



UNMASKING SOPHISTRY

A Journal of Christian Evidences and Comparative Religions

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"See to it that there is no one who takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception in accordance with human tradition, in accordance with the elementary principles of the world, rather than in accordance with Christ."

(Colossians 2:8, NASB)

CONTENT



4 FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

CHRISTIAN EVIDENCES

5 Is Faith Blind? By Emmanuel Oluwatoba

WORLD RELIGIONS

7 The Problem with Organized Religion By Andy Sochor

DISCOURSE

Discussion Of First Corinthians 11:2-16

10 A Custom, Not A Command By William J. Stewart

13 Hats, Hair and Harridans By Brent Sharp

16 QUIBBLES THAT BACKFIRED

CHURCH HISTORY

17 The Beginning of Apostasy By Andy Sochor

BARBS WITH A POINT

20 Contend Earnestly for the Faith By Dylan Stewart

INSTITUTIONALISM

22 The History of the Institutional Controversy By Jefferson David Tant

CONTENT



MYTH BUSTER

- 26 How To Judge A Sermon By Pat Donahue

IDEAL HOME

- 28 Mothers: The Heart Of The Family By Gene Taylor

- 29 How a Wife Builds a Godly Home By Glen Young

- 30 How a Husband Builds a Godly Home By Glen Young

SALVATION

- 31 Faith Without Works Is Dead By Osamagbe Lesley Egharevba

- 35 Possess Your Vessel By Mike Thomas

37 QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

ADDENDUM

- 38 Making Effective Use Of The Internet & Social Media by Osamagbe Lesley Egharevba

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From The Editor's Desk

With great joy, we present to you the ninth edition of *Unmasking Sophistry Magazine*. It is the first issue in the year 2023. We are grateful to God for the grace He has given to us to see this new year. The journal is still focused on teaching the truth of God's word as well as exposing the various arguments that have been prepared in defense of false religion and arguments designed to oppose the Christian faith. For us to cover a wide range of areas, various sections have been created in this journal, and topics relating to each of the sections will be discussed in every edition in a consistent manner.

In the last edition of this journal, we examined various subjects under each of the sections such as: *Why Do Bad Things Happen To Good People?*; *Was Jesus Created?*; *A Discourse On The AD 70 Doctrine*; *Early Persecutions*; *Drinking Moderately*; *Dressing Moderately For Our Children*; *A Model of Good Deeds*; *Should We Pray To Cover Ourselves With The Blood of Jesus?*; *Institutionalism*; *A Crisis In Christianity*; *The Prosperity Gospel*; and other exciting topics.

Meanwhile, this edition shall focus on topics such as: *Is Faith Blind?*; *The Problem With Organized Religion*; *A Discussion On The Head Covering Of I Corinthians 11*; *Quibbles That Backfired*; *The Beginning Of Apostasy*; *The History Of The Institutional Controversy*; *Contend Earnestly For The Faith*; *Mothers: The Heart Of The Family*; *How a Wife Builds a Godly Home*; *How a Husband Builds a Godly Home*; *How To Judge A Sermon*; *Faith Without Works Is Dead*; *Making Effective Use Of The Internet and Social Media*; as well as other intriguing topics.

You are warmly reminded that *Unmasking Sophistry Magazine* is available online and all editions (past and present) can be accessed and downloaded online at www.unmaskingsophistry.com/downloads

The open-door policy of the magazine is still very much intact – if anyone disagrees with an article in any edition of the magazine, such could write a rebuttal to it, and we would be willing to publish it in the same issue to which the article he is replying appeared. Alternatively, a proposition will be set for the writer of the article and whoever dissents to affirm and deny respectively as the case may be – with the aim of knowing the truth on the subject matter.

We wish you all a Happy New Year (2023) and pray that we all become more steadfast in the work of God. We appreciate all the prayers, feedback, and encouragement from our readers. We would continue to hold fast to the pattern of sound words which we have heard from the apostles, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus (II Timothy 1:13; Acts 2:42).

God's Love and Blessings.

Osamagbe Lesley Egharevba
Editor

CHRISTIAN EVIDENCES

Is Faith Blind?

By Emmanuel Oluwatoba | Niger, Nigeria

The Bible defines faith in a totally different way from the way most people understood it; biblical faith is a decision to believe something about God based on evidence.

Introduction

Faith is very essential to Christianity, and many assume the Christian faith to be blind. This assumption is not only propounded by atheists (who seek to discredit the faith on that ground) but also by some professing Christians who believe that “true faith” is believing something despite the evidence against it or believing something when there is no evidence to support it.

Is faith blind? Does it necessitate the surrender of reason? Let us go back to the scriptures to find the answer to these questions.

Biblical Faith

What does the Bible mean by faith? Hebrews 11 vs 1 reads “*Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen*”. Some people read the biblical definition of faith and place emphasis on “*hoped for*” and “*not seen*” and conclude that it agrees with the idea that faith is having assurance without evidence and reason to support it. However, such a conclusion is not only hasty but also wrong. Let us look at the three words critical to understanding the biblical definition of faith.

Faith: the original Greek word '*pistis*' means “*firm persuasion*” or “*strong conviction*”, this means what is being referred to is far from irrational belief, rather it is the result of reaching a logical conclusion.

Substance: the original Greek word '*hupostatis*' refers to that “*which has foundation*” or “*which has actual existence*”. This means that there is something substantial that supports one's faith.

Evidence: the original Greek word '*elegchos*' means “**proof.**” This refers to facts that leads to personal conviction.

The two phrases “*hoped for*” and “*not seen*” only highlights the immaterial nature of the Christian expectations and does not in any way mean that the Christian faith is blind. From examining the three words (faith, substance, and evidence), we find that the biblical understanding of faith is totally different from what people assume; it is a personal conviction based on solid evidence.

Christian Faith

The Christian faith is evidential. Neither Jesus nor His apostles advocated for a faith that is without evidence, let us examine the following points:

Jesus' miraculous works are evidence for faith: Jesus presented his works as evidence to those who questioned him, even when they were His followers, He did not require blind faith from them, we read of Philip's encounter with Jesus in John 14 vs 8-12, in verse 11 Jesus says “*Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father is in me; or else believe because of the works themselves.*” John wrote 21 chapters about the works of Jesus and he explains the reason for doing so in John 20 vs 31, “*But these are written, that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name*”.

Jesus presented Himself as a proof for faith: After the resurrection of Jesus, He presented Himself to as many people as Luke writes in Acts 1 vs 3 “*To these he shows Himself alive after he suffered, by many proofs,*



appearing to them over a period of forty days, and speaking about God's kingdom". Jesus also presented Himself to one of His disciples who doubted His resurrection, "Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and observe my hands. Reach out your hand, and put it into my side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing." (John 20 vs 27).

The resurrection of Jesus is evidence for faith: In Acts 2 vs 1-36, Peter appealed to the knowledge of his audience who had seen the miracles of Jesus and offered it as evidence "*Men of Israel, hear these words, Jesus the Nazareth, a man approved by God to you by mighty works and wonders and signs which God did by him in the midst of you, even as you yourselves know,*" (vs. 22). Peter also makes mention of *witnesses* of Jesus' resurrection "*This Jesus God raised up, to which we are all witnesses*" (vs. 32). Based on these two important pieces of evidence, Peter concludes that those listening to him can be confident that Jesus is Christ "*Let all the house of Israel know certainly that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified.*" (vs. 36).

Christians are to examine their beliefs: Christians are expected to be critical and thoughtful, as the Bible teaches in 1 Thess. 5:21 "*but test all things; hold firmly to that which is good*", also we are to emulate the noble Bereans: "*Now these were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of the mind, examining the scripture daily to see whether those things were so.*" (Acts 17 vs 11).

Christians are expected to defend their faith: Christians are called to share the evidence of their faith at every point in time, this is because our faith is defensible "*But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and be ready always to give an answer to every man*

that asks you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear" (1 Peter 3 vs 15).

Conclusion

The Bible defines faith in a totally different way from the way most people understood it; biblical faith is a decision to believe something about God based on evidence. Christians are not to believe that we are expected to have blind faith; instead, we should be always ready to examine our beliefs, come to a conclusion based on the evidences, and be ready to present the evidences as a reason for the hope that we have.

HUMILITY

Brethren, let us remember:

- No matter how dear you are to God, if pride is harboured in your spirit, He will whip it out of you (Ezek. 18:24). Those who rise in their estimation must be brought down by God's discipline (Daniel 4:29-37).
- Humility is elusive. It is such a fragile plant that the slightest reference to it causes it to wilt and die (Rom. 12:3; 1 Sam. 2:3).
- Therefore, true humility is contentment (1 Tim. 6:6). The entire vista of the Christian religion begins with humility (1 Pet. 5:5).
- For spiritual growth, a man must first learn to kneel. It is a duty to be humble toward superiors, courteous toward equals, and noble toward subordinates.
- Sincere humility attracts. Lack of humbleness subtracts. Artificial meekness detracts. Indeed, humility is a Christian's dress code. It never goes out of style (Micah 6:8). It is like a stack of wheat that is full of beautiful grains. The more it is loaded, the lower it stoops down. To take a high place before men, you must first take a low place before God (Isaiah 57:15).
- He who is down has no reason to fear falling. He that is low has no pride; he that is humble shall have God as his guide (Prov. 25:6-7; 15:33) because riches, honour, and life are obtained through humility and fear of the Lord (Prov 22:4).

Rowland Femi Gbamis

World Religions

The Problem with Organized Religion

By Andy Sochor | Kentucky, USA

We have certain responsibilities as individuals in our service to the Lord. We also have responsibilities collectively within our local churches. Organized religion is good when it is the organization the Lord established – His church (Matthew 16:18) – functioning according to His will (Ephesians 5:23-24).

Many people today disparage “organized religion.” Instead, they simply desire a “personal relationship” with the Lord. However, this is not an “either-or” proposition. In our service to God, we have personal and corporate responsibilities. Notice what Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus:

“And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ...from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love” (Ephesians 4:11-12, 16).

“That, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth” (Ephesians 4:22-24).

In the same chapter, Paul spoke of *personal* responsibilities (laying aside the old self and putting on the new self) and *corporate* responsibilities (being a functioning part of a self-edifying body). Clearly, both are involved in the life of a Christian. In this article, we will discuss these responsibilities and notice what the *real* problem is with “organized religion.”

Religion Must Be Personal

Simply being recognized as a member of a congregation does not mean we are saved. Jesus described the kingdom of heaven as a field in which tares would grow among the wheat (Matthew 13:24-30). They would be left together until the harvest, then the tares would be gathered up and destroyed. The point we should learn from the parable is that not all who are recognized by men as being in the Lord's kingdom will be saved in the end – some will be lost. The church in Sardis had “*a few*” who were “*worthy*” to walk with the Lord, even though the church as a whole was “*dead*” (Revelation 3:1-4). They had a reputation for faithfulness, yet many of them – despite being members of that local church – were spiritually dead.

We are individually accountable before the Lord. Paul wrote, “*For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad*” (2 Corinthians 5:10). Therefore, we must honestly examine our lives (2 Corinthians 13:5) and discipline our bodies to keep from becoming disqualified from the reward of heaven (1 Corinthians 9:27).

We need to be sure that we, as individuals, are doing what the Lord wants us to do. Jesus said, “*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. 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'" (Matthew 7:21-23). On the day of judgment, there will be those who believed they were serving the Lord when in reality they were not doing what was lawful in His sight. They had failed to build on the rock; therefore, all of their efforts would be for naught in the end (Matthew 7:24-27).

Regardless of what others do or fail to do, we must do what we should. James wrote, "*Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world*" (James 1:27). The principle behind James' instruction is that we must do good to others and avoid sin. This is our personal responsibility.

