (Colossians 3:2)? Are we redeeming the time or using it to fulfill our own fleshly desires (Colossians 4:5)? Are we content with the things we have or are we always wanting more (1 Timothy 6:6-10). Lord, please help us to be rich toward you!

Brethren, when the Lord returns, let not one church be found sitting on a large sum of money, with no purpose in mind; let no elders be charged with hoarding the treasures that are to be used to take the gospel to the world. Paul’s charge in 1 Corinthians 4:1, 2 is worthy of consideration: “Let a man so account of us, as of ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. Here, moreover, it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.”

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## Will Our Physical Bodies Be Raised?

Mike Thomas | Bowling Green, Kentucky, USA

Some people believe we must come back in a physical body to experience the resurrection, while others believe it will be with a spiritual body. What does the Bible say?

One of the unique aspects of Christianity is that its Founder was raised from the dead. Jesus is “declared

to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead” (Romans 1:4). He literally came back in the body that was nailed to the cross and placed in the tomb, which was raised three days later and seen by hundreds of people afterwards (see 1 Corinthians 15:3-8). He said to one of those witnesses, “Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing” (John 20:27). So, without question, Jesus came back from the dead in the same body He had when He walked the earth. This was necessary to fulfill the prophecy that His body would not experience decay (Acts 2:30-32) and to provide us with a “living hope” (1 Peter 1:3). There is discussion as to whether He still occupies that vessel, but I do not want to use this article to address it. We should all agree and take comfort in the fact that Jesus is “the firstborn from the dead” (Colossians 1:18) and has blazed a trail for the rest of us to follow in overcoming the grave. Thank You, Lord!

Jesus said everyone (both good and evil) will experience the resurrection from the dead on the last Day (John 5:28-29). His apostles taught the same thing; that “there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust” (Acts 24:15). This message led some to ask, “How are the dead raised up? And with what body do they come?” (1 Corinthians 15:35) This is a logical response since everyone dies at different ages, in different ways (some without a body to bury), and eventually “all return to dust” (Ecclesiastes 3:20). So, the reasonable response to the doctrine of the resurrection is, how are the dead raised and with what body do they come back? If we die old, do we come back in an old body? If we die without limbs, do we come back without limbs? Will our raised body bear the marks it had when it entered the grave, as it was for Jesus? The apostle Paul addressed this concern in 1 Corinthians 15 by making these observations:

- Seeds go into the ground in one form and come back in a different form (verses 36-38).
- God is capable of giving different types of bodies to creation (verses 39-41).
- The body is sown in corruption and raised in incorruption (verse 42).
- The body is buried in a weak condition but is raised in power (verse 43).
- It is buried a natural body but is raised a spiritual body (verse 44).
- We now possess a body like Adam but will eventually have one like Jesus (verses 45-49).
- Flesh and blood cannot inherit eternal life (verse 50).
- Those who are alive when Jesus returns will be transformed immediately into a spiritual body (verses 51-53).
- Death is defeated when people possess the spiritual body (verse 54).

It sure seems like Paul is saying we come back with a different body than what is placed in the ground. If he had said the body is sown a natural body and is raised a natural body, there would be a clear indication that we will be raised in the exact same way as Jesus. But Paul said our body “is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body,” which is a different experience than what Jesus had. The prophecy was that His soul would not remain in Hades (the realm of the dead) and His body would not see decay (Acts 2:27), like every other dead person experiences, so He came back in a body that had all the physical marks and blemishes it had going into the tomb. That is not the case with the rest of us. Ours

“is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body...However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward the spiritual” (1 Corinthians 15:42-46).

Thus, the body we now possess is not the same body we will have in eternity or possibly at the resurrection, since “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption” (verse 50). Even those who are alive on earth when Jesus descends will go through a transformation as well.

“Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed — in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality” (verses 51-53).

