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

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Finally, brethren

# WHATEVER THINGS

are true  
are noble  
are just  
are pure  
are lovely

PHILIPPIANS  
4:8

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

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

## My Sin Is Ever Before Me

Bill White | Hammond, Indiana, USA

In his second epistle to the church at Corinth, the apostle Paul wrote of all the things he had endured for the cause of Christ. I have often thought about the things Paul wrote to the various churches of the first century concerning suffering for Jesus and why it had such impact on brethren who read his epistles. It was because he wrote of personal experiences that he had in his service to our Lord. It is for that reason I feel I must share with my brethren some wisdom I have because of my personal experience.

### How Did This Happen?

After preaching the gospel for ten years and warning brethren of the danger of giving place to the devil in our lives, I fell prey to the very thing of which I had warned others. I allowed Satan to win the battle in regard to sexual immorality. How did that happen? For years I had read and studied God's word diligently. However, as I look back on those days and years before I committed adultery, I realize I did not study to draw closer to God or to know Him more intimately. I studied so I could win discussions with those whom I considered to be less knowledgeable in the scriptures. In doing so, I left wide open the door of my heart for Satan to attack at my most vulnerable and weak point. When the opportunity to exploit that weakness occurred, I did. God has told us in His written word the danger of not looking into His word for guidance, strength, and instruction. James wrote,

*"Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls. 22But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. 23For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; 24for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten*

*what kind of person he was. 25But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does.” (James 1:20-25)*

I was not doing that, and it resulted in my being unfaithful to my wife and more importantly to my Lord who died to save me from my sins. There is a huge difference between reading God's word and studying God's word. Studying God's word involves carefully listening to what God is saying to us through His word, making application to our lives, and then living it in our daily lives.

#### **The Consequences Are Hard and Lasting:**

The result was I lost my family and fell into sixteen long, fearful years of unfaithfulness to our Lord. I hurt my wife and two young children more than I can describe in this short article. More than that, I hurt the local congregation of which I was a part. Worse even more, I hurt my God who loves me so. (See Luke 15, the parable of the Prodigal Son.) There you will see the pain God experiences when one of His children goes astray. The father in that parable was watching and anxiously waiting for the son he loved so much to come home. We cannot know this side of eternity, how much our sins hurt our heavenly Father. Also, I can tell you from experience it is a pain you will carry the rest of your life. David said it best in Psalm 51, “My sin is ever before me”. Like David, I have been forgiven by God, my wife and daughters and the brethren that were hurt by my foolish act of self-indulgence. God, as only He could, has put my family back together and has healed my heart and soul. I praise Him for His grace and mercy, and I thank my family and God's people who have extended to me genuine forgiveness.

#### **A Warning To All:**

If you are thinking, “That would never happen to me”, you have opened the door wide for Satan to enter and successfully steal your soul that belongs to God. It is amazing how foolish and careless with our eternal soul we can be. Jesus warned, “For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Matthew 16:26) Sin can be pleasurable for a very short moment, but soon that pleasure turns into guilt and fear of death. For those sixteen years I was away from the Lord, I lived in fear of hell and eternal death. Please believe me. It is not worth the momentary pleasure sin provides.

#### **There Is Nothing Sweeter Than Forgiveness:**

So many people really do not understand what forgiveness is about. You hear people say it all the time: “I'll forgive but I can never forget”. Of course one cannot forget the pain of betrayal by a loved one or brother in Christ. There is no way my wife will ever be able to forget the sleepless nights of sobbing and heartache. It is impossible for my daughters to forget I robbed them of a happy home and was a father who cheated them out of my presence and protection. Forgetting has very little, if anything, to do with forgiveness. What is the character of God's forgiveness? It is not that He forgets what we have done in open disobedience and rebellion against Him. It is not He can turn a blind eye to the fact we have done the very things that made the death of His Son on the cross necessary. When God forgives us, He treats us as if our sin had never happened. Look at the response of the father in the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15. He saw his son while he was still a great way off. That means he was looking for him every single day. I well remember the words brother Dee Bowman used to describe the father as he presented a sermon based on this parable. He said concerning the father, “He didn't know when the bus was coming in.” There is no indication in that parable that the father had forgotten the pain he endured hoping his son would come home. He was watching and wishing every day he would come to his senses and return. The fact is he told the servants to put a robe on him, give him a ring, and sandals on his feet. They were to kill the fattened calf so there could be a celebration of his return. It wasn't that he had forgotten what his son had done. He TREATED him as if he had never left home.