Religion Must Have a Corporate Element

Corporate means "of, relating to, or formed into a unified body of individuals" (Merriam-Webster). As it pertains to the New Testament, this means that our religion must include being part of a local congregation.

While it is true that we are *individually* accountable, that does not mean that we are to be *isolated*. We have a responsibility to be part of a local body of Christians. This is why Saul tried "*to join himself to the disciples*" when he came to Jerusalem (Acts 9:26, KJV). Being part of a local church is for our mutual benefit as we can "*encourage one another*" and "*stimulate one another to love and good deeds*" (Hebrews 3:12-13; 10:24-25). In the local church, we are able to build up one another (Ephesians 4:16).

There are also certain things we must do together as a local church:

- **Worship** – Luke wrote that the church in Troas "*gathered together to break bread*" and hear a message from Paul (Acts 20:7). Paul told the brethren in Colossae to teach one another in song (Colossians 3:16). Togetherness is essential for these activities.
- **Giving** – Regarding the collection, Paul wrote, "*On the first day of every week each one of you is to put aside and save, as he may prosper*" (1 Corinthians 16:2). Why was this done on the first day of the week? That was when the church assembled (cf. 1 Corinthians 11:33; Acts 20:7).
- **Teaching** – Within the church, there are "*evangelists...pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints*" (Ephesians 4:11-12). This equipping would primarily be done through *teaching* – a work that all of these would share in common. Paul told Timothy, "*The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also*" (2 Timothy 2:2). Equipping and training is done within the church, not in a seminary.
- **Encouraging** – The Hebrew writer said, "*And let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near*" (Hebrews 10:24-25). Giving and receiving encouragement necessarily requires togetherness.
- **Discipline** – When Paul addressed the situation in Corinth in which one was unrepentant of his immorality, he wrote, "*In the name of our Lord Jesus, when you are assembled...deliver such a one to Satan for*

the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus" (1 Corinthians 5:4-5). For this type of discipline to be effective, it must be carried out by the group.

These things cannot properly be accomplished when one is not part of a local body of Christians. Therefore, we must be part of a group that has "organized" as a congregation of the Lord's people.

What Is the Problem?

The problem is not with "organized religion" itself. When people attack this, they are attacking the wrong problem. So what is the problem?

- **False religion** – Often when people attack "organized religion," it is not the Lord's church that they are targeting. Jesus built *one* church (Matthew 16:18), but there are *many* churches of men that have been created. The world does not make a distinction between them. To many, all churches are the same. Therefore, the problems that exist in man-made churches are projected onto the Lord's church. To combat this, we need to be able to show the difference between the Lord's church and all others.

- **Wrong expectations** – There are many things that people have come to expect from churches today – social activities, political advocacy, general charity, secular education, and so on. Because of this, they judge churches based upon those man-made expectations. However, these types of things are not what the Lord wants His church to do. The church is "*the pillar and support of the truth*" (1 Timothy 3:15) and needs to be proclaiming, teaching, and defending the truth. Claiming to do things in the name of the Lord is meaningless if those things are not authorized by the Lord (Matthew 7:22-23).

- **Imperfect people** – Christians are to be different from the world (Romans 12:2), but no one is perfectly sinless. John wrote, "*If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us*" (1 John 1:8). Sometimes people attack the church because of the people within the church. We need to strive to give "*no cause for offense in anything, so that the ministry will not be discredited*" (2 Corinthians 6:3). Peter wrote, "*Abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul. Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation*" (1 Peter 2:11-12). However, while we must strive to keep from sin and be the example to others that we ought to be, we also need to make it clear that the church is for those who are imperfect. Jesus said, "*I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners*" (Matthew 9:13). Even those who were guilty of crucifying Jesus could be part of His church if they would believe, repent, and obey the gospel (Acts 2:38, 41, 47).

The solution to these problems is not to abandon any sense of "organized religion." This only creates a new problem. The solution is to dedicate ourselves – individually and within our local churches – to carefully following what the Lord has instructed.

Conclusion

As we have noticed in this article, we have certain responsibilities as individuals in our service to the Lord. We also have responsibilities collectively within our local churches. Organized religion is good when it is the organization the Lord established – His church (Matthew 16:18) – functioning according to His will (Ephesians 5:23-24).

Discussion Of First Corinthians 11:2-16

The topic for discussion in this section centers on the head covering of I Corinthians 11. Is it a command that is binding today or is it just a custom that is no longer binding? There will be a series of exchanges on this issue for the next few editions of this journal. Everyone is encouraged to study both articles with their Bibles as will be published in each edition.

A Custom, Not A Command

By William J. Stewart | Ontario, Canada

The apostle Paul's message in 1 Corinthians 11 concerning head coverings has been variably interpreted by our brethren. Folks differ on what the covering is, on when the covering is to be worn, and on whether it is binding today or not. Herein I affirm the wearing of an artificial head covering is a matter of custom, not a command.

Custom

We need to begin our discussion with the apostle's conclusion – "...we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God" (v 16). This word rendered "custom" (Greek "*sunetheia*") appears just twice in the New Testament, here in our text and also in John 18:39. In John 18, Pilate spoke of the common practice (not a binding law) for a prisoner to be released to the Jewish people at Passover. This is very different from the word *ethos* used in Acts 6:14 and elsewhere, "...the customs which Moses delivered..." The former is a habit or routine, the latter is a statute or commandment. Paul plainly identifies the wearing of head coverings as a custom. It is a cultural practice, not a divine commandment.

The apostle encouraged the Corinthian women to wear the head covering, of that there is no doubt. However, his candid affirmation that "...we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God" sets the rationale for his instruction in the realm of social etiquette rather than obedience to a divine decree.

There may be reasons for a woman to wear a head covering in certain places and at certain times, but it remains a matter of custom, and a custom which does not belong to the church as a whole.

Setting the Context

We stress the importance of context, and rightly so. A text void of its context is easily misunderstood and misapplied. We must consider the greater context to which this instruction belongs. There is a principle woven through the middle portion 1 Corinthians dealing with the use of one's liberty. Just because we have the right to do something doesn't mean it is the right thing to do (6:12; 8:9; 10:23-24). Equally, though we receive sound and timely advice (perhaps even from an apostle), it is not sinful to do otherwise (7:25-28, 35-38). To demonstrate this principle about our freedoms and their willful restraint, Paul looks at various examples in the context: marriage (ch. 7), meats offered to idols (ch. 8, 10), the rights of an evangelist (ch. 9), and the wearing of head coverings (ch. 11); all demonstrating the saying, "...I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some" (see 1 Corinthians 9:19-22).

Immediately preceding Paul's discourse about head coverings, we find this:

"Give no offense, either to the Jews or to the Greeks or to the church of God, just as I also please all men



in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved. Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ” (1 Corinthians 10:32-11:1).

This willingness to set the concerns of others above our own freedoms is Paul's lead into the discussion of the head covering. There is no liberty with divine mandates, but there is a choice regarding the head covering, for it was an apostolic recommendation.

Judge Among Yourselves

In verses 13-15, Paul wrote:

“Judge among yourselves. Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him? But if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her; for her hair is given to her for a covering.”

Paul asked the Corinthians to employ their own ability to make a rational, common sense observation. The Greek word rendered “judge” in our text appears in Romans 14:5, “One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike,” and is elsewhere rendered determined, decided, etc.. Paul encouraged the Corinthians to decide among themselves what was proper, comely (KJV) or appropriate (WEB).

How were they to determine what was proper regarding head coverings and hair length? Paul counselled them to let nature be their teacher. We must be careful how we understand this term “nature.” It does not refer to what is inherent or necessarily imposed by God. The same Greek word (phusis) is used in Ephesians 2:3, which says we “...were by nature children of wrath...” Wickedness is not an innate attribute of humanity – God did not create vessels of

wrath. Wickedness is an acquired trait, learned by exposure and experience, and then acted upon habitually, or as Thayer says “...by long habit has become nature.”

What does nature teach us about hair length? He writes, “...if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him ... but if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her...” (11:14-15). This was Paul's observation of what “by long habit” was the accepted normal, not a universal law. The Nazirite vow required adherents to not cut their hair for a time, and then at the end of the vow, to shave the head (Numbers 6:5, 18-19). The vow could be taken by either a man or a woman (v 2), which resulted in men having long hair and women being shorn. If either of these were inherently sinful, every Nazirite sinned, and did so at the Lord's command. Acceptable hair length is a societal issue, not a Scriptural issue. Men with long hair and women with short hair is a matter of decorum, not sin. Christians should understand that to have a good influence in our communities (to “be all things to all men”), we should abide by societal customs which do not violate God's word.

A Symbol Of Authority

The woman's covering is identified as “a symbol of authority” (v 10). A woman's submission to her husband is a universal truth (v 3; cf. Genesis 3:16; Ephesians 5:23; 1 Peter 3:1, 5-6), but the covering is not a universal symbol of her submission. In other times and places the covering was a symbol of prostitution (Genesis 38:13-15, 19), of mourning and weeping (2 Samuel 15:30; 19:4; Esther 6:12) or of false prophecy and divination (Ezekiel 13:17-23). The covering may have served as a symbol of a woman's submission to her husband in first century Greek or Roman culture, but the covering is not a universal sign synonymous with a woman's subjection to her



husband. No such command existed in the age of the patriarchs, nor under the Mosaic Law, neither was it a subject of orthodoxy among the churches in Paul's day (v 16).

Covered Or Uncovered?

The instruction of 1 Corinthians 11:4-7 must be understood in light of these facts:

- The greater context deals with having consideration for others in our conduct.
- Hair length and coverings differ based on time and culture.
- Paul stated he is dealing with a custom, not a doctrine of the church.

Paul stated it is a dishonor for a man to pray or prophesy with his head covered (v 4, 7). This is a cultural observation, not a universal truth. Aaron and his sons wore turbans or hats when they served before the Lord (Exodus 28:3-4; 29:9), and it brought no dishonor to them or the Lord. In western culture, it is considered disrespectful for a man to wear a hat indoors (though such is changing). If a man wears a hat indoors, it may result in disapproval or rebuke. He brings dishonor to his head.

Paul continues, "...every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head..." (v 5). The application is the same. If cultural expectation is for a woman to be covered, then she should be covered (ie. Middle Eastern culture), lest she dishonor her head (herself and her husband's authority). Ignoring such a custom would bring disdain rather than an opportunity to influence others for good (to be all things to all men).

The "if" of verse 6 is important, "...if a woman is not covered, let her also be shorn. But if it is shameful for a woman to be shorn or shaved, let her be covered." Paul is not citing a divine law; the 'if' appeals to cultural

standards (v 13-15). This is not a universal statement of divine instruction, rather it calls upon brethren to fit in with local customs.

As much as we are able, we should minimize hindrances to our influence for the gospel's sake. That is Paul's focus in 1 Corinthians 11:1-16 and in the greater context. As we are able, we should abide by the customs of the culture we are in. Seeking to make this text a universal law requiring women in all places and in all ages to have long hair with artificial coverings and men to have short uncovered hair stretches the text beyond the apostle's intent.

Reference

Thayer, Joseph, "Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament".

5 THINGS JESUS DID NOT DO WHEN PERFORMING A MIRACLE

1. He did not push the individual to fall first.
2. He did not fix a date that he will do a miracle.
3. He did not ask the audience to sow seed.
4. He did not pray and the person got healed after some days.
5. He did not sort out those he will heal and those he will not.

What we see today is a far cry from what we read from the bible.