We all must experience a metamorphosis in acquiring an eternal body. Even if we do come back in a natural body, as some suggest, we will not keep it for long because we need something else to dwell with God. As it stands, our earthly vessel is incapable of beholding God because He dwells in “unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see” (1 Timothy 6:16), so we need a different type of body to see Him as He is. Therefore, John said, “Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is” (1 John 3:2). Notice what he said, God has “not yet revealed what we shall be” and “we shall be like Him” in spiritual form. “What will we look like, and will we have a body like we have now, except in a glorified state?” I do not know because God has not made that knowledge available. But we can know it will be a body far superior to what we have now, which should create immeasurable hope and anticipation within us. Paul awaited this new vessel in saying, “For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens” (2 Corinthians 5:1).

Because of these insights, I do not see how we can conclude we are coming back in the same natural body we occupy now. That does not match up with the promise of being “raised a spiritual body.” Again, just because we do not know how God will transform us from one form to another does not mean we should doubt His ability to make it happen. The Designer who makes it possible for a seed to enter the earth in one form and burst forth in a much greater form is the same Designer promising to raise us from the dead. This should give us confidence and hope unparalleled with anything else, especially when facing persecution or heartache. Paul said he was willing to discard any impediment necessary in following 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 3:10-11). The thought of overcoming the grave was all he needed to persevere in his trials and losses.

Dear reader, why should it be any different with us? Why lose heart or contemplate a life without God, with so much at stake? What experience in life compares to the promise of coming back from the dead to be with God? Even though He has not yet shown us the spiritual body He will raise us with, we can have great confidence knowing that “when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality,” we will be the ultimate victors in life (1 Corinthians 15:54). The important thing is that we are prepared for that moment by believing in Jesus as God’s Son and living to be with Him eternally. For, “everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure” (1 John 3:3). It was the message of Christ’s resurrection that Peter used to persuade people to devote themselves to Him and to obey His gospel in repentance and baptism (Acts 2:32-41). God is going to judge all of us with an eternal judgment and has “given assurance of this to all by raising Him [Jesus] from the dead” (Acts 17:31). Since this is so, “what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God” (2 Peter 3:11-12)?

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## **Test All Things ... Abstain From Evil**

IS THAT REALLY WHAT IT MEANS?

William Stewart | Odessa, Ontario, Canada

Drawing near the close of his first letter to the church in Thessalonica, Paul wrote what might be described as a series of sentence sermons. Among them, we find the following:

*Test all things; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil.*

(1 Thessalonians 5:21-22)

These verses ought to be self-explanatory, but some find in them an opportunity to exploit God's word for evil. This is not a hypothetical caution that these verses could be misused; I am personally aware of a case where Paul's instruction in verse 21 was used to justify dabbling in sin, and another situation where one defiantly defended choices that would be perceived by Christians and non-Christians alike as something immoral.



## Test All Things

The Greek *dokimazw* is defined as "to test, approve, allow, discern, examine, try" (Strong's). Based upon this verse and this word, I heard a young Christian reason several years ago that we cannot call something good or bad unless we have experienced it. How can you say it is bad or wrong if you have not tried it? I am not sure how far she took her erroneous position, but sadly it served as a justification for selfish and sinful experimentation.

1 Thessalonians 5:21 is not a license to test what some may consider the murky or shallow waters. He is not encouraging Christians to try anything that is not specifically condemned in the Bible.

Test or try may not be the best words to convey the thought; examine or discern are better. 1 John 4:1, which tells us to test the spirits, uses the same Greek word. How do we test the spirits? Taking error for a test drive is not an option. Do not just accept a teacher. Don't try out his doctrines until we have examined what is being taught (see Acts 17:11). We need to discern between truth and error.

The book of 2 Corinthians closes with Paul asking them to verify that they are indeed serving God faithfully. We all need to examine, test, try, or discern our faith. This is done by comparing our lives with God's word. Are we obeying God or not?

1 Thessalonians 5:21 says we are to hold fast what is good. Test all things by the word of God (not by experimentation), and hold to what is good.