#### **A Happy Ending:**

Since coming to my senses and returning to the Lord, God has put my family back together as only He can. I have returned to serving my God in preaching His word and telling folks about God's amazing grace. The church where I preach knows fully of my past history and never at any time has anyone said or done

anything that would indicate they hold against me the inexcusable sin I committed. Now I can preach about the sin of adultery, hear sermons about adultery, discuss the subject of adultery in a one on one meeting without feeling ashamed or wondering if someone is holding that sin against me. I have been blessed to experience the grace, love, and forgiveness of God and to see it in action by those who have forgiven me. May I say it again, "There is nothing sweeter than forgiveness." We serve a great and wondrous God who gives us the greatest blessing we can imagine: **His Forgiveness.**

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## What About Marriages Before One Was Saved?

Pat Donahue | Harvest, Alabama, USA

I hear believers all the time try to make excuses for their current adulterous marriages by saying their previous marriage was before they were saved. What does that have to do with anything? Marriage was instituted in Genesis 2:24 long before Christianity started (Matthew 19:4-6). Jesus didn't say in verse 9 "Whosoever **is a Christian** and shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery;" Instead he said "**Whosoever**" - and that gets everybody, every Christian and every non-Christian alike.

If marriage does not really exist between non-Christians, does that mean none of the couples before Christianity was instituted were married? Wouldn't that mean married people in our world today are not really married if they are not Christians? Were Herod and Herodias Christians when John the Baptist told Herod in Matthew 14:4, "It is not lawful for thee to have her"? According to this position it should have been okay for these two divorcees to marry each other because since they weren't "saved" their previous marriages did not count.

Wendell Wiser wrote correctly, "Some argue that God does not recognize a sinner's marriage. Paul said a man can have a wife who is an alien sinner (1 Corinthians 7:12). The Holy Spirit tells us Pilate had a wife (Matthew 27:19). Pilate and his wife were alien sinners. The Holy Spirit tells us Felix had a wife named Drusilla. (Acts 24:24). Felix and Drusilla were not Christians. They were alien sinners (Acts 24:25).

Many times we know this, "but I wasn't saved then" excuse is just that, an excuse, because the person in question thought of themselves as saved during their first marriage, but now that they want to marry a second person, they suddenly declare themselves as being unsaved previously. That way they can declare their first marriage invalid and marry again – contrary to what Jesus said in Matthew 19:9. And some keep doing this over and over again. No, we see from 1 Corinthians 7:12-13 that marriages to non-Christians are real marriages; they entail obligation just like any other marriage.

Romans 7:2-3 also helps us on this question. It reads:

*"For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man."*

Notice the text doesn't say one is bound to their spouse if they are a Christian. It doesn't say a second marriage is not adulterous if one was not a Christian during their previous marriage. No, one is bound (obligated) to their original spouse regardless of whether they were Christians at the time or not.

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## A Prophet Sharing Plan (2)

Jefferson David Tant | Hendersonville, Tennessee, USA

### Channel the Conversation

After a time, advance beyond the weather. Some folks, even preachers, can never seem to get to the point. Even when the person expects you to bring up Bible matters, timidity reigns. Sometimes this is

because we are afraid we will strain (or lose) a relationship, or we won't know what to say. This is the real "fear factor."

We moved into one neighborhood and met the young family next door, who had three young children about the ages of the three we had at the time. They were very hospitable and soon invited us over for steaks grilled on the barbeque. Joe showed me where his tools were in case I ever needed to borrow one. Good neighbors, and you don't want to mess that up. Of course we invited them to church, but never got much beyond that. After a time it began to gnaw on me, so I finally got up my courage and knocked on their kitchen door one night as they were finishing supper. "Come on in, David." "Do you have any plans for the evening?" "No, what do you have in mind?" "I wanted to share some things about the Bible with you, if that's OK." "We've been wondering when you were going to come."