Discussion Of First Corinthians 11:2-16

Hats, Hair and Harridans

By Brent Sharp | Arkansas, USA

Suppose you showed up for worship services one morning and discovered that your preacher was going to deliver his sermon while wearing a ball cap with the logo for his favorite football team, or automobile company, or some such on his head. Would you care? Suppose another of your members, who happens to be from West Texas, was waiting on the Lord's table with a ten-gallon Stetson perched atop his head. What difference would that make? Suppose that the preacher put forward a man to be an elder, who seemed to be perfectly qualified from scripture... had long, flowing locks to his waist which the ladies of the congregation assured you were "beautiful". Would that be a problem?

Now suppose you entered a congregation for worship on Sunday morning and every woman and girl in attendance was bare-headed, many of the women had haircuts indistinguishable from men, and a sizeable minority had buzz cuts that would be acceptable for enlisted men in the army. Would this be a problem? Well, the fact of the matter is that you are highly unlikely to encounter the former ... but the latter is a fact of life for the overwhelming majority of professed churches of Christ throughout the United States. Why is this?

In the book of I Corinthians Paul addressed a number of disorders plaguing the church in Corinth. While this book was written to correct the excesses and contentions of Corinth, the letter itself is universally applicable to all local congregations, including the various local churches today. Paul's instructions to Corinth are still applicable in Amarillo, Lagos, Florence, or anywhere else a congregation of

Christians assembles to work and worship together (I Corinthians 1:2). Included in these instructions were some specific matters as to the conduct of each sex within worship, with a strong emphasis on maintaining the proper role of each, not only to preserve decorum, but to properly reflect our relationship with Christ and His Father.

In the first half of I Corinthians 11 Paul admonished the Corinthians, and instructs us, in four specific things. These are that women should pray with covered heads and have long hair, whereas men should pray with their heads uncovered and keep their hair short. For the first eighteen centuries after Paul penned this letter few, if any, who claimed to be Christians disputed this matter. It was universally accepted by Catholics, Orthodox and Protestants that this was the correct way to do things. Suddenly, however, in the 19th century we somehow discovered this was incorrect.

Today most brethren will tell you that Paul was simply addressing a local custom of Corinth.... Yet Paul nowhere calls his instructions to the Corinthian church a matter of custom, nor did anyone believe so until modern times, nor do serious lexicographers believe so today. Most who oppose the head covering for women will point out that the word custom appears in verse 16 of this passage, after which they will assert that this refers to Paul's instructions in the previous section, and then proclaim half the matter moot... that is, they will excuse women from their responsibilities in this passage while still binding Paul's instructions to men. A few will at least excuse men along with women from adhering to this,



although they are a small minority.

To properly apply the passage we must know to what Paul makes reference when he uses the word “custom.” The fact of the matter is Paul was referring to the abhorrent Corinthian practices of having women appear unveiled when he uses this term, and was explaining that no other church anywhere in the world allowed their women to behave in such a fashion. Every church in the first century other than Corinth was requiring their women to wear a covering. Even studious opponents of the veil, such as Mike Willis, acknowledge that the wearing of the veil was the universal practice of all the churches when Paul penned this letter (Commentary on I Corinthians, page 308). If we look at this seriously, from a lexicographer’s view, what does the passage actually say?

“We have no such custom - We the apostles in the churches which we have elsewhere founded; or we have no such custom in Judea. The sense is, that it is contrary to custom there for women to appear in public unveiled. This custom, the apostle argues, ought to be allowed to have some influence on the church of Corinth, even though they should not be convinced by his reasoning.” (Albert Barnes)

“But if any man seem to be contentious - If any person sets himself up as a wrangler - puts himself forward as a defender of such points, that a woman may pray or teach with her head uncovered, and that a man may, without reproach, have long hair; let him know that we have no such custom as either, nor are they sanctioned by any of the Churches of God, whether among the Jews or the Gentiles. (Adam Clarke)

See note on 1 Corinthians 8:7. The word has

been interpreted [1] as referring to contention, 'it is not our custom to be contentious,' or [2] to the practice of permitting women to appear unveiled at the services of the Church. The latter yields the best sense. This appeal to the Churches must not be understood to imply that all Churches ought in all respects to have the same customs. But in a matter such as this, involving the position of women in Christian society, and their reputation in the world at large—a matter of no small importance—it were far wiser for the Corinthian Church to follow the universal practice of Christendom.

Now if the false teacher resolves to be contentious, and maintains that it is allowable for women to pray and teach publicly in the church unveiled, we in Judea have no such custom, neither any of the churches of God.“ (James MacKnight on the Epistles)

See also Alford, Matthew Henry, Fausset (Pulpit Commentary), Lipscomb, McGarvey, etc. etc. etc.

At this point I should acknowledge that there has long been a minority opinion, championed by Chrysostom and Calvin, amongst others, that the custom of verse 16 is a practice of being contentious. While a minority of scholarly luminaries have taken this position, they likewise held that the veil was still universally binding and that the contentious person was still arguing about the head coverings and hair lengths despite Paul's thorough teaching on the matter.

This is the crux of the problem for those who oppose the covering.... Their position is contrary to plain reading of the text, contrary to the Greek grammar (as seen above), and its existence is well nigh impossible to document prior to the latter half of the 19th



century. Nowhere does Paul refer to the covering as a custom... this is a modern invention to excuse ignoring a direct command.

What we need to understand, and admit, is that at the turn of the twentieth century many preachers affiliated with the restoration, or Stone-Campbell movement, saw themselves as progressives and advocated positions that would shock most members of the church of Christ today. The most adamant opponents of the head covering, who by and large were successful in winning the majority over to their position, were men who embraced and espoused what would later become known as first-wave feminism. These men advocated for deaconesses in the local church and women teaching Bible classes with men in attendance; some of them also advocated for women leading in various acts of worship such as prayer and song leading, and in a few cases even advocated for women preachers in the local churches. The ensuing split between the church of Christ and the Christian church has usually been framed as a matter of organization and to a lesser degree music, but the role of women played a sizable part as well. Even so, some of the feminist progressives continued with the church of Christ, for example Nichol, while others continued to be influential through their written works, such as McGarvey. The point to all this is that prior to the rise of first wave feminism in England and the United States no one questioned that women should wear a head covering in worship and keep their hair long. It was only after the rise of this movement, and the change of women's role in society at large, that many brethren "discovered" a new meaning of I Corinthians 11:16 which allowed them to utterly annul the teaching of the preceding fourteen verses; a view without historical precedent, grammatical structure or logical consistency. The fact of the matter

is that the term custom in verse 16 means the opposite of what the progressives have told us, and that the entire passage is still binding in all places today.

IF JESUS CAME TO YOUR HOUSE

If Jesus came to your house
To spend a day or two
If He came unexpectedly
I wonder what you would do?
When you saw Him coming
Would you meet Him at the door,
With arms outstretched in welcome
To your heavenly visitor?
Or would you need to change some things
Before you let Him in?
Like burn some magazines
And put the Bible where they had been?
Oh I know you'd give your nicest room
To such an honoured guest,
And all the food that you would serve to Him
Would be the very best
And you'd keep assuring Him
That you were glad to have Him there
That serving Him in your home
Was joy beyond compare.
But what about your family conversation
Would it keep its normal place,
And would you find it hard each meal
To say a table grace?
Would you be glad to have Him stay forever on and on,
Or would you sigh with great relief
When finally He had gone?
You know it might be interesting
To know the things you would do,
If Jesus came in person
To spend some time with you.

QUIBBLES THAT BACKFIRED

This section tagged "Quibbles that Backfired" deals with interesting statements and arguments that have been made by people during discussions by way of defense in attempts to justify and sustain their position regarding the subject involved. Some of these quibbles backfired in that the termination of it showed the complete incongruity of the statement made. Others backfired because they reverted upon the person who made them and put him in the very same predicament in which he intended to put the other fellow.

During a discussion with a friend in Nigeria on whether Jesus was created or not, the argument was made from Colossians 1:15 that Jesus was the first creature. Then I asked, "Do you know that it is a sin to worship a creature?" She replied, "Well, I do not worship Jesus. Maybe you do, but I don't. Because even Jesus **the firstborn of every Creature** himself worships God, the Creator." Then I asked, "So it is a sin to worship Jesus?" And she said "It is a sin. That is what the Bible said." I immediately pointed to passages where Jesus was worshipped in the Bible and asked if those who worshipped Him committed sin in those instances such as Hebrews 1:6; Matt 2:2; 8:2,9:18,14:33,15:25,28:9,17. Hebrews 1:6 states that all the angels worshipped Jesus and other passages show that other people worshipped Him and He accepted the worship. He did not refuse nor rebuke them like Peter refused to accept worship when Cornelius bow down to worship Him in Acts 10:25-26. The question was left unanswered!

G. E. Cobb, a Baptist preacher, met W. Curtis Porter in Wooster, Arkansas, in 1948. In discussing the building of the church, or the time of the church's establishment, Cobb started out on his affirmation on Isaiah 28:16, in which the Lord said, "I will lay in Zion for a foundation, a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation. " He went then to Mark the first chapter, verses 14 through 18, where the Lord at the sea of Galilee called Peter, Andrew, James and John to become his followers, and said that is

where the Lord's church began and that is where it was set up." Porter said, "Mr. Cobb, upon the basis of your argument you have the foundation laid in Zion, and the church built in Galilee. The church was not even built where the foundation was laid. The foundation laid in one place, and the church built in another." Cobb came back to try to fix that thing up and he said, "the word Zion does not mean Jerusalem there. The word Zion means the church," trying to get out of the idea that one was in Jerusalem and the other in Galilee, to try to get them together. So he said the word Zion does not refer to Jerusalem there, it refers to the church. Porter replied, God said through Isaiah, "I will lay the foundation in the CHURCH." And so the church was not built on the foundation, the foundation was laid in the CHURCH.

Jacob Ditzler and J. S. Sweeney were having a debate on the scriptural action of baptism. Ditzler showed that a secondary meaning of the word "baptize" was "to wash or sprinkle" (according to the dictionary definition). In reply, Sweeney showed that a secondary meaning of "believe" was "to have an opinion" and a secondary meaning of "saved" was to be "pickled." He gave the resulting translation of Mark 16:16: "He that hath an opinion and is sprinkled shall be pickled." Sweeney then raised the question, "Is it our aim to see what we can make of the Scripture, or is it our aim to find out what God has said?" We must be careful lest we fall under such an indictment.



CHURCH HISTORY

The Beginning of Apostasy

By Andy Sochor | Kentucky, USA

Despite the warnings that were given in the New Testament about the apostasy that would be coming, many were led astray. This came as a result of a series of relatively small departures from the New Testament pattern until eventually the “church” no longer resembled the one that Jesus purchased with His blood on the cross (cf. Acts 20:28).

As we noticed in the previous article, the early Christians often faced severe persecution for the cause of Christ. While many abandoned their faith in order to avoid these persecutions, there were others who remained faithful even to the point of death. Because of this, the enemies of the church were not able to destroy it. The gospel continued to spread throughout the Roman Empire and beyond.

However, there was another threat against the church that would prove to have a much greater impact. Generally, the effects of persecution were immediate and obvious. Yet the other threat – apostasy (falling away from the faith) – would arise much more slowly, allowing it to take root before many even realized the problem.

The Hebrew writer warned about *drifting* from the message that was first taught by the Lord and His apostles (Hebrews 2:1-3). Though the apostasy would progress slowly and occur over several generations, eventually the “church” would look nothing like the one described in the New Testament. How did this happen? Let us consider the beginning of this apostasy.

Reminder of the Warnings in the New Testament

In the second article in this series, we noticed the state of the church at the end of the first century. During that time, the apostles warned of an apostasy that was coming. Yet this was not just a prediction by these men; rather, Paul told Timothy, “*The Spirit explicitly*

says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons” (1 Timothy 4:1).

Paul told the church in Thessalonica that the return of Christ would not happen until “*the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction*” (2 Thessalonians 2:3). As we noticed in that earlier article, Paul was not referring to a few Christians falling away; instead, he was warning about a departure from the truth on a grand scale.

Furthermore, this apostasy would be led by those who were in positions of leadership in the church. Paul warned the Ephesian elders, “*From among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them*” (Acts 20:30).

What would this apostasy look like? Notice Paul's warning about the “man of lawlessness” in his letter to the Thessalonians: “*Who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God*” (2 Thessalonians 2:4). In other words, this apostasy would first start to manifest itself as men in the church would elevate themselves above their brethren and begin to stand between them and God.

This is important – the “*man of lawlessness*” was not a single person; rather, it was an attitude. The rise of this lawless attitude would take place over a period of time and would not happen all at once. This “*spirit of error*”



(cf. 1 John 4:6) that departs from the New Testament pattern would continue to grow over time until the church would evolve into something that was wholly unrecognizable from the description given in the New Testament.

Changes in Local Church Organization

During the second century, a practice developed of selecting one of the elders in a local church “to preside over the meetings as a permanent president” (*Church History*, John D. Cox, p. 26). This change may have been implemented as a matter of practicality in order to keep order in their meetings, yet the unofficial role of presiding elder eventually evolved into an official position. This man came to be known as the “bishop,” thus differentiating him from the other elders.

At this point, it would be helpful to be reminded of what the New Testament teaches about the overseers in the local church. There are three different terms that are used:

- Elder (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5; 1 Peter 5:1) – This is from the Greek word *presbuteros* which refers to one who presides over or has leadership of an assembly.
- Bishop (Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:2) – The Greek word for this is *episkopos*. Newer translations use the word *overseer*, which helps us understand the meaning of the word. This refers to those who keep watch over the congregation.
- Pastor (Ephesians 4:11) – This word (Greek: *poimen*) is used to describe a *shepherd* and is often translated that way (cf. Luke 2:8; John 10:11; 1 Peter 2:25). Peter used the verb form of this word to describe the work of feeding the flock (1 Peter 5:2).

Not long after the time of the apostles, the elders and bishops came to be seen as different offices or roles. Today, many religious groups use these terms (elders,

bishops, pastors) to refer to different positions in their churches. However, in the New Testament, these terms referred to the *same* office. When Paul met with the “*elders of the church*” in Ephesus (Acts 20:17), he told them to *shepherd* (Greek: *poimaino*) the flock over which the Holy Spirit had made them *overseers* (Greek: *episkopos*) (Acts 20:28). When Peter wrote to the elders (1 Peter 5:1), he exhorted them to *shepherd* (Greek: *poimaino*) the flock and exercise *oversight* (Greek: *episkopeo*) (1 Peter 5:2).

These terms were not used to describe different offices in the church; rather, they were used to describe different aspects of the *same* office. In other words, using the language of the New Testament, an elder is a bishop and a bishop is an elder. Yet by making a distinction between the two, a new “office” was created which changed the organization of the church.

Development of a Larger Hierarchy

This somewhat subtle change in the organization of the local church established a new hierarchy. When Peter addressed the elders and instructed them to “*shepherd the flock of God*,” he reminded them of the “*Chief Shepherd*” (Jesus) who was over them (1 Peter 5:1-2, 5). Yet this change meant that the elders were no longer directly under the authority of Christ; they were now under the authority of the bishop.

Over time, the authority of the bishops grew and expanded beyond their local churches. Eventually, the bishops would oversee not just a single congregation, but a territory or “diocese.” This growing hierarchy eventually led to distinctions among the bishops with authority over churches, territories, and larger regions.

As questions and disputes would arise, church leaders



(bishops and elders) would meet in synods or councils to discuss how to handle various issues and controversies. Eventually, these became permanent legislative bodies which further centralized control among the churches. Rather than having autonomous (self-governing) congregations in each place as the New Testament describes, five rulers (“patriarchs”) emerged as the chief rulers of the church – the bishops from Rome, Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem, and Constantinople.

Distinction between “Clergy” and “Laity”

As changes were developing in the organization of the church, a distinction was also being formed between preachers (“clergy”) and other members of the church (“laity”). This would lead to a protected and unaccountable class of leaders in the church – a concept foreign to the New Testament. The Bereans were commended as being “*noble-minded*” because they were “*examining the Scriptures daily*” to see if what Paul taught them was the truth (Acts 17:11). It was noble for them to confirm the truth of his message rather than just blindly accepting it. When Paul wrote to Timothy, he outlined a procedure for rebuking elders who continued in sin (1 Timothy 5:19-20). Yet the greater the divide between the “clergy” and the regular church members, the more difficult it would be to hold the leadership accountable.

In his book on church history, John D. Cox noted, “By the close of the Second Century...the ministry possessed the attributes of the priesthood. This idea borrowed support from Judaism” (*Church History*, Cox, p. 29). Yet God's design for the church was that all of His people would constitute “*a royal priesthood*” (1 Peter 2:9).

This distinction between the “clergy” and “laity” is the reason why, even today, preachers and other religious

leaders wear titles like “reverend” and “father,” even though Jesus specifically condemned such designations (cf. Matthew 23:9). Even the apostles in the New Testament, though they had been given a special role by the Lord, they did not view themselves as some elevated class in the church. Paul used himself and Apollos as an example to illustrate this in his first letter to Corinth: “*What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave opportunity to each one*” (1 Corinthians 3:5). Though he was an apostle, Paul did not “*seek glory from men*” (1 Thessalonians 2:6); instead, he told the Christians in Corinth that he and his fellow-workers considered themselves to be their “*bond-servants for Jesus's sake*” (2 Corinthians 4:5).

Summary

Despite the warnings that were given in the New Testament about the apostasy that would be coming, many were led astray. This came as a result of a series of relatively small departures from the New Testament pattern until eventually the “church” no longer resembled the one that Jesus purchased with His blood on the cross (cf. Acts 20:28). This should serve as a reminder for us about the “slippery slope” of error. One seemingly innocent change could lead to others that we would initially not be willing to accept; but the further we go, the more comfortable we become with even greater (and more unauthorized) changes. We need to be careful to “*retain the standard of sound words*” (2 Timothy 1:13) and “*not drift away*” (Hebrews 2:1) from what is taught in the New Testament.

BARBS WITH A POINT



Contend Earnestly for the Faith

By Dylan Stewart | Alabama, USA

Jude 3 reads, "*Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.*" The Greek word used here translated as "contend" means to "*fight or to contend strenuously in defense of*" something; It means to "*contend about a thing, as a combatant*" (Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words). In this case, "*the faith*" is what we are to contend for earnestly. This faith has been delivered to all believers, not just leaders of the church, such as elders and deacons, meaning all Christians are called to defend the truth of Jesus Christ. How do we do this; how do we contend earnestly for the faith?

First, let's establish that "*the faith*" is used singularly and in an objective sense. It is the sum of all that we are required to believe, obey, and practice. Consider Acts 6:7, which reads, "*Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.*" Similarly, Paul, by inspiration, informed Timothy, "*Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons*" (1 Timothy 4:1). We also are admonished in Philippians to "*only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ . . . that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel*" (Philippians 1:27). Thus, we are to stand firmly in the one and only true faith presented in God's Word. How do we do that?

Since we know there is "*one body and one Spirit . . . one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all*" (Ephesians 4:4-6), and since we all must strive to "*come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God*" (Ephesians 4:13), we can contend earnestly for the faith by:

Examining ourselves to ensure we are living in accordance with the one faith:

· "*Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified*" (2 Corinthians 13:5).

Ensuring we do not live outside the bounds of what is taught in the New Testament, urging others to do the same:

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

· "*As I urged you when I went into Macedonia—remain in Ephesus that you may charge some that they teach no other doctrine*" (1 Timothy 1:3).

Having book, chapter, and verse for everything we believe, teach, and practice:

· "*And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him*" (Colossians 3:17).

Always being prepared to defend the truth:

· "*But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear*" (1 Peter 3:15).



· *"Knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel" (Philippians 1:17b).*

Testing what others say about God's Word:

· *"Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1).*

· *"These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so" (Acts 17:11).*

Holding fast to what we find to be true:

· *"Test all things; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil" (1 Thessalonians 5:21-22).*

Avoiding and not yielding to false knowledge:

· *"O Timothy! Guard what was committed to your trust, avoiding the profane and idle babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge—by professing it some have strayed concerning the faith" (1 Timothy 6:20-21).*

Defending the truth against attacks from false teachers:

· *"I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry" (2 Timothy 4:1-5).*

Not teaching the commandments/traditions of men:

· *"Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: 'These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honor Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men'" (Matthew 15:7-9).*

Not adding to or taking away from God's Word:

· *"If anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book" (Revelation 22:19).*

Debating the truth with others:

· *"And [Paul] went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God" (Acts 19:8).*

· *"Therefore he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and with the Gentile worshipers, and in the marketplace daily with those who happened to be there" (Acts 17:17).*

Insisting everyone follow the approved examples found in the New Testament:

· *"The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you" (Philippians 4:9; see also 1 Corinthians 11:1; Philippians 3:17; 2 Thessalonians 3:9).*

These are just a few ways we must contend for the faith. Remember, as Jude 3 explains, all saints who share in the common salvation of Jesus Christ have this great responsibility. Are we contending earnestly for the faith as we ought?

Institutionalism

The History of the Institutional Controversy

By Jefferson David Tant | Tennessee, USA

This is a long article written by Jefferson David Tant on the history of the institutional controversy. All of it cannot be published at once in one single edition of this journal. Hence, we would publish it in bits at different editions of this journal as they come out.

Those who have a general knowledge of churches of Christ today are aware of the fact that a division took place during the last half of the 20th Century. This division took place over doctrinal issues concerning the organization, work, and mission of the Lord's church. In many respects, this division reflected many of the same issues that had caused division during the latter half of the 19th Century which resulted in two distinct groups — the Christian Church and churches of Christ. In the ensuing years, the Christian Church itself has suffered a division, with the more liberal element identified as the Disciples of Christ, and the more conservative part identified as the Independent Christian Church.

In a convention of the Disciples group some years ago, they acknowledged, "We are a denomination, and we might as well admit it, and get on with the business of being a denomination." That is not an exact quote, but expresses what was said, as it was reported to me.

Some may wonder why it takes 50 years for a division to become complete. There are some issues that brethren must take time to study. There are ties of friendship and brotherhood that are slow to be broken. My father, Yater Tant (1908-1997), went to school with many preachers that ended up on the other side, and they often worked together in meetings in their younger years. I knew these men, as they were in my parents' home and I in theirs. But now my own children have no association with these men, thus in the third generation, the lines of division are pretty well drawn.

Sadly, bitterness and wild charges often accompany division. Conservative brethren were oft called "orphan-haters" and "anti-cooperation", and were thus labeled "antis." This is the same appellation that was given to those who were opposed to instrumental music and missionary societies in the 19th Century. "While there are a few places where "anti-ism" is still a real threat to the true faith, it is generally of no consequence. Isolated little groups of 'antis' still meet, but they are withering away and are having no appreciable effect on the brotherhood at large." This speaker went on to say that this "false doctrine" was "antagonistic to clear Bible teaching," and the "typical 'anti' usually cut his own throat by his arrogant and malicious acts and statements" and was "quick to draw the line of fellowship and exclude himself from the larger portion of our brotherhood" [Reubel Shelley, Freed-Hardeman Lectures, 1970].

