



# 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)**

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# From The Editor's Desk

With great joy, we present to you the 13th edition of *Unmasking Sophistry Magazine*. It is the first issue in the year 2024. We are thankful to God for the grace to see the New Year and the strength He has given us for this journal's regular publication. As usual, this journal is designed to teach the truth of God's word and expose the various arguments prepared in defense of false religion and arguments designed to oppose the Christian faith. To cover a wide range of areas, various sections have been created in this journal and topics relating to each section will be discussed at every edition.

In the last issue of this journal, we examined various subjects under each of the sections including: *What is "that which is perfect" in I Corinthians 13:10?; Is the church of Christ a Denomination? Weddings and Funerals in the Meeting Hall; The Development of Papal Power; National Association of Gospel Ministers: How Scriptural?; Does God Call One Today? Quibbles that Backfired;* and other interesting topics. We appreciate all the encouraging feedback received from our dear readers.

Meanwhile, this edition shall focus on topics such as; *Three gods or one God in Three Persons?; Catholic Doctrine of Purgatory; The Early Reformation; Weddings and Funerals in the Meeting Hall; Quibbles that Backfired; Review of Books on Bible Colleges; Divisions within the church; Why I Want To Marry A Christian;* and 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](http://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 and pray that we all become more steadfast in the work of God. Once again, all the prayers and encouragement from readers are duly appreciated. We would continue to hold fast to the pattern of sound words that 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

## Three gods or One God in Three Persons?

By Dudley Ross Spears

The Bible teaches there is only one God.

Malachi 2:10 "Have we not all one father? Hath not one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously every man against his brother, by profaning the covenant of our fathers?"

Romans 3:30 "Seeing it is one God, which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith."

I Corinthians 8:6 "But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him."

Ephesians 4:6 "One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all."

I Timothy 2:5 "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus"

James 2:19 "Thou believest that there is one God thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble."

There is but one Lord.

Deuteronomy 6:4 "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is one Lord:"

Zechariah 14:9 "And the Lord shall be king over all the earth: in that day shall there be one Lord, and his name one."

Mark 12:29 "And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord."

I Corinthians 8:6 'But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him."

Ephesians 4:5 "One Lord, one faith, one baptism."

Notice how "one" is used in the Scriptures: Paul said in Romans 12:4 "Just as each of us has one body with

many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others." In yet another reference to the church Paul said, "The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ" (1 Corinthians 12:12).

Jesus taught that two persons can be one without losing their individual identity. "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh? So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate" (Matthew 19:5-6). Likewise He prayed that all believers might be one. Read John 17:20-22 "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one." In neither passage does the term one mean one person. Nor does one mean one person when the Scriptures speak of one God or one Lord.

The issue turns on the meaning of the biblical term, Godhead, which means "Deity, the state of being God or divinity." To contend that since the Bible says there is one God – or One Lord – that there is only one person who is Deity is as foolish as contending that since the Bible says a man and wife are one flesh that there is but one person after the marriage union is complete. Such is rank ignorance of divine principles of truth. A man and woman who are married scripturally are "one flesh" but remain two distinct persons. All who obey the apostle's inspired words are



made one in Christ (John 17:20) but that does not mean they all become one person. If countless billions can be "one" and remain distinct human beings by obeying the gospel of Christ, surely three divine Beings can be one and remain distinct divine beings.

A United Pentecostal creed book reads: "We believe in the one ever living, eternal God: infinite in power, holy in nature, attributes and purpose; and possessing absolute, indivisible deity. This one true God has revealed Himself as Father, through His Son, in redemption; and as the Holy Spirit, by emanation. ... This one true God manifested Himself in the Old Testament in divers ways; in the Son while He walked among men; as the Holy Spirit after the ascension." (Manual, United Pentecostal Church, page 17). Some of those who adhere to this creedal dictum explain it this way. "God is one person, who has manifested Himself in creation as Father, in redemption as Son, and in the Church as the Holy Ghost,"

This false doctrine about God's personality is extremely dangerous. If God exists eternally as only one person, manifesting Himself in three different modes, He is not (and cannot be) a manifestation of all three simultaneously. Either God is Father (as Pentecostals say He was in creation) or He is the Son, as they claim He was in redemption, or He is the Holy Spirit now. He cannot be all three at the same time and be but one person. This brings a serious consequence they must face. If Jesus was God manifest in the Son, but God is now manifesting Himself as the Holy Spirit, Jesus is not now the Son of God. Those who deny that Jesus is the Son of God are anti-Christ. "Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son. Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: but he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also" (1 John 2:22-23). Those who

affirm only one person of God but three separate manifestations cannot acknowledge the Son and the Father also. They must deny that Jesus is now manifest as God. It is just that simple and that is very serious.

To prove there are three separate and distinct beings of God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit all that is needed is to go to the Bible. It furnishes abundant evidence of the identity of each of the three divine Beings who make up the one Godhead. Please follow along in your Bible.

Genesis 1:26 reads: "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness:..." The Hebrew word Elohim is defined as: "... specifically used (in the plural thus, especially with the article) of the supreme God.." It appears some 2500 times in the Old Testament and is always a plural word. Notice that God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness..." Us and our are plural pronouns. Every high school student recognizes the rule of grammar that "a pronoun agrees with its antecedent in person, number and gender." (Plain English Handbook, page 20, section 125). The fact that Elohim is a plural word explains why the pronouns us and our are used. Consider another Old Testament reference to God. "Come, let us (plural) go down, and there confound their language" (Genesis 11:7) Verse 8 adds, "So the Lord scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city." The word for Lord here is Jaweh, the self-existent or eternal God.

Another passage affirming the plurality of God in the Old Testament is, "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them" (Ecclesiastes 12:1). The Hebrew word for Creator in this verse is plural. The Creator in Ecclesiastes 12:1 is the God of Genesis 1:26 and consists of the three divine Beings, the Father, Son,



and Holy Spirit.

The New Testament is just as emphatic that there are three separate and distinct Divine Beings of God. "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high; Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee? And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son?" (Hebrews 1:1-5).

The first person, the Father, uses the pronoun, "I, Me, My" (verse 5). Of the Son, the Father uses the pronouns "Thee, Thy .." Both the Father and the Son are mentioned and the Son is called "the express image" of the person of God. It is obvious that the Son cannot be the express image of something non-existent. This passage shows that the Father is a Divine, and that the Son is the express image of that person. It would be interesting to hear some Pentecostal preachers explain how Jesus could be the express image of the person of the Father, since they deny that the Father is a person separate and distinct from the Son.

The New Testament also teaches the distinct identity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in Matthew 28:19. Jesus commissioned His apostles to "Go teach all nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." We hear some who say that there is only one name for the Father,

Son, and Holy Spirit, based on this verse. But name singular does not mean one name for all three divine Beings. Read with me from Isaiah 9:6. "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, the everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace." Notice that name is singular, but includes at least five names. Matthew 28:19 is irrefutable proof of the identity and existence of the three separate and distinct divine Beings who make up the one Godhead. There is one God composed of three Divine Persons. Scriptural baptism is into the name of the divine Three. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three separate and distinct persons. They are the one true and living God Almighty. We follow the teaching Christ gave His apostles. We baptize people on His authority (in His name) into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

A second-century heretic called Sabellius argued, "but one person in the divine essence; or he denied that the Father was one person, the Son another person, and the Holy Spirit a third; of course he discarded the inherent distinction of three persons." (**Moshheim's Ecclesiastical History**, Book I, Century III, Part II, Chapter 5, page 198, Footnote (12).

Any unbiased person can quickly see the origin of the modern-day heresy of "one person in the Godhead." It did not start with a Holy Spirit guided prophet, apostle, or teacher. It began in heresy and remains heretical. It must not be allowed to go unopposed. It is a discredit to the sacred "Trinity" and misleads many people into error on one of the most basic of all Bible doctrines - the Personality of the Divine Godhead.

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# World Religions

## Catholic Doctrine of Purgatory

By Dudley Ross Spears

One of the first contacts I ever had with a Roman Catholic Priest was in Cookeville, Tennessee. It was my maiden Voyage as a gospel preacher. The Roman "Pontiff" at that time, passed away and I received a letter from the local parish Priest asking me to pray for the departed soul of the "Pope." The reason: the Priest informed me the man was being detained in Purgatory and needed our prayers to be released.

Purgatory is a fictional concept of what happens at death and has been a hallmark of the Catholic Church. They practically own the exclusive claim to this doctrine. While they assert it has biblical connections, there is nothing in the Bible at all about either the designation or concept of Purgatory. I declined to pray for the Pope. His destiny was sealed when he died. Nothing I could say to the Lord would alter that.

This fantasy of the Catholic Church originated at the Council of Trent. "There is a Purgatory, and souls there detained, are helped by the prayers of the faithful, and especially by the acceptable Sacrifice of the Altar." (Sess. XXV.). James Cardinal Gibbons explained their position in this way. "The Catholic Church teaches that, besides a place of eternal torments for the wicked and of everlasting rest for the righteous, there exists in the next life a middle state of temporary punishment, allotted for those who have died in venial sin, or who have not satisfied the justice of God for sins already forgiven. She also teaches us that, although the souls consigned to this intermediate state, commonly called purgatory, cannot help themselves, they may be aided by the suffrages of the faithful on earth. The existence of purgatory naturally implies the correlative dogma - the utility of praying for the dead - for the souls

consigned to this middle state have not reached the term of their journey. They are still exiles from heaven and fit subjects for Divine clemency." (FAITH OF OUR FATHERS, James Cardinal Gibbons, Archbishop of Baltimore, P.J. Kenedy & Sons, page 173).

Catholic doctrine makes an unwarranted distinction between what they call "venial sins" and "mortal sins." They define "venial sins" as: "An offense against God which does not deprive us of His friendship and which merits only temporal punishment. It is called venial because it is more easily pardoned than mortal sin. Venial sin, however slight it may be, is, nevertheless, an injury done to God. It diminishes the fervor of charity, and causes us to tend to God with less affection than He deserves. It dims the light of the intellect, weakens the will, and so disposes to mortal sin. It deprives man of many degrees of grace and glory. Unless expiated, it will merit the pains of purgatory in the world to come." (THE CATHOLIC ENCYCLOPEDIA, page 994).

**They define mortal sin as:** "A grievous offense against the law of God. This sin is called mortal because it deprives us of supernatural life and brings damnation and death of the soul. Three conditions are necessary for a mortal sin: gravity of matter, sufficient reflection, and full consent of the will. The gravity of matter is determined by Holy Scripture, by the definitions of the (Catholic, DRS) Church, by the testimony of the Fathers, Doctors, and theologians, by the universal belief of the faithful, and by reason enlightened by faith. Mortal sin is a revolt against God, supreme Lord, contempt of His adorable majesty, an act of monstrous ingratitude. It is an offense against Christ who redeemed us, and against the Holy Ghost who



sanctifies us. It deprives one of sanctifying grace and thus prevents one from acquiring merit or sharing in the satisfying merits of the Church. It tarnishes the soul, and causes remorse of conscience, an inclination to evil, darkening of the intellect, weakening of the will. It deprives one of the right to heaven, and entails penalties, some of which are incurred in this life, and the loss of God forever as well as eternal punishment." (Ibid. page 652). Those guilty of "mortal" sin go to hell - not to this illusion called Purgatory.

For a period of time the Catholic Church raised revenue by selling what they called "Indulgences." These indulgences were peddled among Catholics not only for "the living but also for the dead." One of the common priestly sayings was, "As soon as the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from Purgatory springs." An indulgence, to a Catholic, was his assurance that he would escape punishment for sin and help the departed dead be released from Purgatory. Historians have noted that "Repentance fell by the wayside." Erasmus, partner to Martin Luther, is reported to have said, "Everywhere the remission of purgatorial torment is sold; nor is it sold only, but forced upon those who refuse it."

Catholics now argue that the money given for indulgences was all voluntary. It reminds me of those who see no difference in buying services and making donations. It is similar to those TV and Radio preachers who don't "sell" their wares, they just stipulate how much you have to donate to them to get their products.

John Tetzel was commissioned by Pope Leo X to sell these indulgences to raise money to complete the building of St. Peter's Cathedral in Rome. Catholics consider Tetzel's and Leo's actions as abuses. They cannot deny the practical effect of these indulgences. They may be correct on the abuses, but are wrong on

the intent of selling indulgences. The intent of those indulgences provided the ordinary Catholic with the hope that not only he, but his departed dead, would find relief from punishment for sin. Thus it was tied to the false doctrine of purgatorial punishment and all its ramifications.

There is a very simple way to refute this false doctrine. Neither the term nor the concept is found in anything from God. The Bible is silent regarding any intermediate state of the dead where the dead suffer for sins and are held as exiles from heaven till some living person prays or pays to have them released. That is the simple way. Let some Catholic priest or theologian produce biblical evidence that the doctrine is from God. They cannot do it.

In the absence of Scripture, Catholic defenders turn to the apocryphal book of II Maccabees. Keep in mind this is not an inspired document and has absolutely no divine sanction, It is not even accurate history in some instances. Chapter 12 verses 43-46 read: "And making a gathering, he sent twelve thousand drachms of silver to Jerusalem for sacrifice to be offered for the sins of the dead, thinking well and religiously concerning the resurrection. For, if he had not hoped that they that were slain should rise again, it would have seemed superfluous and vain to pray for the dead... It is therefore, a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead that they may be loosed from sins." Scholarly linguists question the authenticity not only of the book, but particularly this selection. Many exaggerations are made in the book. But this passage is not what Catholics should use to support their doctrine that only those guilty of "venial" sins are in need of prayers and money from the living to obtain release.

The context in which the apocryphal statement is made deals with those guilty of idolatry. They died



idolaters! This is surely not considered a "venial" sin by the Catholic Church. Idolatry is classed as a "mortal" sin by the Catholic Church. Remember their definition? "This (mortal sin) sin is called mortal because it deprives us of supernatural life and brings damnation and death of the soul." Remember again: "A venial sin is an offense against God which does not deprive us of his friendship and which merits only temporal punishment." The Catholic cannot have it both ways. The doctrine of Purgatory offers a second chance to sinners, but the Bible does not. At the end, when the Lord returns to judge the world in righteousness (Acts 17:31) those who are in sin will go away into everlasting punishment (Matthew 25:46). There is no reprieve from the final sentence pronounced upon those guilty of sin.

Jesus spoke of the deaths of a rich man who went to hell and of a poor beggar (Lazarus) who went to the bosom of Abraham. When the rich man asked that Lazarus come and give him relief from torment, Abraham said, "Son, remember that you in your lifetime received good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and you are tormented. And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence" (Luke 16:25-26). At death eternal destinies are sealed and unchangeable.

Lazarus died, but was comforted, not being punished in some imagined purgatorial torment. The rich man suffered excruciating pain in torment. While the candle of life burns, God gives all men the opportunity to prepare. Once that flame goes out, there is no altering the eternal destiny of anyone. The unrepentant wicked will never be released from punishment. Solomon tells us even now, "When a

wicked man dies, his expectation will perish, and the hope of the unjust perishes" (Proverbs 11:7). It behooves any rational being to reject doctrines that promise a false hope and get right with God now.

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### **SPEAK THE UTTERANCES OF GOD**

Peter succinctly described the responsibility of everyone who will preach or teach on spiritual matters. He said, "*Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God...*" (1 Peter 4:11).

What does it mean to speak "*the utterances of God*"? It means we must speak the very words of God. It is not enough to claim to speak for God. Many false teachers do this. They share a message that sounds close enough to the truth that those who are unfamiliar with the word of God and do not make an effort to test what is being taught are deceived by it. It is not enough to teach something that *sounds right*; it must *be right*.

How do we speak the words of God? We have to go to the word that He has revealed in the Scriptures (cf. 2 Timothy 3:16). We must understand God's word in the way He intended, not "*distort*" it "*to [our] own destruction*" (2 Peter 3:16). We must not corrupt the message (2 Corinthians 2:17), lest we lead others astray and find ourselves to be "*accursed*" (Galatians 1:6-9). This is a serious responsibility, and we must not take it lightly.

So speak the utterances of God. We do not have the liberty to teach whatever we want to teach or whatever the people want to hear. Instead, we must preach the word in simplicity, purity, and its entirety.

- **Andy Sochor**

# DISCOURSE

## Should Weddings And Funerals Be Conducted In The Church Building?

The topic for discussion in this section is a continuation of what was discussed in the previous edition – Weddings and Funerals in the church building. Is it scriptural for weddings and funerals to be conducted in the church building? The two brothers replied to each other's article. Both articles are published here for the consideration of the readers. Everyone is encouraged to study both articles with their Bibles. If you missed the October – December, 2023 edition, you can download it via

[www.unmaskingsophistry.com/downloads](http://www.unmaskingsophistry.com/downloads)

### Weddings and Funerals in the Meetinghouse - No 2

By Weldon E. Warnock

Brother Ralph Williams said in a review of my February article on “Weddings and Funerals in the Meetinghouse” that “The real issue is: WHERE IS THE AUTHORITY? If such practices are allowable a simple N.T. precept, example or necessary inference is all that's necessary.” But the issue is not one of authority (finding book, chapter and verse), but rather it is a matter of judgment. We are not talking about what the church may do, but what individuals may do in the meetinghouse. Certainly, the church has no business conducting weddings or funerals in or out of the meetinghouse. We are all in agreement here. But what individuals may do in the church's building is another matter.

To ask for book, chapter and verse for a wedding or funeral in the meetinghouse is about like asking for Bible to comb your hair, tie your shoes, powder your face or manicure your nails in the meetinghouse. Where is there command, example or necessary inference for these things in the meetinghouse? Yet, we all do them (hopefully, not during the worship, however). The church would need authority to comb hair, tie shoes, powder the face and manicure nails, but not individuals.

Our brother states, “I would take exception to the statement, 'The Lord never did say what could or could not be done in a meetinghouse.' