



# January 2025

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

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Finally, brethren  
**WHATEVER THINGS** are true  
 are noble  
 are just  
 are pure  
 are lovely  
 are of good report  
 IF THERE IS ANY VIRTURE AND IF THERE IS ANYTHING PRAISEWORTHY –  
**meditate on these things.**

PHILIPPIANS 4:8

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).

## Knowledge and Understanding

Proverbs 18:2

"A fool has no delight in understanding, But in expressing his own heart."

Proverbs 18:15

"The heart of the prudent acquires knowledge, And the ear of the wise seeks knowledge."

"The age in which we live today is surely more illustrative of this truth than any other era ever has been. One could spend all day every day, learning about any particular subject and would be able to do this at very minimal cost. It is mostly available free from a wide variety of sources, electronically. Ours has not been described as the "information age" for no reason. And yet, most people spend all of their extra time playing video games, and posting useless information on social media platforms, all the while becoming less informed in the meantime. Generally speaking, people are more ignorant and uneducated than ever before in human history in spite of this phenomenal growth of the availability of knowledge. The world should be filled with wise men and women! But just the opposite is the case. How could this be? The answer is that there are far more people in this world who fit the description of Proverbs 18:2 than there are those who fit 18:15. This is a truly sad commentary on our reality. But the accuracy of it is difficult to deny" (Daniel H. King, Sr., **Truth Commentaries: The Book of Proverbs**. 575).

## Walk Worthy

James Rattazzi | Manhattan, New York, USA

Scripture tells us that Enoch escaped death because he "walked with God" (Genesis 5:24). Micah 6:8 talks of things that the Lord requires of us, one is "to walk humbly with your God". Amos 3:3 poses this question, "Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?" (NKJ). This figure runs through both the old and new testaments. Ephesians 4:1 encourages us "to walk in a manner worthy of the calling". The apostle Paul then urges us, among other things, to be "eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3).

Misinformation can damage our walk with God. Some have expressed concern about my walk with God at various times. Most recently, for example, regarding the news that I am currently worshipping at the Manhattan Church of Christ, an immediate reaction of one was: "Don't they have women serving at the Lord's table?" Is that concern based on truth or misinformation? We human beings have the tendency to create out of our own imagination explanations for things that puzzle us. Having a reasonable explanation often supersedes the concern for truthfulness or factual accuracy of the product of our imagination. An example might help here. John 3:2 tells us that Nicodemus "came to Jesus by night". Let's say I'm in the habit of teaching that Nicodemus chose that time of day for fear of his Pharisee buddies, a perfectly reasonable assertion. Students trust my teaching and this becomes integral with their understanding of the text. Now, one of my students visits a church where they teach that Nicodemus chose that time of day in order to get Jesus alone and, as often does, a quarrel ensues. My failure to clearly separate my imagination, my opinion from what the scripture actually says was not helpful in maintaining "the unity of the spirit". And so unity and peace suffer. In Romans 14:1 the apostle Paul advises "As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions". Much of the division among believers is merely quarreling over human traditions and opinions.

Look at this passage from the gospel of Mark chapter 7 verses 1-9:

*"Now when the Pharisees gathered to him, with some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem, they saw that some of his disciples ate with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed. (For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands properly, holding to the tradition of the elders, and when they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash. And there are many other traditions that they observe, such as the washing of cups and pots and copper vessels and dining couches.) And the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, 'Why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?' And he said to them, 'Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men."'"*

You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men And he said to them, "You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition!" (Mark 7:1-9)

When Jesus appeared in the flesh he came to a people whose religious practices had strayed greatly from the instructions found in scripture. Over time the accumulation of human traditions almost completely eclipsed God's instruction in part due to the sheer volume of amassed statutes. In other words traditions from men, over time crowd out God's pure instruction that remains a fixed quantity. This is something they were specifically instructed not to do, "You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God that I command you" (Deuteronomy 4:2). The example given in Mark 7 of these various ceremonial washings seems harmless enough but Jesus is strong in his condemnation of the mindset these practices represent. Jesus goes on to cite an additional human tradition they follow and concludes with this further condemnation, "thus making void the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And many such things you do" (Mark 7:13).

## From God or from man

This phrase summarizes the principle Jesus is focusing on here. The source of my opinion is from man. The source of an instruction such as to love my neighbor as myself is from God. This contrast drives a number of passages in scripture. One example is: "About the middle of the feast Jesus went up into the temple and began teaching. The Jews therefore marveled, saying, "How is it that this man has learning, when he has never studied?" So Jesus answered them, "My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me" (John 7:14-16). Disciples of Jesus should strive to walk as Jesus did. Each of us should do our very best to focus on what is from God rather than what is from man (human traditions and opinions). We can then speak with authority if we are successful in accurately communicating God's word.

## Nuance & Balance

While there are certainly principles in scripture that when correctly understood apply to all for all time (Micah 6:8 for example). Some often imagine that every statement in scripture is binding on all for all time. Context and specifics are often ignored in connection with this error. There are two obvious Old Testament examples I often cite. In Genesis chapter 6 God tells Noah to build an ark. It would be incorrect to conclude that today we all must each build an ark. In Genesis chapter 12 God tells Abraham (Abram at that time) to move to a land that God would show him. This winds up being the land of Canaan which as we all know becomes Israel. It would again be incorrect to conclude that today we all must each move to Israel. These instructions were to a certain person at a certain time, for a specific purpose. Understanding the context takes nothing away from the fact that all these things were "written for our instruction" (Romans 15:4). Correct handling of scripture requires us to take into account who is being spoken to and under what conditions. Also we need to take into account various translation hazards that crop up. The apostle Paul gave Timothy this advice, "charge them before God not to quarrel about words, which does no good, but only ruins the hearers. Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:14-15). Correctly taking context into account helps us to appreciate the nuance and balance so often found in scripture. And helps to prevent us from taking various statements and applying them as universal rules for all time. These sort of errors of imagination, which come from man, only multiply over time and detract from the unity and peace that we should all be striving for.

I'll include a quote here from the late 19th century that clearly expresses a related challenge we all face as we pursue God's truth: "The most difficult subjects can be explained to the most slow-witted man if he has not formed any idea of them already; but the simplest thing cannot be made clear to the most intelligent man if he is firmly persuaded that he knows already, without a shadow of a doubt, what is laid before him." (The Kingdom of God is Within You "Leo Tolstoy, 1894".) A struggle we all face is maintaining our conviction while still being open to correction.

Holding to man made traditions and opinions as if they were from God is responsible for a great deal of disagreement and division. The comment mentioned earlier about women serving at the Lord's table is an example of this. It is not my plan to go over the details of these various issues here, but if you see this differently my invitation is for us to study together with the goal of coming to agreement concerning the truth.

Let me know your thoughts on what I'm saying here. I am available for constructive discussion and study aimed at improving our walk with God in unity and peace.

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## Reply to "Walk Worthy"

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

Brother James Rattazzi, who lives in Manhattan, New York, is my dear friend. In July, 2014 William Stewart and I spent a week teaching in the New York City borough of Queens in the vain hope of getting a

congregation started there. Brother Rattazzi found and procured us a suitable meeting place, helped set everything up, and was there for every session. I can never thank him enough.

He has decided to become a member of the Manhattan Church of Christ, and the preceding article is his defense of that. He concentrates on women serving in leading roles and argues against following human tradition, implying that those of us who disagree with his fellowship with MCoC are just guided by our traditions.

When we corresponded about his attendance there, I asked him what the MCoC believes, practices, and teaches. He referred me to their web site, which I have now read.

Brother Rattazzi mentioned only women serving at the Lord's table. That's barely the hem of the garment. They have two women elders, Mary Joseph and Julie Short. Additionally, Emily Cofmann is "associate minister of Worship and Small Groups."

The inspired apostle Paul wrote: "A woman must quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. But I do not allow a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet" (1 Timothy 2:11-12, NASB). The purpose of Paul's first epistle to Timothy was "so that you will know how one should act in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:14-15). That's not human tradition; that's inspired New Testament Scripture. There's nothing in the statement or the context limiting the statement by time or culture. Women must not take leadership roles over men in the local church. "Elders," "pastors" (i.e., shepherds), and "bishops" (i.e., overseers) are all different names for the same office in the local church (Acts 20:17, 28). They have the oversight of the local church (1 Peter 5:1-4). An elder (pastor, shepherd, bishop, overseer) must be "the husband of one wife" (1 Timothy 3:1-2). Now I know that unbelievers have gone so far as to promote homosexual marriage, but this is an abomination to the Lord (Matthew 19:4-5; Romans 1:26-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; et al). How can a woman scripturally have a wife? How can a church with women elders claim to be "of Christ"?