Nine years later Ira North, editor of the Gospel Advocate (an influential journal among churches of Christ) estimated that the "antis" composed 5% of the churches, and pleaded with them to "come back home ... to the old paths ... and preach again in the great churches," claiming that the "anti doctrine cannot build churches, inspire missionaries, and encourage pure and undefiled religion." One college professor argued that those who believe Christians could "visit the fatherless and widows by taking them in your home" have "taken the narrow, crooked pig-path of radicalism." (That sounds like a pretty "radical" statement!)



In this treatise, we want to take a look at the past and see where we are today. I acknowledge the research of Homer Hailey, Steve Wolfgang, Ed Harrell, and others, which has been of great help in preparing this material. In fact, a good bit of the substance of this was taken from a tract Wolfgang wrote several years ago.

The Bible and Apostasy

The Old Testament was full of apostasy. Prophecies concerning this were made even before Israel entered the Promised Land. *“Now therefore write ye this song for you, and teach thou it the children of Israel: put it in their mouths, that this song may be a witness for me against the children of Israel. For when I shall have brought them into the land which I swear unto their fathers, flowing with milk and honey, and they shall have eaten and filled themselves, and waxed fat; then will they turn unto other gods, and serve them, and despise me, and break my covenant. And it shall come to pass, when many evils and troubles are come upon them, that this song shall testify before them as a witness; for it shall not be forgotten out of the mouths of their seed: for I know their imagination which they frame this day, before I have brought them into the land which I swear”* ([Deuteronomy 31:19-21](#)). The people prospered, grew fat, and fell away. Time and again we have the story repeated — a period of faithful service, apostasy, oppression, repentance, restoration, etc. But finally, God's patient ran out, and Israel was no more.

The New Testament history presents a similar picture. Once more many warnings were given about departures from the truth. Paul gave charge to the Ephesian elders in [Acts 20:28-30](#): *“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. I know that*

after my departing grievous wolves shall enter in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.”

Paul gave such a warning to Timothy: “But the Spirit saith expressly, that in later times some shall fall away from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of demons, through the hypocrisy of men that speak lies, branded in their own conscience as with a hot iron” ([I Timothy 4:1-2](#)). Then we note in [Hebrews 3:12](#): *“Take heed, brethren, lest haply there shall be in any one of you an evil heart of unbelief, in falling away from the living God.”*

Within the second century, we see the trend beginning of the hierarchal system that culminated in the Catholic system's pope. This began in the local church with one elder becoming predominant, and the presiding elders in churches in a given area forming a council. Within this area, one elder came to preside, who then joined with presiding elders in other areas, which obviously led to a supreme bishop or pope. This is a clear departure from Biblical directives. *“The elders among you I exhort, who am a fellow-elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, who am also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Tend the flock of God which is among you”* ([I Peter 5:1-2](#)). The only flock, or church, which elders are to tend is the one “among them,” not somewhere else!

Although there is evidence of small, persecuted groups following the New Testament order through the centuries, they were scattered and isolated. These centuries are called the Dark Ages, with more than one application of meaning.



The 19th Century -- The Beginning of Restoration

The 16th Century saw the start of efforts to “reform” the Catholic Church. It had grown in power and corruption, and in many respects came to rule much of the civilized world. Augustine, born in 354, is considered the “Father of Roman Catholicism,” and formulated a doctrine that greatly contributed to the political power of the church, which gave the pope authority over even kings and emperors. In commenting on this matter, Alexander Allen says:

“The church was here by divine appointment, and if so it was the divine will that all men should come into it; and if they would not come of themselves, they must be forced to do so; and if the church lacked the power of compulsion, it was the sacred duty which the state owed to the church to come to its rescue, and by the might of the sword 'compel them to come in,' that the church might be filled” [V. G. All Alexander, *The Continuity of Christian Thought*, pp. 152, 153].

Luther, Huss, Zwingle, and Calvin rebelled not only against the corruption in the church but also against its political power. These efforts began in earnest in the early 1500s. But their efforts fell short in that they sought merely to reform a corrupt system, rather than to return to the original system. This culminated in the formation of a multitude of denominational bodies, which we have as their legacy today.

Beginning around 1800, we see serious efforts being made at restoring the ancient order of things. Much has been written about the important work of Thomas and Alexander Campbell in this matter, but there were several others who also had much influence in this great movement. Around 1793, James O'Kelly and others left their Methodist conference when their efforts to restrict the power of the clergy were not accepted. They formed what they called “The

Republican Methodists” in Virginia. In a formal meeting on August 4th, 1794, Rice Haggard stood up with a New Testament in his hand, and said, “Brethren, this is a sufficient rule of faith and practice, and by it we are told that the disciples were called Christians, and I move that henceforth and forever the followers of Christ be known as Christians simply.”

Around the same time, Abner Jones and Elias Smith in New Hampshire left the Baptist Church and became pioneers in the search for undenominational Christianity. Meanwhile, in Kentucky, Barton W. Stone was on his own journey. He had been ordained a Presbyterian minister and began preaching at Cane Ridge, KY in 1798. He already had misgivings about the Confession of Faith and began his break with Presbyterianism at the “Great Revival” at Cane Ridge in 1801. Stone's movement had a great influence on the return to Bible-based Christianity.

The work of Thomas and Alexander deserves special attention. Thomas was born in Ireland in 1763, and was ordained as a minister in the Seceder Presbyterian Church. Thomas came under the influence of the followers of John Glas, a Scot who introduced weekly observance of the Lord's Supper, a plurality of elders in each congregation, and the principle that the Scripture is the only standard of both doctrine and practice. For health reasons, he came to America in 1807.

Shortly after his arrival, he was asked to preach for a Seceder church near Pittsburgh. His views on the Lord's Supper offended some, and the Presbyterian Synod subsequently tried him for heresy. He left the Presbyterian Church but continued to preach to a group of people who, like him, looked for freedom from sectarian narrowness, a closer walk with God, and a union based upon Scriptures.



At one of the meetings of these people, Campbell spoke at length about the desire for unity among all believers based upon the Scriptures and made what has become a well-known statement concerning the rule they would follow: “That rule, my highly respected hearers, is this, that where the Scriptures speak, we speak; and where the Scriptures are silent, we are silent.” This statement had a tremendous effect on the religious thinking of the nation in the ensuing years.

Realizing the need to make his views of Scripture clear, Thomas delivered his famous “Declaration and Address” on September 7, 1809. The entire document filled 54 pages and was a masterpiece of reasoning from the Scriptures. W. E. Garrison summed up the major points of Campbell's address:

“...first, that the will of Christ included the revelation and imposition of a definite doctrinal and ecclesiastical program. Second, that the Scriptures give an inerrant report of the teaching of Jesus and His apostles and the procedure of the church of the first century, so that any verse in the New Testament could be quoted with perfect assurance of his historical accuracy...Third, that the teaching authority of Jesus had passed over undiminished to the apostles, so that both the injunctions and the examples of the apostles possessed complete authority over the church for all time, that their teachings were as commands of God, and that the practice of the church of the apostolic age constituted a pattern which the church must permanently follow” [Winfred Garrison, *Religion Follows the Frontier*, pp. 95, 96].

Shortly before the “Declaration and Address,” in 1809, Alexander and his mother and sisters arrived in the United States. Alexander had already been influenced toward reformation by men in England

and Ireland, and happily found similar thinking in his father.

In 1810 a meeting house was built in Brush Run, Pennsylvania, and by the following year, these brethren formally organized themselves into an independent congregation, soon realizing that their attempts to identify themselves with any denominational group was fraught with failure.

Following the principles set forth by his father, Alexander soon realized he had not been baptized scripturally, for Presbyterians did not immerse. Soon the whole family was immersed, and in a short time, nearly the whole congregation was made up of immersed believers. This event was the occasion of the change in leadership from father to son. The father had enunciated the principles, and the son recognized the full implications of the principles and put them into practice.

Alexander began publishing *The Christian Baptist* in 1823, which had a wide influence. He also had several highly regarded debates and was even honored to address the U.S. Congress on one occasion. In his 1843 debate with Presbyterian H. L. Rice in Lexington, Kentucky the noted Henry Clay presided as chairman over the two weeks' debate.

Campbell's famous Sermon on the Law in 1816 had caused much prejudice among the Baptists with whom he had been associated, and this reflected a general ignorance of denominational preachers concerning the Bible and the distinctions between Old and New Testaments. Alexander and Barton W. Stone met for the first time in 1824, and by 1832 the two groups had joined forces, recognizing they were on common ground.

To be continued in the next edition.

Myth Buster

How To Judge A Sermon

By Pat Donahue | Alabama, USA

Let's remember what's important and what's not. God's word is what counts and not "good words (or good ideas of men) and fair speeches." (Rom 16:18)

It is a common practice after a worship assembly for people to discuss the merits of the sermon just delivered. Many times there is agreement about whether the lesson was a good one, but every now and then there is disagreement. It seems people judge a sermon based upon different criteria. Just what does make a good sermon? Let's go to the Bible to find out.

Most people judge a sermon based upon how good a job of speaking the preacher did. When discussing the sermon they talk about the style - "he yells too much," "he doesn't preach with a strong enough voice," "you know he is sincere because he cries just about every sermon" (think Jimmy Swaggart in yesteryear), "he shows too much emotion when he preaches," etc. The Bible teaches that this is not the way to judge a sermon. Who wouldn't agree that Paul was an effective preacher? Yet Paul himself states in I Corinthians 2:1 that he declared the testimony of God, "[not with excellency of speech.](#)" How good a speaker the preacher is, has no bearing on how good his sermon is, according to the Bible.

A lot of times people judge a sermon based upon the wisdom (man's wisdom) that they perceive was expressed by the speaker. One comment to a speaker after a lesson went like this once, "you used too much scriptures references and not enough of your own ideas." A casual reading of I Corinthians 1:17-2:5, 13 shows this is not a good criteria upon which to judge a sermon. Notice especially Paul's statement in I Corinthians 2:4, "[And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.](#)"

How then should we judge a sermon? Let the Bible suggest to us three points...

The truth must be preached. Only the [truth](#) sets us free from sin (John 8:32), not error. Christians are commanded to speak "[the truth in love](#)" (Ephesians 4:15). If a Christian preaches anything but the [gospel](#) that Paul preached, "[let him be accursed](#)" (Galatians 1:8).

Many Bible verses must be used in the sermon. Paul told Timothy to "[preach the word](#)" (II Timothy 4:2) not his own stories and jokes. Romans 1:16 tells us "[the gospel... is the power of God unto salvation,](#)" not good speeches. If the scripture itself is not read and taught, where does that leave God's power? True faith only comes from hearing [God's word](#) (Romans 10:17). The scriptures themselves are the only thing profitable for doctrine (II Timothy 3:16). How could we say a man is speaking "[as the oracles of God](#)" (I Peter 4:11) when he delivers a forty minute sermon and only refers to an oracle of God once or twice? Read Acts 2:14-36 and Acts 7:2-53 and notice how often inspired preachers made reference to the scriptures in their sermons. And if men whose very speeches became scriptures saw fit to quote the Bible so often, how much more should the uninspired Christians of today use the actual texts of the Bible in their lessons.

If the truth is preached, and many Bible verses are used, it should go without saying that the passages given should be used to backup the truth that is preached. Apollos "[mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, shewing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ](#)" (Acts 18:28). Paul didn't just assert that

things were so, he proved it (Acts 9:22). How can a listener "prove", or test a sermon if the speaker doesn't prove what he says by the scriptures (I Thessalonians 5:21)? Have you ever wondered why some preachers read a verse and then proceed to talk about everything else under the sun except the passage read? Notice in Nehemiah 8:8 that the sense of the passages read was given, not a great explanation for the different experiences in the preacher's past life. Commandments without proper scriptural support are simply "commandments of men" (Matthew 15:9) and nothing more. Unless verses are given, how would a listener know if the teaching was from heaven, or from men (Matthew 21:25)? A listener would certainly be under no obligation to obey such teaching (II Thessalonians 1:8). Even if he did, he would be obeying man's word, not God's. So if a preacher doesn't prove what he teaches by God's word, we should "let it go through one ear and out the other."