## Abstain From Every Form Of Evil

We need to be careful how we understand this verse. Consider a few different translations:

- KJV, "*Abstain from all appearance of evil.*"
- CEB, "*Avoid every kind of evil.*"
- Darby, "*Hold aloof from every form of wickedness.*"
- NCV, "*Stay away from everything that is evil.*"
- NLV, "*Keep away from everything that even looks like sin.*"

Some have concluded from this text (and perhaps in particular because of the word "appearance" in the KJV) that we must avoid anything which may be perceived as evil by others. Such an interpretation of the text is exceptionally subjective and absolutely untenable. Vincent Word Studies of the New Testament states:

*"As commonly explained, abstain from everything that even looks like evil. But the word signifies form or kind ... it never has the sense of semblance. Moreover, it is impossible to abstain from everything that looks like evil."*

A perceived appearance of evil does not mean something is evil, nor is the intent of Paul's instruction here that we should be bound or constrained by every sentiment or bias which anyone may have against this or that. Paul's instruction in Romans 14 sheds light on how we should treat one another in areas of disagreement which are matters of opinion or personal faith. He wrote:

*...one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables. Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him. Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand. One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind. He who observes the day, observes it to the Lord; and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe it. He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he who does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat, and gives God thanks. (Romans 14:2-6)*

There may be things which an individual does not approve or participate in, but that does not make them inherently sinful. Right and wrong are not grounded in individual opinions or inclinations. We are not required (nor would it be possible) to bring every action in life into subjection to the whims, thoughts, prejudices, temperaments, or idiosyncrasies of others. We must submit ourselves to the Lord and to His will (James 4:7; 1 Peter 5:6; Romans 12:1-2).

Consider the Lord and His apostles as examples. The Pharisees complained against Jesus for *"eating with tax collectors and sinners"* (Matthew 9:11). Further, they declared Him to be *"a glutton and a winebibber"* (Luke 7:34) because of it. Jesus did not stop associating with these people because the religious leaders opposed such a thing and would never do such themselves. Simon the Pharisee even concluded that Jesus could not be a prophet, since He allowed a woman who was *"a sinner"* to touch Him (Luke 7:39). The apostles were condemned by the Pharisees as those who *"do not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashed hands"* (Mark 7:5). Jesus did not command them to appease the Pharisees and their man-made tradition. On a Sabbath the disciples plucked heads of grain as they walked through a field. The Pharisees accused them of breaking the Law (Matthew 12:1-2). Jesus did not tell the disciples not to do it again - He defended them, for they did nothing wrong. Multiple times the Pharisees spoke out against or inferred Jesus did wrong by healing on the Sabbath (Mark 3:2-4; Luke 13:14-16; 14:1-5; John 5:16-18; 9:16; etc.). Their judgment was based on their thoughts rather than God's word. Jesus did not stop healing on the Sabbath because it upset the religious leaders.

Unfortunately you can always find someone willing to oppose this or that. Do you like contemporary music? Even if the lyrics are fine, someone will believe you are sinning by listening to it. Are you a sports fan? To someone, your "obsession" is reprehensible. Do you own a brand new car? Shameful! Truly, you can find someone who will oppose or assail just about everything.

Certainly, we want to be concerned about our reputation and we do not want to unnecessarily upset people by engaging in what they believe to be wrong. If we know someone is opposed to this or that, perhaps it would be good to avoid it in their presence (or maybe not - Jesus didn't avoid healing people on the Sabbath because the Pharisees opposed it). We need to use wisdom in each circumstance.

What is the command in 1 Thessalonians 5:22? It is the flipside of 1 Thessalonians 5:21b. If something is good, hold to it; accept it; support it; do it. If something is evil, reject it; reprove it; abstain from it. But he is not dealing with things which "appear to be" good or evil, he is addressing things which are actually good or evil.

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## **The Law for Tithing Is Not Meant for Christians.**

### **Here Are My Reasons from the Scriptures**

Chizuru Lowell Odoemelam | Umuahia, Abia State, Nigeria

1. The laws God gave to the Israelites at mt Sinai were meant for them alone not for their fathers nor any other nation (Deuteronomy 5:3-5; Psalm 147:19-20).
2. God told them that he was going to change that law and made a new law (Jeremiah 31:31-32).
3. Because that law was found faulty in the sense that the people could not keep it (Hebrews 8:7-8)
4. The law was called the ministration of death (2 Corinthians 3:6-18).
5. The law to give one tenth was given at Mt. Sinai (Leviticus 27:30-34).
6. And the law has been abolished on the tree of Calvary (Colossians 2:14).
7. Since Christ the Law of Moses no longer justifies man from all things (Act13:39; Romans 3:20).
8. Christ is the end of the law to whomever that believed (Romans 4:10).
9. Christ has broken down the middle wall of partition that was against us (Ephesians 2:13-14).
10. The law could not make anything perfect (Hebrews 7:11,19).
11. We are under law to Christ (1 Corinthians 9:21).
12. God will not judge the world by the law given the Israelites but through the Gospel of Jesus Christ

(Romans 2:16; Colossians 2:14-19).

Remember that all power both in heaven and earth has been given to Christ and we were commanded to hear him (Matthew 28:18; Matthew 17:5).

In Hebrews 1:1-2 the Bible says God speaks to us today by his son Jesus.

If we must please God in our religious bodies we must listen to Christ and his doctrine.

The early Christians continued steadfastly in the doctrine of the apostles which is Christ's not the laws given to the Israelites.

No Christian paid tithes in the Bible; rather they gave as they prospered, and it was on the first day of the week, not on the Sabbath (1 Corinthians 16:1-3).

Observations: Israel could keep the Law (Deuteronomy 30:11-14), but they didn't (Acts 7:53) and were thus without excuse (cf. Romans 8:3-4). They could not be justified by the Law, because its animal sacrifices cannot remove the guilt of sin (Galatians 2:16; Hebrews 10:4), whereas the blood of Christ does (Hebrews 9:13-14). - the editor

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## The Hope of Israel

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

Some four millennia ago, the Lord promised Abram that he would become a great nation (Genesis 12:2) and that his descendants would inherit the land of Canaan (Genesis 12:7). The Lord's promises are sure. While the descendants of Abraham were in captivity in Egypt, they "became a nation, great, mighty, and populous" (Deuteronomy 26:5). Also, under the leadership of Joshua Israel received all the land the Lord had promised them (Joshua 21:43-45; Nehemiah 9:7-8, 22-25).

### Conditional Promise

However, Israel's continued possession of the land was conditioned on their faithfulness to the Lord (Deuteronomy 5:33; 28:15, 64). But Israel rejected the Lord God and served idols (2 Kings 17:7-22; 21:1-16). Thus, the Lord brought against them the Assyrians and Babylonians, who took them away captive (2 Kings 17:5-6, 23; 25:1-21).

But the Lord also promised Israel that they would be restored to the land if they repented (Deuteronomy 30:1-3). The prophets foretold that such a restoration would take place (Jeremiah 25:11; 27:22), not of the entire nation but of a faithful remnant (Isaiah 1:9; Jeremiah 23:3). Again the Lord was faithful to His promise, and seventy years after their initial captivity by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, the restoration began under Cyrus of Persia (Ezra 1:1-4). People from all Israel returned to Canaan (Ezra 2:70; Nehemiah 7:73). All the land promises to national Israel were fulfilled over two millennia ago.

The covenant the Lord made with Israel was conditioned upon their faithfulness to the Lord (Exodus 19:5-6; Deuteronomy 8:19-20). The promise of the everlasting covenant to the physical seed of Abraham was the land of Canaan (Genesis 17:7-8). But national Israel broke the everlasting covenant (Isaiah 24:5). When they, after having rejected all God's prophets, finally killed His Son, God cast them off and gave the kingdom to another nation (Matthew 21:33-45). National Israel has no more place in the Lord's plans.

### Restoration Impossible

Jeremiah prophesied that national Israel would be so broken that it could not be restored (Jeremiah 19:1-11). To be restored as a nation, Israel would have to return to a faithful observance of the law of Moses (Deuteronomy 30:1-3, 10). But any believing Jew who did that would "become estranged from Christ" (Galatians 5:1-4).