In addition to women serving in the church in leading roles over men, in direct violation of specific, plain New Testament Scripture (1 Corinthians 14:34-35; 1 Timothy 2:11-12), the MCoC has "Community of Hope," an "outreach to homeless individuals and those in need," which offers, every Saturday, "a hot meal and a welcoming atmosphere to all who attend." Quite a contrast to the Lord who refused to feed those who came because they "ate of the loaves and were filled" (John 6:26-27). Where did first century churches ever provide benevolent needs to any but Christians? (cf. Acts 2:44-45; 4:32-35; 6:1-4; 11:27-30; 15:25-26; 1 Corinthians 16:1-4; 2 Corinthians 8:4, 13-15; 9:1,12-13; 1 Timothy 5:3,10,16).

They "recognize the gifting of the Holy Spirit on all people to lead." New Testament "gifts of the Holy Spirit" were miraculous (1 Corinthians chapter 12) and ceased when the New Testament revelation was complete (1 Corinthians 13:8-13). Even then women were forbidden to speak in such a way that they were over men (1 Corinthians 14:34-35). Rather than being cultural and temporary, this principle has always been true everywhere and at all times (1 Corinthians 14:34; cf. Genesis 3:16).

Further MCoC sponsors "Precious Kids Ministry," a youth camp with its own organization. The church of the New Testament is a spiritual relationship (Ephesians 1:3, 22-23), and all its authorized activities are spiritual. The primary function of the church of the Lord is to be "the pillar and support of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:14-15). In keeping with this principle, the church should preach the gospel to the lost (1 Thessalonians 1:6-8), edify Christians (Ephesians 4:11-16), and provide benevolence to needy saints, an expression of fellowship in Christ (2 Corinthians 8:1-4; the New King James Version correctly renders "participation" [NASB] as "fellowship"). There is absolutely no authority from Christ for the local church to sponsor recreational activities, whether for young or old. Furthermore, the only organization Christ has authorized for His church is the independent, autonomous local congregation (1 Corinthians 1:2; Philippians 1:1; 1 Peter 5:1-2).

The MCoC website contains a 1960 film it made to solicit millions of dollars to fund its building on the corner of Madison Avenue. The film falsely teaches that having such a building is essential to having a church in Manhattan, although churches of Christ had existed in Manhattan since 1810, sometimes with but more often without their own building. There is no biblical authority for various congregations to send funds to another congregation so it can build a house of worship. Nor does a congregation have to own its own building to thrive. Although the gospel went to "all the world" in the first generation after the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (Colossians 1:5-6), there is no proof any congregation owned its own building, including brethren in the giant metropolis of Rome. Further, the construction of the MCoC edifice was a real estate venture, in that the upper three fourths of the 25 story building was built in order to provide apartments to sell. In essence, operating on funds unscripturally begged from and provided by churches of Christ and individual brethren from all over the country, MCoC went into a huge real estate venture.

MCoC has the denominational one man pastor system. One of its elders is designated as "senior minister or pastor." Each New Testament church had a plurality of pastors (i.e., bishops, overseers, elders; Acts 20:17; 21:18; Philippians 1:1; Titus 1:5; 1 Peter 5:1-2) equal to one another in authority.

They have a page on their web site soliciting contributions from everyone, everywhere, just like other denominational churches. A church of Christ should only solicit contributions from its own members on the first day of the week (1 Corinthians 16:1-2).

They have a completely denominational concept of the church, in that they refer to "congregations of Churches of Christ." The church of Christ (i.e., the Way, church of God, church of the first born) is composed of individual Christians, not congregations. Every metaphor used in the New Testament that describes the composition of the church applies to individuals (1. kingdom: citizens - Matthew 16:18-19; Ephesians 2:19; 2. fold: sheep - John 10:16; 3. vine: branches - John 15:5-6; 4. body: members - 1 Corinthians 12:27; 5. temple: stones - Ephesians 2:21; 1 Peter 2:5; 6. family: children - Ephesians 3:14-15; Galatians 3:26). Individual members of this universal body function under a spiritual Head, Christ (Colossians 1:18; 3:17). Christians universally have fellowship by each following Christ through submission to the words of His apostles (1 John 1:3,7).

Should a Christian be a member of the Manhattan Church of Christ? "Come out from among them and be separate" (2 Corinthians 6:17).

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## **Why Should You Read, Study, Know The Bible? (Pt. 2)**

Jefferson David Tant | Hendersonville, Tennessee, USA

### **A Road Map**

If you start out for a destination where you have never been before, the most reasonable thing to do would be to obtain a good map. Then you follow the map until it leads you to your destination. Most people will study the map before ever embarking on a journey. I don't know if I have ever met anyone who was about to go on a trip who had no idea where their destination was or how to get there, who just started off in a direction down no certain highway. That would be foolish, wouldn't it? But if you have a map and start out along the way, and people tried to divert you and convince you that you didn't have to follow the directions on the map, what would your response be? In most cases, unless there was a compelling reason to do otherwise, you would stick to the map. Someone has been that way before you, and the map shows the way.

We may also look upon the Bible as our spiritual roadmap, guiding us to heaven. Do we just strike out on our own? Have you ever been to heaven before and thus know the way? God says that we cannot find the way ourselves. Jeremiah 10:23: "I know, O Lord, that a man's way is not in himself, Nor is it in a man who walks to direct his steps." He further insists that we can only come to the Father through Jesus Christ.

John 14: 6: "Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.'" And how do we come to the Father through Christ? By reading and heeding His words. How else? In following a roadmap, we look for signs along the way to direct us. The Word of God supplies us with spiritual roadmarks as well. When the nation of Israel departed from the paths of righteousness, they were encouraged to return, to "get back on the right road." Jeremiah 31:21: "Set up for yourself roadmarks, Place for yourself guideposts; Direct your mind to the highway, The way by which you went. Return, O virgin of Israel, Return to these your cities."

It is true that many will try to divert us and tell us different ways to heaven, or tell us we do not need to follow all the directions. But even there the Bible warns about false prophets and teachers who will lead us astray. 1 John 4:1: "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world." And how do we test or try the teaching that is given? By comparing the teaching with the Word of God, which is the standard by which all is to be judged. The apostle Paul commended the people of Berea for their diligence in doing study for themselves. Acts 17:11: "Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so." Some preachers I have known would get upset to be questioned, but Paul says this is a mark of nobility if you "check out" what the preacher says. 1 Thessalonians 5:21: "But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good."

Think about it. If your destination is Burnt Corn, Arkansas, is it not important to get the directions right? If you do miss your destination because someone has given you wrong directions, that is not the end of the world. But if you miss heaven because you relied on someone else's directions, that IS the end! With the importance of what is at stake, your eternal existence in heaven or hell, don't you think it's worth the trouble to find out for yourself?

### **A Will**

Suppose a rich uncle died and left you his estate worth millions. In his will were certain conditions to be met. For example, you had to live in Monkey's Paw, Kentucky (there is such a place), and you had to have at least five children. Now, since you then resided in Roswell, Georgia, and had only three children, what would you do? I would assume that you would make immediate preparations to move to Monkey's Paw and adopt two children. Any person making a will has the right to set the terms for an heir to receive the inheritance. If you didn't comply with the terms of the will, then you would not be surprised when you didn't receive the inheritance.

Is there a spiritual application? The book that we call the Bible is divided into two parts, the Old and New Testaments. What is a testament? Look up a copy of your will. It may be titled, "The Last Will and Testament of..." The words "will," "testament," and "covenant" are all used in describing such a document. And all of these words are used to refer to God's plan for us. In Hebrews, the writer compares the Old Testament or covenant with the New one that superseded the Old upon the death of the One who made the New Covenant, Jesus Christ. Hebrews 9:15-17:

*"For this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant, so that, since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance. For where a covenant is, there must of necessity be the death of the one who made it. For a covenant is valid only when men are dead, for it is never in force while the one who made it lives."*

The point is made that when Jesus died, His "last will and testament" came into effect, for such a will has no force when the one who made it is still living.

Now, how is it that we "receive the promise of the eternal inheritance?" The same way we receive any eternal inheritance--by complying with the terms of the will. Note Matthew 7:21: "Not everyone who says to

Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter." It is interesting to note that Jesus follows those words by describing certain ones at the Day of Judgment who argued that they were doing all sorts of "religious" or "good" deeds, but deeds which he had not authorized, which were not a part of his will. Matthew 7:22-23: "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'" Therefore it is obvious that in order to receive the inheritance, we can do only the things in his will, and not try to think that we can do whatever we want. Does that make it important to read, study and know God's will? How can we comply with the terms of the will if we don't know for ourselves what the terms of the will are?

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## The Mirror of the Soul

Jim Mickells | Sellersburg, Indiana, USA

James describes the gospel as the perfect law of liberty (James 1:25). He also speaks of it as a mirror where one can look and really see himself as God sees him (James 1:23-24). Not the outward appearance, but the inward man. We are to be doers of this law and not just hearers (James 1:22). What do we see when using this mirror? It will reveal our character, the needs of the soul, and if we truly are doers and not just hearers of God's word. Yet the entire Bible serves as a mirror as well. There is so much revealed to us in the word of God about ourselves, the needs we have, the great love our Father has for us to supply those needs through Jesus, His dealings with men and women in the past, etc.

**One thing it reflects is the origin of man.** God created man from the dust of the earth and, "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul" (Genesis 2:7).

**It also tells why He made mankind,** placing him on this earth. Paul in speaking to those in the city of Athens says that God expects man to seek after Him (Acts 17:26-28). We can know He is God (Psalm 100:3) and can draw near to Him by cleansing our hands and purifying our hearts according to James (James 4:7-10). Seeking Him involves doing His will (Matthew 7:21-22; Hebrews 10:36).

**And the Scriptures also reveal where we are going when life on earth draws to a close.** There are only two places, heaven or hell. Many deny there is a hell, yet its reality is just as great according to the Bible as heaven (Matthew 25:41,46; Mark 9:42-48). Heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people (John 14:1-6). No preparation is needed to lose one's soul in the fires of hell.

**This great mirror reflects the value of the soul,** and it also reveals how worldly possessions will be of no worth to one in eternity. Notice the question posed by Jesus, "For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matthew 16:26). One of the Lord's parables, titled "The Parable Of The Rich Fool" in my Bible, illustrates to us how useless material blessing are when life ends (Luke 12:13-21). This rich farmer was concerned about building greater barns to store his crops so he could take it easy and enjoy life for many years. Jesus called him a fool. Someone else enjoyed those crops. He lost the only truly valuable possession he had, his soul. The word of God tells us we need to be rich in faith to be heirs of His eternal kingdom (James 2:5).

**This great revealing device shows us how marred our souls can become because of sin and the need for forgiveness.** Sin is a transgression of God's law (1 John 3:4; 1 John 5:17); it is widespread, all have sinned (Romans 3:10, 23); it makes the soul filthy (Zechariah 3:3-4); it pays wages, spiritual death or separation from God (Romans 6:23; Isaiah 59:1-2). Forgiveness is made possible to men through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross (Colossians 1:20; Ephesians 2:16). God loved us so much He was willing to send His Son to die in our place, to become the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world (John 3:16; 1 John 4:10). One of the truly amazing things to me is He does not want anyone to perish, die lost, but all to be saved, even the most hardened criminal (1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9). His love for each of us should motivate everyone to submit to Him in humble obedience (2 Corinthians 5:14-15).

What do we need to do with this mirror? We need to spend time looking into it, day and night (Psalm 1:2); diligently search it, rightly dividing (2 Timothy 2:15); making sure we make the proper application, not following false teachers (2 Peter 2:1-3); be like the Bereans search to make sure the truth is taught and then receive it, incorporate it into our lives (Acts 17:11). I am not sure we appreciate having the word of God in our language so we can constantly listen as God speaks to us like we should.

My good friend Greg Gwin related to me a story about an old man in Tula, Russia. They were giving out Bibles on the street in the Russian language, which at that time they were not readily available to them. He placed it in his hands, looking down at it, and seeing it was a Bible began to weep and said, "I have never even held the word of God before." How sad! May we thank the good Lord for it and be doers of His word and not hearers only.

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## Why Must Reconciliation With The Original Spouse Be Attempted?

Patrick Donahue | Harvest, Alabama, USA

Some Christians who agree divorce (or marital separation) is wrong except in the case of divorce for fornication, teach that once a person commits this sin, then 1 Corinthians 7:11 allows them to scripturally remain apart. But they are missing the truth in this text.

Here is how 1 Corinthians 7:10-11 reads –

*"And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband: But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband: and let not the husband put away his wife."*

It is true the option "let her remain unmarried" is given after she departs, but there are actually two options given – the other being "let her ... be reconciled to her husband." Are those two options of equal priority? We must not just assume they are.

Sometimes two options are given in a situation where one option has priority. As an illustration of this possibility, consider Revelation 3:15 "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot." Do you see how God gave the Laodiceans two options ("cold or hot"), but the two options given are not equal? God obviously prefers the second option over the first.

That opens up the possibility that the same might be true in 1 Corinthians 7:11. Now let's prove conclusively the "be reconciled" option is preferred by God over the "remain unmarried" option

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First, the initial command is "Let not the wife depart" (verse 10). That is God's law on the matter, and we sin if we violate that law (1 John 3:4). And if we understand what repentance is (a change of mind that leads to a change of action – Matthew 21:29), then we will understand that if a wife sins by departing from her husband in violation of verse 10, what she needs to do to make that right is to return to him, to undo the wrong she did (Luke 19:8). And don't think the fact that verse 11 gives instructions if one violates verse 10, means it isn't a sin to violate verse 10.