All that worry for nothing. They expected me, and this led to several studies over a period of time. (Don't even ask the question.)

So, introduce spiritual topics. Sometimes I start with "Where do you go to church." I have never had anyone get offended at that, even if they happen to be Jewish or Muslim or atheists. One September morning I was at the cleaners when I engaged the young clerk in conversation. Noting her youthful appearance, I asked "Why aren't you in school today?" "I'm in college, and classes haven't started yet?" "Did you go to Henderson High School." "Yes." "Did you know (and I named a few names)?" "Yes." "Where do you go to church?" She was silent as she lowered her head. I said, "You don't go to church, do you?" "No, I don't." "Why not?" "Well, you can't trust the Bible. It's full of legends and fairy tales." "Who told you that?" "My Bible professor." (She was going to a Methodist College.) "Nancy, do you know that the Bible is filled with all sorts of interesting facts that were unknown to men at the time they were written? I'd be glad to show you some of these things if you are interested." Nancy came for studies over the next several weeks, which led to this 19-year-old being baptized into Christ.

On another occasion I was stuck at a bus station in Anniston, Alabama because a bus had been delayed that was supposed to meet us. One of my fellow passengers was 19-year-old Denise, and we started talking. In the course of our conversation, I asked, "Are you a Christian?" She replied in the negative. She seemed like a nice young woman, so I asked her, "Why not?" She then went into some detail about some bad experiences in church in her younger years. We had a good conversation, and the bus was soon on its way. As I got off the bus in Atlanta, she was continuing on to Columbia, South Carolina. I mentioned that I would be nearby in a meeting in a few weeks, and would like to continue our conversation. She gave me her phone number.

As I passed through Columbia, I called Denise. She asked for directions to the church building in Camden, and said she and her boyfriend would be there Sunday morning. When I woke up that morning, I had my doubts that I would see them, for the fog was so thick you could cut it with a knife. But at the appointed hour, Denise and Danny came walking in. I was to have lunch that day with the preacher and his wife, Owen and Glenodine Thomas. They invited Denise and Danny to come along. We had a Bible study after lunch, and then went to the building to baptize the two of them. When I stopped to see Denise at her work on Monday, she and Danny were going on her lunch hour to get their marriage license so as to make their "living together" acceptable in the eyes of God.

Perhaps you do not really feel comfortable to bring up some spiritual topic. I can understand that some people may be a bit shy. How about carrying around some little tracts and give them to people? I usually carry a little four page leaflet that I give to people I meet. Sometimes there is no opportunity to talk to a store clerk, so I hand them the leaflet and ask them to read it and give me their thoughts on it when I return. Surely anyone can do that.

Another question I often ask goes something like this as I talk to our waitress at IHOP or some other diner: "Let me ask you a philosophical question." They look somewhat puzzled, but agree. "What's the meaning

of life?" Often I get the "deer-in-the-headlights" look, as they have never thought about that. That then opens the door for me to say, "I'd like to share some thoughts with you about that. I think you'll find it interesting." There are many such approaches to get the conversation turned to spiritual matters.

Use common sense and tact in talking with people. "Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer each one" (Colossians 4:6). We always need to measure our words, lest we needlessly turn people off. I have heard of one preacher who has the reputation of knocking on a stranger's door and telling the people there, "I'm here because I believe you are going to hell. May I come in a talk with you?" I'm not sure that is the most effective approach. And then there was the barber who had a man in the chair who wanted a shave. As the barber was sharpening his razor, he asked the man, "Are you ready to die?" That might be one way to lose a customer.

When one of my sons-in-law was dating my daughter, the first time he went to church with her, one of the men met him and asked about his religious affiliation. When Bill said he was a Catholic, the response was, "Don't you know Catholics are going to hell?" Thankfully, he overcame that setback, but I would suggest that such an approach is not the best way to win converts.

### **SET UP A BIBLE STUDY**

Somewhere along the way, one needs to take the plunge and ask the question. You do not have to wait until one has visited our services. Some people are reluctant to enter a strange church building. After you get to know someone, just ask, "Could we get together for a Bible study for an hour or so? I have something I would like to share with you—the simplicity of New Testament Christianity, apart from all denominational creeds and doctrines."