The levitical priesthood would have to be restored (Nehemiah 12:44). In this case Christ could no longer be our High Priest (Hebrews 7:11-17), and we would lose our salvation (Hebrews 7:25).

Such a restoration would involve a king of the seed of David ruling on the throne in Jerusalem. In fact, the central belief of those who ardently look for the restoration of national Israel is the rule of Jesus Christ on the physical throne of David in earthly Jerusalem. As a noted leader in this movement said, "The purpose of Christ's return to the Mount of Olives will be to establish Jerusalem as the capital of His new world kingdom." (Dr. John Walvoord [chancellor, Dallas Theological Seminary], **Armageddon, Oil, and the Middle East Crisis**. 195) But Jesus is the seed of David through Jeconiah (Matthew 1:1,12). And no one of the seed of Jeconiah can ever reign on the throne in Jerusalem and prosper (Jeremiah 22:24-30).

Further, in order for each Israelite to inherit his proper portion of the land, the genealogies of Israel would have to be restored (Nehemiah 7:5, 73). But the genealogies of Israel were destroyed with the destruction of the Temple in A.D. 70, and the apostle Paul by inspiration forbade concern over genealogies, "for they are unprofitable and useless" (Titus 3:9).

Finally, the restoration of national Israel would of necessity include the restitution of Temple worship with its animal sacrifices (2 Chronicles 36:22 - Ezra 1:4). In this case we would lose the benefit of the sacrifice of Christ to return to sacrifices that cannot remove the guilt of sin (Hebrews 10:1-4; 9:13-14). Why would any believing Jew want to give up the greater blessings in Christ for the old, material system which the New Covenant replaced?

### **Kingdom Removed from Israel**

When Israel, after having rejected all God's prophets, finally killed His Son, God cast them off and gave the kingdom to another nation (Matthew 21:33-45). National Israel has no more place in the Lord's plans.

There is no excuse for anyone who believes the Scriptures to insist that fleshly Israel is still the chosen people of God. After fifteen hundred years of refusing to heed God's servants the prophets, they killed His beloved Son (Acts 7:52). They exhausted the longsuffering of God, and He removed the kingdom from them and gave it to another nation, spiritual Israel, all both Jew and Gentile who come to Christ in obedient faith (Romans 2:28-29; Galatians 6:16; 1 Peter 2:4-10).

### **So All Israel Will Be Saved**

But didn't Paul teach that all Israel will be saved? (Romans 11:26) The verse before (verse 25) declares "the fullness of the Gentiles" are to come in. Does that mean all Gentiles are to be saved? Is the apostle teaching universalism? The adverb "so" (verse 26) is an adverb of manner, i.e., "in this way." In the same way all Gentiles may be saved, even so all Jews may be saved, through the gospel (Romans 1:16).

### **The Hope of Israel**

There is a hope for the physical offspring of Abraham. Paul preached the hope of Israel (Acts 26:6-7). This is salvation through Christ, a promise alike to believing Jews and Gentiles (Acts 26:22-23).

God does not have two plans, one for Jews and one for Gentiles. "For there is no partiality with God" (Romans 2:11).

*Or is He the God of the Jews only? Is He not also the God of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also, since there is one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith (Romans 3:29-30).*

God sent the same word to the Gentile house of Cornelius that He had already sent to Israel (Acts 10:25-48). He gave them the Holy Spirit even as He did to the apostles to demonstrate that He had removed the distinction between Jew and Gentile (Acts 10:44 - 11:18; 15:7-9). "For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him" (Romans 10:12).

“God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew” (Romans 11:2). “Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace” (Romans 11:5).

### **No Partiality with God**

“For there is no partiality with God” (Romans 2:11). Whether Jew or Gentile, male or female, slave or free, those who by faith are baptized into Christ are children of God and the seed of Abraham (Galatians 3:26-29; cf. Romans 2:28-29; 9:6-8; Galatians 6:15-16; 1 Peter 2:4-5, 9-10).

All who come to Christ in obedient faith by being baptized into Him are now the Israel of God, His chosen generation, royal priesthood, holy nation, His own special people. Praise be to our God who has made us the Israel of God in His beloved Son!



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