Let's remember what's important and what's not. God's word is what counts and not "good words (or good ideas of men) and fair speeches." (Rom 16:18) The next time you are shaking a preacher's hand after his sermon, don't tell him it was a good sermon unless the lesson was filled with Bible passages proving the truth of God.

HAS THE BIBLE BEEN CHANGED?

We are frequently asked about the reliability of our Bibles. Specifically, how can we be sure that the Bibles we are reading today are true to the original messages delivered so long ago? In particular, can we be sure that the New Testament has not been altered and changed in the almost 2000 years since it was written?

The answer to these questions is a resounding **yes**, we can be absolutely certain that we have good, reliable copies of the messages as they were originally written. To illustrate how we can have this confidence, consider this illustration:

- At a potluck dinner, Sally has a delicious dish and several other ladies ask for her recipe.
- Sally makes three handwritten copies of her recipe and gives them to Anna, Betty, and Clara.
- A good while later, Anna pulls out that recipe and is preparing to fix the dish. She calls Sally to confirm the ingredients, but Sally has lost her original copy of the recipe.
- Is there any way for Anna to confirm the accuracy of her copy?
- Yes, although the original has been lost, Anna can compare her copy to those of Betty and Clara. If all three agree, she can have good confidence that her copy is exactly like the original.

Now, take this illustration and apply the same principle to the New Testament. Admittedly, the original 'autograph' copies of these documents are all lost and unavailable. But, there are literally thousands of copies of those originals, many dating back to the immediate time frame in which the originals were written. By comparing these thousands of copies, and by observing their nearly perfect similarities, we can conclude that our Bibles today are true to the originals. In fact, there is no book of antiquity that comes even close to the Bible in being able to provide this sort of documentary evidence for authenticity and accuracy.

Yes, you can trust your Bible!

by Greg Gwin

Ideal Home

Mothers: The Heart Of The Family

By Gene Taylor | USA

Happy and blessed is the home and the children of a loving mother—one devoted to her husband, children and the Lord.

Nations rise and fall, empires prosper or crumble and men are stirred to great accomplishments or driven to shameful failure often because of the influence of a wife or mother. The wise poet has properly said, "The hand that rocks the cradle, is the hand that rules the world."

For most women, motherhood is a great privilege, a crowning joy and a sublime fulfillment. Perhaps the greatest privilege of motherhood is that of sharing and giving. No one shares and gives as a mother does. She shares her body with another in order to conceive. She shares it again with her unborn child. Then she shares her time, energy and talent with it after it is born in order to meet its needs and cause it to grow and develop. But most of all, she shares her heart and her love as she weeps, laughs, sorrows and rejoices with her child through the months and years of infancy, adolescence and youth and adulthood.

Motherhood, while being a great privilege, also involves obligation. No task on earth requires more dedication, greater skill or fuller commitment. Her responsibilities demand devotion to the highest ideals and patient perseverance over long years of time. Her task is formidable because there is no human obligation that is less adaptable to substitution than motherhood. You can substitute for the teacher, policeman, governor and almost anyone else but no one has found an adequate substitute for a mother's love.

The greatest writers and speakers of the ages have tried to capture the fullness of motherhood but all have failed to maximize it. Only in Scripture do we see the

blessedness of a good mother fully described. "Her children rise up and call her blessed; Her husband also, and he praises her: 'Many daughters have done well, But you excel them all.' Charm is deceitful and beauty is passing, But a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised" (Prov. 31:28-31).

Happy and blessed is the home and the children of a loving mother—one devoted to her husband, children and the Lord. Let us thank God if our home is so blessed.



IDEAL HOME

How a Wife Builds a Godly Home

By Glen Young | USA

Several years ago in a discussion about the home, I made the point that the wife should never put her children before her husband. Needless to say, this created quite a stir. I thought for a moment that some of my sisters were about to resurrect the old custom of tarring and feathering.

Years of dealing with church problems that directly relate to problems in the home have caused me to conclude that before there can be a godly home, there must be a godly relationship between the husband and wife. The foundation of the home is faulty when God is left out of the husband wife relationship. Because God created marriage, abiding together as God teaches, results in a godly relationship.

God solved Adam's problem of being incomplete by creating for him a helpmeet, which Adam called woman for she was taken out of man (Genesis 2:21-23). For this reason, a man [woman] is to leave their parents and cleave to their mate. In this way, the two become one flesh (Genesis 2:24-25). The coming together as one flesh certainly addresses the issue of physical union, and yet, it is more. It brings into existence a home which contains different personalities that must learn to function as one. The intimacy of marriage is considered by God to be undefiled (Hebrews 13:4). From this God sanctioned joining, children are born (Genesis 1:28). It is both joyous and frightening when the home is blessed with children. As we glory in this blessing, we must not forget God's order of things. Problems occur in marriages when wives assume the role of mother to the exclusion of their role as wife. She must remember that she was a wife before she was a mother. Paul recognized this potential problem for he told older

women to, "train the young women to love their husbands" (Titus 2:4). He further instructs Christian husbands and wives to, "Defraud ye not one the other, except it be by consent for a season, that ye may give yourselves unto prayer, and may be together again, that Satan tempt you not because of your incontinency" (1 Corinthians 7:5).

The loving passion that is manifested in the sexual union is not all there is to the husband and wife relationship. Of equal importance, is the subjection of the wife (Ephesians 5:22-24). "For after this manner aforetime the holy women also, who hoped in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection to their own husbands: as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord: whose children ye now are, if ye do well, and are not put in fear by any terror" (1 Peter 3:5-6). She will find that many of the burdens she finds so upsetting will flee from her if she will just abide in her God given role. When wives learn to put their love for their husbands in the number one spot, it will go a long way in developing the foundation upon which to build a godly home.





Ideal Home

How a Husband Builds a Godly Home

By Glen Young | USA

Have you ever heard these expressions: “The little woman,” “The old ball and chain”? Have you ever used one of these expressions? I would hope that husbands think more highly of their wives than to be guilty of such inconsiderate remarks. Now, this brings me to a discussion of how husbands can build a godly home by changing their perception of their wives.

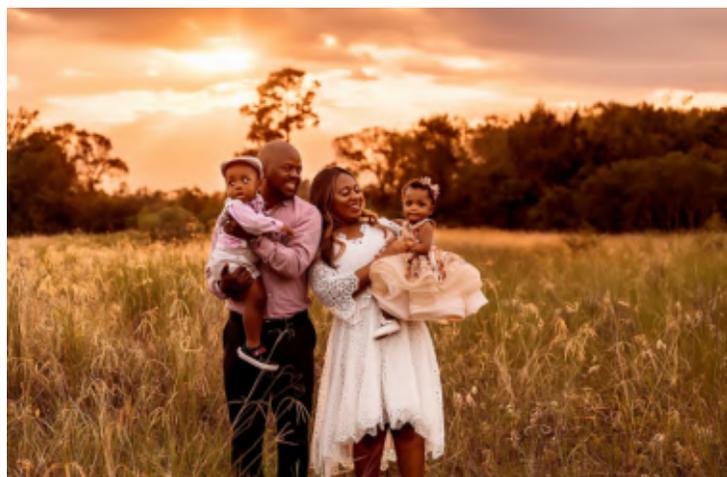
Where did you get your wife? Think a moment, then consider this, “House and riches are an inheritance from fathers; But a prudent wife is from Jehovah” (Proverbs 19:14). Do you accept that your wife was given to you from God? I believe this is where we must start. Too many husbands never think in terms of their wives as a gift from God. The failure to think this way has caused husbands to think of their wives as burdens and, to put it mildly, the cause of all their troubles. They believe that all their failures and unhappiness are the fault of their wives. Yet, God says, “Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favor of Jehovah” (Proverbs 18:22). Until husbands think appropriately about their wives there cannot be a godly home.

Two things are responsible for this fault in the husband's thinking. First, he does not understand his wife's mental and emotional state. Women are different from men in more ways than those that are obvious. Women view life and its problems differently. They tend to approach life with the need to be caregivers. They are not problem solvers. They want to talk about their problems but what they need is someone to listen and then to give them a hug, expressing one's concern for the hurt they feel.

On the other hand, men are problem solvers. They can hear a problem explained and in a matter of moments

give forth an infallible solution. When their wives need one thing, they are giving something else. They then become frustrated because their wives are continually upset about a problem that could be solved at the snap of the finger if the wife would just do what he told her to do. Does any of these sound familiar yet? Second, is the husband's failure to understand and apply biblical teaching to his relationship with his wife. In Ephesians 5:23, we are told that the husband is the head of his wife. We husbands love to hear sermons preached on this passage.

I am convinced husbands have not comprehended what headship means. Let me illustrate. The Apostle's comparison is to Christ's headship over the church. When it came to effecting reconciliation in the church, who effected that reconciliation? Christ did (Romans 5:10). When there is division between the husband and wife, who is to effect reconciliation? The husband is. That is a part of his responsibility as being her head. The husband that is so childish that he pouts for days until his wife gives in, isn't head of anything.





Salvation

Faith Without Works Is Dead

By Osamagbe Lesley Egharevba | Lagos, Nigeria

It is strange that some denominational preachers today teach that obedience (works) is not required for salvation when both our faith and love of God are completed by our obedience.

But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? (James 2:20)

Many people today in the world teach the “salvation by faith only” doctrine. By this, they mean that faith (belief) is the only thing required for one to be saved and one does not have to do any work in order to be saved. This doctrine, in reality actually disregards any kind of work commanded by God to be done in order for one to be saved. What is even more interesting is that in the only place the words “faith only” appeared in the Bible, it is clearly stated that we are not saved by it – “*You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only*” (James 2:24). The aim of this writing is to examine the statement in our text above (James 2:20) and see the relationship between faith and works and then find out if both are required for salvation or not.

What Is Faith?

In this discussion, faith refers to **belief** in God and His Word. In Hebrews 11:6, the Bible says “*But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.*” This passage of the Scriptures clearly tells us that one must believe in God before such can come to Him. And in Mark 16:16, Jesus stated that one of the conditions that a man must meet in order to be saved is to believe. With these passages, it is clear that faith is required for salvation. But the question is: should it stand alone or must it be accompanied by works? Our text is clear on this, that

faith that is standing alone without works is a dead faith. Also, James 2:17 states: “*Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.*” But what kind of “works” are we talking about? Looking through the Bible, we see that “works” can be classified into two. Let us examine them.

Two Kinds of Works

The word “works” is used in two different ways in the New Testament and with two different meanings. This is not unusual as a word can have different meanings and we have to allow the context to tell us the meaning intended. For example, when we take a look at how the word “world” is used in the Bible, we see more than one meaning. In John 3:16, we read: “*For God so loved **the world** that he gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth on Him might not perish but might have everlasting life.*” Also in 1 John 2:15, we were told to “*Love not **the world**, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.*” God loved the world and gave His Son to die to save it. Yet if a man loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. How can that be true? The word “world” (*kosmos*) is the same in both passages whether English or Greek. The difficulty is resolved by understanding that the word “world” in John 3:16 refers to man while in 1 John 3:15 the word “world” is a reference to the sinful pleasures which draw us away from God. A perusal of the Scriptures will reveal that there are other words in the New Testament that may be found



in one passage to mean one thing while in another place the meaning is entirely different, sometimes opposite in meaning from its use in other passages. It is the same way with the word "works" as used in the New Testament.