If you do not feel competent to conduct a Bible study, there are all sorts of aids that are helpful—filmstrips, videotapes, printed lessons, etc. Maybe you can take someone with you who has more experience. Just don't let inexperience keep you from getting started. Everyone has to start somewhere.

Get the person to commit to a specific date. Don't leave it to "OK. We'll get together some time." "Some time" is not on your calendar.

Be persistent. The fainthearted and fearful will never get much accomplished. Keep on asking until the person says "yes" or "no." Some years ago we had met a family who owned a discount store—mom and dad and three teenagers. We became friendly with them, and invited them to visit our services several times. "Yeah, we'll have to come sometime," but it didn't happen. One day I went into the store and found the dad. "Roger, could my wife and I come by one evening for about an hour to share the idea of simple, undenominational Christianity?" He agreed for us to come, and later admitted he only agreed to, thinking that if we got that out of the way, we would leave them alone.

That one-hour study led to a desire to know more. After our third study, Roger had tears in his eyes. He said that he had gone to church and Sunday School through his young years, and had even been a Sunday School teacher as an adult, but admitted he had learned more about the Bible in these few weeks than all those years put together. In just a few weeks Roger and Donna were baptized into Christ, and then later one of the daughters.

One thing I often do is give people an "out." After asking for a study with people a few times, I tell them, "If you would rather not do this, just tell me. I won't be offended. I don't want you to feel threatened every time I come around." They appreciate my telling them this. Only one time has anyone taken me up on my offer. But after some months she changed her mind, and we were able to study together.

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## **Singing And Making Melody To The Lord**

Jim Mickells | Lewisburg, Tennessee, USA

*"speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your hearts to the Lord" (Ephesians 5:19)*

There is much we can learn from this passage of Scripture about our singing to the Lord. It is a shame many in the religious world today will not confine themselves to what is taught in the New Testament about this act of worship. Notice with me a few things which the apostle Paul points out in this verse.

(1) He tells them to speak to one another. We all should participate in our song service. There are at least two things accomplished when we follow this command. (a) We teach and admonish one another as we sing these spiritual songs (Colossians 3:16). When we sing hymns, they provide instruction and inspiration. They move people to be obedient to God. I'm often encouraged after singing to work harder and live better for the Lord. (b) We also sing to praise our Heavenly Father, His Son, and the Spirit. In Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16, both tell us our singing is to the Lord.

(2) We are told the kind of songs we are to sing as well, psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. The word "psalms" is defined as "a pious song, a psalm" (Thayer's Greek English Lexicon). In Vincent's Word Studies in the New Testament, he says, "is used in the New Testament of a religious song in general, having the character of an Old Testament psalm." The meaning of the word "hymns" is, "a sacred song, hymn" (Thayer). Vincent says, "A hymn is a song of praise." Thayer defines the word "songs" as "a song, lay, ode." Bullinger in his word study says of the word "spiritual" as "probably implying that the songs were composed by spiritual men; or that they related to spiritual things" (A Critical Lexicon And Concordance To The English And Greek New Testament). This eliminates all songs which are not spiritual, which fail to praise God, and do not teach and edify those who sing to love and obey the Lord.

(3) The command given is to sing. We are not told to play or beat. If we simply follow the instruction given there would be no discussion about the kind of music in our worship service today. The only music which would be heard as people worship the God of heaven would be vocal, not instrumental. There is no command for such, no example of a New Testament church using such, and nothing is implied in any verse in the law of Christ that something mechanical is to be used while singing praises to God.

(4) We are told what is to be used by each individual when they sing, making melody in one's heart. The word "melody" is defined as "primarily to twitch, twang, then, to play a stringed instrument with the fingers, and hence, in the Sept., to sing with a harp, sing psalms, denotes, in the N.T., to sing a hymn, sing praise" (Vine's Expository Dictionary Of New Testament Words). What instrument does the text tell us to play? It is the heart, not a mechanical instrument. In Paul's letter to the Colossians, he tells them, "singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord" (3:16). Every act of worship we are instructed to do is to be from the heart. Our minds must concentrate and be upon the service to be rendered unto our God. More is involved than just lip service. Carefully notice the definition given of the word melody by Mr. Vine. In the New Testament we are to sing, plucking the heart strings.

I have never heard anyone say it is a sin for us to just sing without the accompaniment of mechanical instruments. Yet, if such is not authorized by God, and it is not, then to act would be in violation of His will and would constitute sin (2 John 9). Why not just do what we have authority for and let everything else alone? Some have told me in the past they have a piano or an organ because they like the way it sounds. Who are we trying to please, God or man (Galatians 1:10)? We must simply follow the Bible (1 Peter 4:11). Are you willing to do that?

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## **Adam, Where are You?**

Mike Thomas | Bowling Green, Kentucky, USA

It's not like He didn't know where Adam was, but still the "Lord God called to Adam and said to him, 'Where are you?'" (Genesis 3:9). He asked this because something had changed in His relationship with His son. They were no longer enjoying the closeness they once did and something severe had driven them apart,

and consequently God's child was hiding from Him. He called for Adam because...

### **Adam Was Missing**

Adam is still missing today whenever we let a busy world crowd our heart with "the desire for other things" (Mark 4:19) instead of a love for God and His word. We go missing when we find reasons to quit attending services faithfully or fail to form daily routines with God. Unfortunately, this has become a common development in churches since the Covid Pandemic. It was a trying time for the entire world that presented many new and unique experiences for most Christians. Virtual worship was a rare experience, and very few churches had it prior to 2020. But now it is as common as smartphones, for everything from Bible classes to worship services. This virtual alternative continues to benefit those who are confined to home. But some Christians are still using these options instead of meeting in-person because of the convenience they provide. Some claim they are still concerned for Covid and getting sick, even though they still go to work, grocery stores, restaurants, ballgames, and many other settings without reservation. Yet for some reason assembling for worship is the most dangerous activity fathomable and must be avoided. Truthfully, friends, if that is our thinking, we have wandered from God and do not even realize it.

Adam, where are you? Your brethren need you as much as you need them – and your faith is dependent on gathering for public worship like God instructs. He says:

*"Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching"*  
(Hebrews 10:23-25).

If worshiping in person was not important, God would not require it of us. But obviously, there are benefits that can only be found in being together for worship and study. We may soothe our conscience by saying we'll watch the broadcast later, but we all know that will never last or make us better. Christians need to be together to grow in our relationship together and to aid each other in maturing in Christ. The only real solution is to get back to God.

### **Adam Had to Confess**

Omniscient God already knew where Adam was since "the darkness and the light are both alike" to Him (Psalm 139:12). He does not need light to see us and He certainly did not need Adam to answer verbally to identify his location. Behold, "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). God called out to Adam so that Adam could know where he was. He needed to see the changes he had created in his relationship with God and why things would never be the same. In asking Adam, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree...?" (Genesis 3:11), God was forcing mankind to take responsibility for his actions.

This should impress upon us the importance of confessing sin. God's word says, "He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy" (Proverbs 28:13). He does not require this admission from us because He is unaware of our sin and needs to learn the details. Jesus said God knows the things we have need of before we even ask (Matthew 6:8). The reason He requires our confession is so that we might realize our needs. Like Adam, we need to see the awfulness of violating His will and how we have ruined something very precious. By confessing sin, especially of a public nature (James 5:16), we are taking responsibility for our actions and placing the blame where it belongs: on our self and not God or anyone else.

Sometimes people give fake confessions in response to sin. They say things like, "I know I shouldn't have done what I did, but I had no choice because of all the problems I was facing." Anyone who is truly filled with godly sorrow will not make excuses or try to justify their evil. They will have the humility and honesty to say as penitent David said, "I have sinned greatly, because I have done this thing...for I have done very foolishly" (1 Chronicles 21:8). They will know that God requires genuine humility and righteousness before

He extends forgiveness (James 4:6-10).

Fortunately, we have a God who still looks for us even after we have wandered away. Through the blood of Christ, we can find the forgiveness of sins and be reconciled to Him by either obeying the gospel (Acts 2:38) or by being restored as an erring Christian (Acts 8:22). But we must first admit we have departed from God and are separated from Him because of our sin. As long as we say that “we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8), but “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (verse 9). In light of that...Christian, where are you?

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## Your Reasonable Service...

TEXTS TO PAUSE & PONDER ON

William Stewart | Odessa, Ontario, Canada

The book of Romans is filled with many great statements. The book begins with the declaration that the gospel "...is the power of God to salvation..." (1:16), and ends with the promise that "...the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly" (16:20). Between these, we find many other exceptional verses of faith. In our time today, we want to focus on Romans 12:1-2.

The text reads:

*I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. (Romans 12:1-2)*

There are a bunch of rich concepts in these two verses. Consider:

- Rather than the dead sacrifices of the Old Covenant, we give ourselves, our lives as a living sacrifice to the Lord.
- Like under the old covenant, not just any sacrifice is acceptable. We must present ourselves as holy (sanctified, set apart) to God.
- We are not to conform to this world, realizing that the world is condemned before God. Instead, we are to be changed (the Greek for metamorphosis is used here).
- If we put God's word into practice, we'll find it is good and has the power to renew (renovate) our minds.

There are a lot of really neat ideas in these 2 verses. The phrase that catches my attention the most is at the end of verse 1.

Some translations render it “spiritual service” or “spiritual worship,” but I think the KJV and NKJV translators have given the best translation of *logikos latreia*, calling it “reasonable service.”

Yes, it is spiritual service that Paul is writing about, but the word spiritual really does not capture the idea he shares. A transliteration of the first word in the phrase would result in “logical service.” It makes sense; it is a rational decision for us to serve God.

There are a number of ways we can speak of our decision to follow Christ. It is a decision based on love—His love for us, as well as our love for Him. It shows a focus on eternal rather than temporal things. It is a choice for salvation of the soul rather than damnation. It sets our hope in heaven. It acknowledges the authority of God's word. We could keep going, but quite simply, it is logical.

Often in our world Christians are accused of serving God out of blind faith. Sadly, that could be the case for some, but our decision to follow Christ should be based in logical conviction. It is sensible to obey and live; it makes no sense to disobey and suffer destruction.



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## Respectable Wordliness

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

*"Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever"*  
(1 John 2:15-17).

My wife and I moved to Northern New York State in 1995, where I preached for the following fourteen years. Not long thereafter, we occasionally were in New York City. After our daughter moved to the Brooklyn borough of the city in 2004, we were there fairly regularly. We were amazed to find the parts of the city we visited - we've been in all five boroughs - safe.

Prior to 1994 that wasn't the case. Times Square was a red light district. Visitors were assaulted on the street by homeless people. Rudy Giuliani became mayor in 1994 and had a plan to clean up the city based on the "broken window" theory of law enforcement.

*"The theory suggests that policing methods that target minor crimes such as vandalism, loitering, public drinking, jaywalking, and fare evasion help to create an atmosphere of order and lawfulness"* (Wikipedia).

Vagrants demanding money for using a dirty squeegee on your windshield at traffic lights were arrested. New York City became a pleasant place to visit.

For years I've been of the opinion that we've lost the fight against respectable worldliness in the church and will just have to draw the line against egregious sins like homosexuality, easy divorce, and fornication. But, if we have lost our respect for the authority of Christ and His Word and are just drifting along with our denominational neighbors, we've lost the fight. My Methodist friends are proud that they accept openly practicing homosexuals. When will we be just like them?

We must take a zero tolerance attitude toward sin in the church.

*"But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person"* (1 Corinthians 5:11).

*"And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them"*  
(Ephesians 5:11).

### Modest Dress

We must teach and practice modest dress. When Adam and Eve learned the difference between good and evil, the first thing they noticed was their nakedness and "made themselves coverings" of fig leaves" (Genesis 3:7). The word "coverings" (New King James Version) is also translated "aprons" (King James Version, American Standard Version), "loin coverings" (New American Standard Bible), or "loincloths" (English Standard Version). They still considered themselves "naked" (Genesis 3:10), and the Lord God agreed with their assessment (Genesis 3:11). In every age public nakedness has been and is shameful (Genesis 9:20-23; Exodus 20:26; 28:42; Isaiah 47:3; Nahum 3:5; Revelation 3:18). To cover Adam and Eve's nakedness, "the Lord God made tunics of skin and clothed them" (Genesis 3:21). These "tunics" were "generally with sleeves, to the knees, but seldom to the ankles (sic)" (Wilson. 81).

Nakedness is shameful. The definition of "lewdness" (Ephesians 4:17-19; Galatians 5:19-21) is "shamelessness" (Thayer. 79). Christian, put on your clothes.

### Raffles

Some brethren have always gambled, but almost all brethren I was associated with understood it is wrong. That is no longer the case, especially when it comes to raffles conducted for a charitable cause.

Gambling is “the act or practice of betting: the act of playing a game and consciously risking money or other stakes on its outcome” (Webster. 932). Thus, we must not confuse gambling with legitimate business risks. A legitimate business provides beneficial goods or services that are meant to bring the business owner a legitimate profit. Everyone benefits. In gambling, one profits by the loss of others. No beneficial goods or services come from the act of gambling.

The Scriptures authorize four means of gaining wealth: work (Ephesians 4:28; 2 Thessalonians 3:10-12), fair exchange (Acts 5:3-4), investment (Acts 5:3-4), and gifts of love (Acts 20:35; Ephesians 4:28). There is a pattern: All authorized means of gaining wealth help others. Conversely stated, no one gains at the loss of others. The principle of love, the highest moral principle, is always followed (1 Corinthians 13:13; 1 John 4:8).

Gambling fits none of these and violates at least three: wealth without work, something for nothing, and taking what others do not want to give.

Furthermore, gambling violates at least two very important New Testament principles. It violates the principle of unselfish love. First, we must love all people (Matthew 5:43-45). Love is manifested by concerned giving (1 John 3:16-18). We must not be selfish, but seek what is best for others (Matthew 7:12). Second, we should desire to earn what we receive (2 Thessalonians 3:7-9).

Raffles, a form of gambling (see definition above), are very popular as a means to raise money for a charitable cause. Paul inquired, “shall we do evil that good may come?” and replied that those who accused him of teaching this were slandering him and deserved to be condemned (Romans 3:8). A worthy purpose does not justify sin.

### **Wilfully Missing Services**

One of the hardest (impossible?) things to do is to get many brethren to attend any service of the church other than Sunday morning, and many are even lackadaisical about it.

*“And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, “not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching” (Hebrews 10:24-25).*

First, the passage tells us why we need to assemble with the Lord’s people - we show consideration for each other by “stimulating” (**NASB**) each other to love and good works. Do Sunday afternoon and Wednesday night help accomplish that?

Does it excuse us from assembling if relatives come to visit? Do I love my children more than I love the Lord? (Matthew 10:37). If they’re there when it’s time for church, invite them to come with you. If they decline, let them know you’ll be back after church.

Does it say it’s alright to miss church if we’re on vacation? Are we “lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God”? (Titus 3:4). When you go on vacation, plan ahead to worship with a faithful congregation on the Lord’s day.

### **Gossip**

Does a brother or a sister irritate you? What should you do about it? If it’s sin, talk to the sinner and try to save his soul, thereby demonstrating your love (Galatians 6:1-2; James 5:19-20). If it’s just irritating to you but not sinful, learn to be longsuffering (Ephesians 4:1-3). But don’t engage in sinful gossip and backbiting (2 Corinthians 12:20). Talk to them rather than about them, and be gentle and humble about it.

*“But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. “For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you*

*will be condemned*" (Matthew 12:36-37).

### **Conclusion**

New York City is no longer safe. Friends of ours who have lived there for years have either left or are living in fear. What happened? The laws are no longer strictly enforced if at all. Violent, repeat offenders are freed to roam the streets and terrorize. They should have kept the zero tolerance and strict enforcement.

As Christians drift with the world and become lax in obedience, the church is no longer growing. Many see no reason to talk to a friend or neighbor about the gospel. Our denominational friends see an unconcerned people who live like the world. As the Lord's apostles, we must be "in the world" but "not of the world" (John 17:11, 14).

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