Compare to Deuteronomy 22:28-29: Just because a young man is given instructions about what to do after he commits fornication with a young woman, that doesn't prove the fornication was okay to start with.

Second, consider Romans 7:2-3:

*"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."*



A woman is bound (obligated) to her husband as long as he lives. And just because she leaves him, that doesn't relieve her of that obligation.

That obligation would include I Corinthians 7:3-5, which teaches she is responsible to satisfy the sexual needs of her husband. Just because she gets an unscriptural divorce doesn't relieve her of that stated responsibility. As a matter of fact, Matthew 5:32 implies the woman in such a situation sins by divorcing her husband by putting him into a place of underserved sexual temptation, and she is therefore party to his sin if he commits adultery. So as long as they stay apart, the one who left is in a continual state of sin (withholding) per I Corinthians 7:3-5 and Matthew 5:32. And as long as a man stays apart from his lawful wife, he continues to be in violation of the command for him to "dwell" with her in I Peter 3:7.

Conclusion: God really does expect us to fulfill our "vows" – "till death do us part" (Matthew 19:6). So if a woman sins by departing from her husband (I Corinthians 7:10), then she should seek reconciliation to him (repentance and fulfilling our vows demand that). But suppose he won't take her back / what if that option is unavailable to her? After all, it takes two to tango. Then she has relieved her responsibility in that regard; she should remain unmarried, that is, not commit the additional sin of adultery. Taking all passages under consideration, that would have to be the meaning of I Corinthians 7:10-11.

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## **An Offer You Shouldn't Refuse**

Greg Gwin | Columbia, Tennessee, USA

Daily we are confronted with a variety of "special offers." Many techniques are used to encourage our favorable response. Often we are urged to buy with the suggestion that this product fills some great need, or that it will only be offered for a limited time. Others tell us of new products, or special deals. Sometimes we are told that we have been specifically chosen for the privilege of participation. All of this is intended, of course, to get us to make some positive commitment.

There is another offer that comes to us which is different from those previously described. But with this offer, every incentive is really true. It fulfills a great need, it speaks of opportunity both special and for a limited time, and it involves that which is always new. But, perhaps most importantly, it provides a truly genuine privilege of participation. The offer of which we speak is that which has been extended by our Lord Jesus Christ:

*"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30).*

This offer concerns that which is of the greatest value - your eternal soul (Mark 8:36,37). It is certainly worthy of your most careful consideration. Think!

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## **"Be Zealous"**

Michael D. Hickox | Mattoon, Illinois, USA

Among the seven churches whom the book of Revelation was directly addressed to (cf. Revelation 1:4, 11), only the church at Laodicea received no commendation from the Lord. What was their chief error addressed by the Lord? False doctrine? Division? Sexual immorality? While any of these sins would need to be corrected if they existed, the sin of the Laodiceans highlighted by the Lord is lukewarmness.

Notice Revelation 3:15-16: "I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were cold or hot. So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will vomit you out of my mouth."

The Christians at Laodicea were spiritually apathetic. They lacked fire, enthusiasm, and passion for the Lord. In other words, they were omitting the positive virtue of zeal.

Misdirected zeal can cause harm rather than good (Romans 10:2-3; Philippians 3:6). This is reason for caution, but it doesn't excuse omitting properly directed zeal. Knowledge without zeal is no better than zeal without knowledge.

Properly directed zeal is summarized in Titus 2:14. Speaking of "our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ" (verse 13), the Holy Spirit says "who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good works."

If our zeal is directed toward what God defines as "good works," it will please Him. To know what God defines as a good work, we need only look to inspired Scripture (cf. 2 Timothy 3:16-17). More specifically, we must look to what the New Testament authorizes as a good work (cf. Colossians 2:14).

For instance, Scripture shows that studying God's Word is a good work (cf. Acts 17:11). Christians should be zealous for this, having a strong spiritual appetite (1 Peter 2:2).

As we zealously feast on the spiritual nourishment of God's Word, we should be zealous to examine ourselves by it (2 Corinthians 13:5). When we see something in our lives that does not measure up to His standard, we should zealously correct it (cf. 2 Cor. 7:9-11).

We should each be zealously devoted to prayer (Ephesians 6:18) and edifying one another (1 Thessalonians 5:11).

Zeal for good works such as these is a must for God's children. If we are lukewarm like the Christians in Laodicea, the same rebuke given to them could be given to us.

Moreover, the same solution given to them applies to any Christian living in spiritual apathy. Notice Revelation 3:19: "As many as I love, I reprove and chasten. Be zealous therefore, and repent."

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## Who Are Your Friends?

Ethan Jennings | Olney, Illinois, USA

1 Corinthians 15:33 states, "Do not be deceived: Bad company corrupts good morals." There are only a few words in this verse, but they speak much truth. The world has a way of influencing others. I've seen folks affected by all sorts of sins just by hanging out in the world. Everything from course jesting (Ephesians 5:4) to fornication (Hebrews 13:4) and many other things have influenced Christians to the point that they fall away.

I'm sorry to see Christians influenced by the world because they fail to understand the actual danger there is in it. The words of James 4:4 ring clearly in the statement, "You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore, whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God." One can't have both the world and God. A choice must be made.

The Psalmist said it best, "How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers! But his delight is in the law of the Lord, And in His law, he meditates day and night" (Psalm 1:1-4). Letting the Bible – the word of God – influence us rather than wickedness is something we should consider.

Some people argue, "I'm trying to convert these folks." This is the right attitude to have. However, if one gets influenced into sinfulness, one will inevitably be influenced to do evil. It will ultimately result in one losing his soul. There is a time to move on. Even Jesus said in Matthew 7:6, "Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under their feet, and turn and

tear you to pieces.”

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## **God's Word is Profitable For...**

William Stewart | Kingston, Ontario, Canada

Paul wrote concerning the Bible:

*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17)*

When we read this text, the first question which might come to mind is this: what is Scripture? Paul used the Greek word *graf*, which Thayer defines as "a writing, thing written," but Jamieson-Fausset-Brown adds, "The Greek is never used for writings in general, but only of the sacred Scriptures."

In context, Paul identified the Old Testament as Scripture (2 Timothy 3:15), but there is no reason to limit the scope of his statement to the Old Testament. Peter refers to the writings of Paul as Scripture (2 Peter 3:15-16). God inspired all Scripture, both Old and New Testament.

A single Greek word gives us the phrase, "inspiration of God," a compound word combining the words *theos* (God) and *pneuma* (spirit, breathe), thus, Scripture is God-breathed. The Bible is God-spoken, for it came from God, not man (2 Peter 1:20-21). The Bible is not just a good book with good words in it; rather, it is God's book, with God's words in it. Many times we find the words, "God said," or "the Lord said," or "the word of the Lord came to...." Time and again, the Bible claims to be from God.

Since the Bible is a message from God, Paul identifies it as profitable or beneficial. God gave us the Scriptures to direct us in life and service to the Lord. Thus, Paul says it is "...profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness..." Consider...

### **Profitable For Doctrine**

Doctrine is another word for teaching. God's word is filled with teaching on many, many topics. It teaches us about God, about our purpose in life, about loving and obeying God, and about doing good for others. The Scriptures instruct us on how to receive God's mercy, how to worship the Lord, and how to abstain from sin. The Bible is very much the user manual for life, thus, we would do well to read and follow it.

### **Profitable For Reproof**

The Greek word used here is elsewhere rendered "conviction" or "evidence." This is about confronting error; about pointing out where we've missed the mark. Paul said, "...I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, 'You shall not covet.'" (Romans 7:7). Galatians 2 speaks of an occasion when Paul reprovved Peter, who acted contrary to God's will and led others astray in his hypocrisy. God's word reveals when we get off course in our walk with God.

### **Profitable For Correction**

Exposing sin is not enough; we must also correct it. God's word not only reveals our straying, but it also guides us back to the right way. The key is the will to hear and obey. Paul spoke about the need to put off the old man and put on the new; thus putting off uncleanness, covetousness, anger, blasphemy, lying, etc, and putting on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, forgiveness, love, etc. (Colossians 3:5-13; Ephesians 4:22-32). We need to leave the crooked ways behind so we might walk the straight way of the

Lord.

### **Profitable For Instruction In Righteousness**

This relates to all three aforementioned items. The instruction comes from the doctrine of God, which then reproves us of our sin, and finally instructs us to make correction. This goes beyond mere knowledge. We need to learn to put God's word into practice (Romans 2:13; James 1:22). As we are instructed by God's word we will be equipped to become what God calls us to be.

2 Timothy 3:17 tells us what the result will be if we learn the doctrine, receive the reproof, seek the correction, and follow the instruction. We will be complete. The Greek word (artiov) carries the idea of "fitting, complete, perfect" (Thayer). Albert Barnes notes, "...the Scriptures have laid down the way which leads to perfection, and that if any one were perfect, he would find in the Scriptures all the instruction which he needed..." We cannot be complete or fitted for God's service apart from adherence to the Scriptures. But, if we will be students and followers of the divine text, Paul assures us we will be "...thoroughly equipped for every good work." What a great statement! God's word doesn't just sort of equip us - it thoroughly equips us. God's word doesn't just prepare us for some good works - it prepares us for every good work.

Friend, the Bible is the most important book in the world. Used rightly, it will lead us away from wickedness and bring us to righteousness. Followed as it should be, it will prepare us for service before God in this life, and by His grace and mercy, unto eternal life.

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### **Is Conscience a Safe Guide?**

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

We are often admonished, "Let your conscience be your guide." This is used to justify people following whatever religion or path in life that seems right to them.

But Solomon observed, "There is away that seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death" (Proverbs 14:12; 16:25).

"Conscience" is a consciousness of guilt or innocence (Hebrews 10:2; The word translated "consciousness" is the one usually translated "conscience.").

Paul kept a clear conscience throughout his life (Acts 23:1), but he persecuted to the death the disciples of Christ (Acts 22:4-5; 26:9-11). Although he was doing what he thought he should do (Acts 26:9), he was nonetheless the "chief" of sinners (1 Timothy 1:15).

The function of conscience is to bear witness of one's guilt or innocence to that person himself as he compares his own thoughts, words, and actions to whatever standard of right and wrong he has accepted (Romans 9:1; John 8:9). Your conscience is like the cruise control on your car. If the speed limit is 55, and you set your cruise control on 55, it will keep you from speeding. But if you set it on 70, it might cause you to get a speeding ticket.

Make sure your conscience is properly set.

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### **Introduction to Exodus**

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

**Author**

Moses is the author of the book of Exodus (17:14; 34:27) as well as the rest of the Pentateuch.

### **Name**

The name "Exodus" is from the Greek word meaning "way out" or "departure." Thus, it is the story of Israel's "going out" of Egyptian bondage.

### **Themes**

Exodus has two intertwining themes. The first eighteen chapters of the book are a narrative, the story of the great Exodus of Israel from Egyptian bondage. This narrative continues the story of the book of Genesis. The word "Now," the very first word in Exodus, ties the events of Exodus to the story of Joseph, the last event chronicled in Genesis. In fact, Exodus 1:1-8 specifically refers to Joseph and his generation as the background for the story of Exodus.

But chapters nineteen through forty of the book are a completely different type of writing. This marks the first great division of the Pentateuch, so far as type of literature. Now, rather than historical narrative, the text becomes law, legislation. This legislation was given in order to organize Israel as a nation, a theocracy, a nation in which civil and religious law are combined. Thus, the second great theme of Exodus is the establishment of Israel as a nation.

God's great promise to Abraham is the key to the entire Old Testament, and that is especially obvious in Exodus. At the beginning of the events recorded in Exodus, none of the three parts of the promise had been fulfilled. But the Lord delivered Israel out of bondage in Egypt to begin the fulfillment of the land promise. At Mt. Sinai he fashioned them into a nation (19:5-6). Thus, at the end of Exodus, the nation promise, the first part of God's promise to Abraham, had been fulfilled (cf. Deuteronomy 26:5).

The two themes of Exodus are Exodus from Egypt and Israel Becomes a Nation. Old Testament Israel was God's own, special people. But Israel as a nation was cast off for rejecting Christ (Matthew 21:33-46). Now the church is God's special people (1 Peter 2:9).

### **Divisions**

The two major divisions of Exodus, corresponding with its twin themes, are Deliverance from Egyptian Bondage (chapters 1 - 18) and The Covenant at Mt. Sinai (chapters 19 - 40).

### **Legislation**

On three different occasions God gave Israel legislation to prepare them to be a nation in the land of Canaan: first, at Mt Sinai, recorded in Exodus and Leviticus; second, in the wilderness, recorded in Numbers; and third, in the plains of Moab, recorded in Deuteronomy.

### **Simplified Outline of Exodus**

- I. Deliverance from Egyptian Bondage - chapters 1 - 18
  - A. Egyptian Bondage - 1:1 - 7:7
  - B. The Lord's Wonders in Egypt - 7:8 - 12:36
  - C. Exodus from Egypt - 12:37 - 18:27
- II. The Covenant at Mt Sinai - chapters 19 - 40
  - A. The Law at Mt. Sinai - 19:1 - 24:18
  - B. The Divine Plan for the Tabernacle and the Priesthood - 25:1 - 31:18
  - C. The Covenant Broken and Renewed - 32:1 - 35:3

D. The Building of the Tabernacle - 35:4 - 40:38



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