Hence, it is important to take a look at how the Bible describes works. This is because one major cause of confusion and disagreement on the issue of salvation by grace through faith is over the meaning of the word "works." And when we fail to make a clear distinction between meritorious works (which nullify grace) and the works of God (obedience which makes faith perfect), confusion and misunderstanding are the results. These are the two kinds of works mentioned in the New Testament and while the former is excluded and irrelevant to our salvation, the latter is not. To show this distinction, I wish that we turn to the Scriptures.

The first class of works which is irrelevant to our salvation is found in Ephesians 2:8-9: "*For by grace you have been saved through faith, **and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast.***" Of what kind of works is our salvation not based on? It is not of boastful works and it is not of man's device. If I am able to take myself to heaven without the help of God, then I could boast of doing such by my own works or efforts. But our salvation is not so for we fully depend on God to enter heaven. This is not the kind of works that saves a man and this is the kind of works that Abraham was not justified by, as stated by Paul in Romans 4:2.

The second class of works is found in Acts 10:34-35, while Peter was speaking at the house of Cornelius, he said: "*In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation **whoever fears Him, and works righteousness, is acceptable by Him.***" Here we have a

class of works that is acceptable and necessary for one to be accepted by God or to be saved. Peter says a man must **work righteousness** before he is accepted by God! In fact, the Bible repeatedly affirms that "faith without works is dead" (James 2:14,17,20,24,26). This is the kind of works that Abraham was justified by as stated in James 2:21. Paul and James were speaking of works from two different perspectives when they used Abraham as an example.

The point is this: Our salvation is not of the first class of works (boastful works, works done by man, originated by man, and of which he is the inventor). It is not of this type lest a man should boast. On the other hand, it is of a class of works described by Peter as "works of righteousness." Whatever comes under the head of righteousness is included in the gospel plan of salvation. And what is righteousness? David tells us what righteousness is in Psalm 119:172 when he said; "*For all Your commandments are righteousness.*" And so, a man works righteousness by being obedient to all the commandments of God. In fact, Jesus was baptized to fulfill all righteousness (Matthew 3:15) even when He had no sin (I Peter 2:21-22).

Hence, the works that are obligatory upon mankind are works of God, to which man submits. Therefore, repentance, confession and baptism are not works of the law and neither are they works of man's righteousness but they are a part of man's faith response to the amazing grace of God which has appeared to all men (Titus 2:11). Jesus said in John 6:29; "*This is the work of God, that **you believe in Him whom He sent.***"

Are We Still Saved By Grace When We Have To Do Something?

Many think that if we do anything in order to get



salvation, it becomes of works (of man's righteousness) and not of grace. That is not true. In Luke 17:10, Christ says, *"When you have done all things which are commanded you then ye shall say, We are unprofitable servants; we have only done that which was our duty."* We have not earned salvation; we have only done our duty, and we will be saved by grace through faith when we have done all things that he commanded.

Paul says in I Corinthians 1:30-31: *"But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God – and righteousness and sanctification and redemption – that, as it is written, he who glories, let him glory in the LORD."* And in Galatians 6:14 he says *"But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ..."* A demonstration of that fact is brought up in the falling of the walls of Jericho. The Israelites had to go around the walls for 6 days, and on the 7th day, they had to go around seven times, and then blow the trumpets and shout before the walls fell. Is there any man who would think that there was any virtue in their work, except obedience to God? They did not get the land by their own efforts but they had to do something (obey God's commandment) to get it. God had given the city to them (Joshua 6:2), but they had done what He commanded them to do (Joshua 6:3-27). In Hebrews 11:30, it says *"by faith the walls of Jericho fell down when they had been compassed about for seven days."*

Naaman was cleansed of his leprosy when he dipped the seventh time (II Kings 5:14). He was not cleansed at the point he decided in his heart to do it. He had to do what the Lord commanded, not part of it, but all of it. He went to the river, he dipped once, he dipped twice, he dipped the third time, the fourth, the fifth,

the sixth, and still, he was not cleansed but when he dipped the seventh time, he came clean. When he had done all that the Lord commanded him, he received the blessing of the Lord. Was it the water that cleansed him or was it his effort? No! The Lord saved him but AFTER he obeyed and did what he was asked to do.

The blind man was told to go wash in the Pool of Siloam. He went and washed and came seeing (John 9:7). Any man could look at the washing and see that the waters of Siloam did not bring back his eyesight to him. No man of intelligence would say a thing like that. Rather, it was his obedience – he did what he was asked to do! And so at this time when Jesus has said, *"he that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved..."* the believer, turning from the world to do the will of God, in penitence going his way, is baptized into Christ— is buried with his Lord by baptism into death— and he is also raised with him, through faith in the operation of God and thus, coming into Christ, his faith is made perfect and avails him and he is by his obedience, purified in soul, for Peter said in 1 Peter 1:22, *"Seeing ye have purified your souls in your obedience to the truth."* That, indeed, is the way to salvation. Therefore, the fact that a man does a work in obedience to God's command as a condition to be saved, does not mean he is saved by his own works or efforts.

What Kind of Faith Saves a Man?

Paul said in Galatians 5:6; *"For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love."* The faith that avails is the one that brings the blessings of God, and notice how that is done. In I John 5:3, John tells us just how that is, for he said, *"This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments"* That is the love of God, and faith working through love avails; faith working through



love saves; faith keeping the commandments of God is the salvation that has been promised. Is baptism a command of God? If it is a commandment of God, then faith working through love, faith working through keeping the commandments of God, which is the love of God, avails and thus faith, leading the individual down in the water, to be buried there with his Lord in obedience to His commandment, is faith working and faith being perfected and that kind of faith saves when it is thus perfected.

Galatians 3:26-27 teaches that the kind of faith that saves a man is the kind of faith that includes baptism. *"We are all children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ."* The word "for" in verse 27 is from the Greek word "gar" and it means to "introduce the reason" (of something previously mentioned). This word "gar" connects with what preceded and shows how they got into Christ by faith. How? By being baptized into Christ they put on Christ and were saved. Thus, it means that they were children of God by faith inasmuch as they have been baptized.

Conclusion

It is strange that some denominational preachers today teach that obedience (works) is not required for salvation when both our faith and love of God are completed by our obedience. Are they saying we can be saved without complete faith? Are they saying we can be saved without a complete love of God? James 2:22 says about Abraham's offering of Isaac *"You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was **completed** by his works;"* (ESV). I John 2:5 reads *"But if anyone obeys his word, love for God is truly **made complete** in them. This is how we know we are in Him:"* (NIV). So, unless one wants to say we can be saved

with an incomplete faith and an incomplete love, or a dead faith, one has to admit obedience is necessary to our salvation because faith and love are both incomplete until they obey.

"BY WHAT AUTHORITY ARE YOU DOING THESE THINGS?"

"Now when He came into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people confronted Him as He was teaching, and said, 'By what authority are You doing these things? And who gave You this authority?'" (Matt. 21:23).

A study of authority in religious matters is very important. It lies at the center of everything we believe, teach, and practice as individual Christians and collectively as a local church. Every religious question is fundamentally a question of authority. However, there are many religious minded people who never stop to consider the question of authority and its application to their beliefs and practices.

Authority is "the power or right to give commands, enforce obedience, take action, or make final decisions" (Webster's New World Dictionary, page 94). Authority has to do with jurisdiction. It is the right to tell others what to do, expect them to do it, and punish them if they don't.

The chief priests and elders who confronted Jesus were asking a legitimate question. Jesus had caused a great disturbance in the temple. He had overturned tables where men were conducting business and drove people out of the temple (Matt. 21:12). These things were being done with the approval of the Jewish leaders. What right did Jesus have to disrupt these practices and remove them from the temple?

Although some may not like the idea of one having power over them, we realize there is a need for authority in different areas of our lives. We need legitimate standards of authority in society. Someone must set forth laws of conduct, and someone must enforce these laws.

Continued on pg. 40

Salvation



Possess Your Vessel

By Mike Thomas | Bowling Green, Kentucky, USA

The Thessalonians were surrounded by immorality and ungodly influences, but those who became Christians “turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God” (1 Thessalonians 1:9). In encouraging them to fulfill this commitment, Paul reminded them of the need to avoid the sexual immorality that was very common in their former ideology. He wrote: “*For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God*” (1 Thessalonians 4:3-5).

It is evident that we are inundated with the same wave of licentious influences that ancient idolaters faced. We may not have heathen temples inviting passersby to participate in the “worship” of fertility deities by laying with temple prostitutes, but we have the same type of influences beckoning us each day to be immoral. With electronic devices that can produce any image we want and literature that corrupts the judgment of unsuspecting readers, we are just as exposed to heathenism as were the Thessalonians, if not more so. Satan is working aggressively to warp the views of sexuality in children, disrupt the unity of the home by corrupting marriages, and plaguing individuals with luring images. Our only hope of remaining free from these influences is to trust in God's word (and mercy) to overcome this onslaught of lust. The things Paul said to the Thessalonians about possessing our “vessel in sanctification and honor” can be most helpful.

For one thing, this instruction implies it is possible for us to control our sexual desires and physical body.

Joseph is a classic example of this possibility. A young man at the peak of his sexual desires was able to resist the continual seduction of a woman who pleaded with him “day by day” to be with her (Genesis 39:7-10). He had to choose between integrity and godliness or passion and lust, yet fortunately he chose to possess his vessel. This is exactly what happens to us every day on our devices and influences. Potiphar's wife is pleading with us to yield to forbidden pleasure, and flirts with us to compromise our integrity and moral purity. Truthfully, it is the devil who issues these influences. He exposes our children to perverted images in storybooks, cartoons, and video games. He sees to it that our phones and computer monitors have enticing images pop up when we least expect it. He convinces people to walk around in skimpy, seductive attire. Satan is the reason young people are pressured to sacrifice their virginity and is the cause of married people compromising their wedding vows. It is in moments like these that we need the wisdom and character of Joseph to guard against Potiphar's wife. Peter said it this way, “*Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour*” (1 Peter 5:8). The moment we dismiss this warning or believe we are immune to this threat is the moment we set ourselves up for failure. Paul referenced the Israelites who had twenty-three thousand die in one day for yielding to sexual temptations. He then said: “*Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall*” (1 Corinthians 10:11-12).

The comforting thought in all of this is God is willing



to help us if that is our sincere desire. He assures us that the devil will flee from us when we are serious about resisting him (**James 4:7**), so that should give us hope. Our Creator also assures us that His eyes “are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their cry” (**Psalms 34:15; 1 Peter 3:12**). One of the best ways He helps us is by giving us the strength and wisdom to remain content with our spouse. “*Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you’*” (**Hebrews 13:5**). Ironically, He makes this promise after emphasizing the sanctity of marriage and the judgment against infidelity. “Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge” (**verse 4**). Contentment is key for married people. We are to save our sexual desires for our spouse and not share them with anyone else. It is the affection “due” them, so we must not selfishly use them in other ways.

“Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband. Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband” (1 Corinthians 7:2-3).

When we violate this commitment and selfishly look for other ways to fulfill our desires, we expose ourselves to a world of devastation and hurt. No moment of pleasure is worth the loss of honor, integrity, family, and the beautiful companionship of marriage. Yet no sin is as deceitful and powerful, yet crippling and devastating to families, churches, and society, as that of infidelity and sexual impurity. It brings severely painful consequences to its participants. Instead, God wants us to ask for help in remaining faithful and pure. He will not leave us nor

forsake us as we seek to possess our vessel in sanctification and honor. Plus, the threat of eternal punishment should motivate us to look past the lure of sexual temptation and make better choices. Paul warned, “*For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God*” (**Ephesians 5:5**). Frankly, no sin is worth the flames of hell and eternal separation from God, let alone the highly deceitful lure of sexual persuasion. But that is not always easy to see when Potiphar's wife is coming after us day after day.

One of my motivations in writing this article is the recent confession of a fellow-Christian who lost his family because he yielded to sexual immorality. His days are filled with darkness and tears because the pleasure that looked so promising was nothing but a facade and hoax. Wisdom is crying aloud with examples like these. The threat is real, dear friends, and the price is steep when it comes to sexual impurity. Yet, if like this fellow-Christian, we yield to foolishness, let us turn to God for mercy and be fully convinced of His love and willingness to save us. “*The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart; these, O God, You will not despise*” (**Psalms 51:17**). The person who wrote that psalm was recovering from his own fall to sexual temptation, so this is not a sin God has not seen before and one He has not forgiven. He knows who wants to do right and be set free from wickedness. Let us remember that when we stumble in any sin, including this one. God is able to save to the uttermost because of the blood of Christ and His tremendous love for us. But the best scenario is to avoid failure altogether by praying for wisdom, strength, self-control, and contentment. We will never regret possessing our vessel.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Question

Afternoon bro Lesley. Hopefully you are doing well today. Please what is your take on 1 John 5:16? I want a good explanation on the asking if a brother commits sin. Is the asking from the brother or asking in prayer for him who saw him committing the sin? Or is the asking applicable both ways? Thanks.

Answer

I John 5:16 reads: *“If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin which does not lead to death, he will ask, and He will give him life for those who commit sin not leading to death. There is sin leading to death. I do not say that he should pray about that.”*

The Greek word for “ask” in this verse is *aiteo* (G154) and it means “to request, petition, demand.” It is not the same word translated “ask” in I Corinthians 14:35 (*“...let them ask their husbands at home...”*) The word translated “ask” in I Corinthians 14:35 is *“eperotao”* (G1905) and it means “to interrogate, to question, demand of.” So in I John 5:16, John is not saying that the one who sees another in sin should interrogate him, rather, it refers to asking in prayer for the one who commits the sin.

However, from other passages of the scriptures, it is commanded that we restore an erring brother from sin such as in Galatians 6:1 and James 5:19-20.

“Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted” (Galatians 6:1).

“Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.” (James 5:19-20)

So, if a brother is in sin, it is okay for another brother who sees him to try to talk to him and bring him back. It is okay to ask the brother in sin and encourage him to return. So, both telling the brother about his sin and praying for him are taught in the scriptures.

But based on the context of I John 5:16, the “**asking**” there refers to praying for him. You would notice the next statement says God will give him life. This life comes as a result of the asking which is the prayer offered.

Also, the last statement in the verse (*“I do not say that you should **pray** about that”*) shows that prayer is what is in reference in the first statement.

- Osamagbe Lesley Egharevba

SPIRITUALLY BLIND

Many years ago, a preacher who faithfully proclaimed the gospel was challenged by an unbeliever who stepped from the crowd and said, “I don't believe in heaven or hell. I don't believe in God or Christ. I haven't seen them.”

Then a man wearing dark glasses came forward and said, “You say there is a river near this place. There is no such thing. You say there are people standing here, but that cannot be true. I haven't seen them. I was born blind. Only a blind man could say what you have said. The Bible says of the spiritually blind man, “But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them. Because they are spiritually discerned” (I Corinthians 2:14), and “The fool has said in his heart, “There is no God!”” (Psalms 14:1).

by Thomas Thornhill



Addendum

Making Effective Use Of The Internet & Social Media

Osamagbe Lesley Egharevba | Lagos, Nigeria

Technically, the Internet (and social media in particular) cannot be said to be good or bad in itself – it actually depends on how it is used and what our attitude is toward it. But as with almost every other invention of man, the Internet and social media have advantages and even disadvantages.

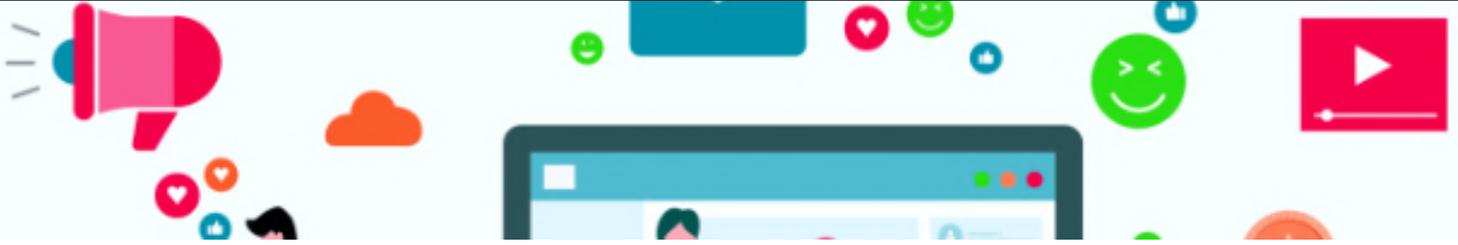
The Internet is one of the most important and wonderful technological advancements in the world today. It has made the world become a global village wherein communication is made easy regardless of distance. By definition, the Internet is a vast network that connects computers all over the world. Through this medium, people can share information and communicate from anywhere with an Internet connection. Social media on the other hand is a collective term for websites and applications that focus on communication, community-based input, interaction, content-sharing and collaboration. Some examples of social media include Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp Messenger, Instagram, WeChat, TikTok, etc. People can engage with social media via a computer, tablet, or smartphone via web-based software or applications. Since people use social media to share information and stay in touch and interact with friends, family and various communities, we can say that the major thing about the Internet and social media is about **communication** – whether orally or in written form.

Technically, the Internet (and social media in particular) cannot be said to be good or bad in itself – it actually depends on how it is used and what our attitude is toward it. But as with almost every other invention of man, the Internet and social media have advantages and even disadvantages. Many have used the Internet for fraudulent and unwholesome activities such as hacking into people's accounts, watching pornographic contents and some will

immerse themselves in social media to the point of excess and the detriment of their personal relationships, work responsibilities, and overall health, etc. Because of this and perhaps other reasons, many will avoid social media altogether, possibly even discouraging or condemning others for using it.

However, the Internet and social media can also be used positively for our good and the good of others. For example, that the Internet aids research and learning is a fact that is too plain to be denied. Many students and even teachers (including Bible teachers) have prepared lessons using resources from the Internet. Churches that have their information on the Internet can easily be located if anyone needs it. During the COVID-19 pandemic, when there was lockdown in which movements and gatherings were limited, many brethren and churches used the Zoom application to study the Bible and some still use it till date. These are good ways that the Internet can be used. As Christians, we must ensure to make good use of things to the glory of God. We must let our light shine before men that they will see our good works and glorify God in heaven (Matthew 5:16).

From the foregoing, it is clear that social media can be an invaluable form of communication. But we must use it properly and avoid using it in a way that would harm our influence. Hence since the church is saddled with the responsibility of communicating the gospel message to the world (evangelism – Matthew 28:19), teaching those converted (edification – Matthew 28:20) and helping her needy saints (benevolence – I



Timothy 5:3, 9-10), how can the church effectively use the Internet in these areas in order to fulfill God's commandments?

One of the ways is by having a functional website where gospel contents can be shared and disseminated to the world. There are various websites that are available with enough resources that can be very useful. Interestingly, some of these websites have great features – one of which is that it allows viewers to automatically translate the messages into various languages including Nigerian local languages. This means that we can get to preach the word to people even in the languages they understand. There are a lot of people in the virtual community and when churches create rich contents (such as Bible studies, pictures of Bible stories, interesting captions and topics for discussions, etc.) they can get to communicate the Word to others.

Another good way is for the church to create social media accounts and post good contents on the social media pages. This way, they can invite and direct people to their congregations for Bible studies. In the same vein, when brethren are in need, a church could quickly reach out to other brethren in distance places who may not even know them to tell them about their needs and solutions or helps may be offered just as in the case of Acts 11:27-30. Congregations should also encourage members to share these things on their personal pages as well. Many individual Christians are active on Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, etc. But what do they post on these pages? Is it just our pictures, achievements, life activities and things of that kind? How often do we talk about the gospel messages – even if it is only posting Bible passages?

Someone posted on twitter on the 23rd of July, 2022 and said something that caught my attention about

one of the Presidential aspirants that seem to be very popular in Nigeria now. He said *“Peter Obi is a proof that evangelism is not hard. We just don't send Jesus.”* I do not know if the individual is a Christian in the sense of how the Bible describes a Christian, but I think he made some sense. Since election is coming closer in Nigeria, I have seen several Christians post on their social media pages campaigning for one politician or the other. I am not saying that this is bad, but how much time and space do we give to posting things about Jesus and His message? The gospel is God's power to save man (Romans 16:16) and we can help spread the Word using our various social media platforms just as we spread other less important things. How about creating groups on these various social media platforms and then invite friends to teach them the Word? Many people who are into various businesses advertise and organize seminars on social media groups to draw people to patronize their businesses. Why can we not do same for the sake of Christ and draw people to His kingdom. I believe that many people can be reached with the gospel through this medium as well.

YouTube is a free video sharing website that makes it easy to watch online videos. A lot of individuals, business owners, churches etc. have channels on YouTube where they upload videos. Churches should encourage their preachers to go on YouTube to preach the Word of God. Door-to-door evangelism may not be as effective as it used to be in the time past due to certain factors especially in the urban area; and since going on radio may be too expensive for some congregations, they can upload videos on YouTube and share them. Even most broadcast media organizations are becoming increasingly popular because of their presence on the social media including YouTube. But if that is not possible,



granting that not everyone may have such ability, churches can subscribe to certain channels that speaks the truth and use those resources as their evangelism tool by sharing with others and posting them on their social media pages. By so doing, we are sharing the gospel messages. I have known brethren who got converted to Christ as a result of video messages they consistently watch on YouTube.

Zoom is also another good medium to study the Bible. I know certain congregations and brethren that conduct Bible studies on zoom with their members and others who are far away. Members can invite their friends to join the virtual Bible study if they cannot physically attend the one conducted at the church building. This way, the gospel message is spread. However, these mediums are not to replace the physical gatherings of the church, rather it is to further aid in spreading the Word. The Bible commands coming together to worship God (I Corinthians 11:20) and we must not forsake the assembling of ourselves together (Hebrews 10:25). Based on this, those who are satisfied with virtual worship are not getting it right.

All of these mediums can be used to spread the gospel to the world, teach the Word of God among the saints as well as help one another in time of need and it is strongly encouraged that churches make use of these things in order to effectively do the work that God has given her in this 21st century. While it is admitted that not everyone has the gift of using the Internet and social media (and as a matter of fact some do not even use them). It is important that those who know how to use these things should use them to spread the gospel.

"BY WHAT AUTHORITY ARE YOU DOING THESE THINGS?"

Continued from pg. 34

Otherwise, we would struggle to exist in a "law of the jungle" environment where the strongest impose their will by force. We need standards of authority in schools. Otherwise, no education can take place. We need standards of authority in the workplace and the home. Without a recognition and respect for authority we have chaos.

This need for authority must be applied to religious matters as well.

"When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained, what is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him? For You have made him a little lower than the angels, and You have crowned him with glory and honor" (Ps. 8:3-5). As man contemplates the creation around him, he realizes there is a Creator more powerful than himself. The authority of this Creator is implied in the opening verse of the Bible. *"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1).* All authority belongs to God by right of creation. We must recognize and respect this authority. *"But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, 'Why have you made me like this?' Does not the potter have power over the clay?" (Rom. 9:20-21).*

The question asked of Jesus by the chief priests and elders could be asked of us regarding our practices as well. By what authority are we doing the things we are doing, and who gave us the right to do these things?

by Heath Rogers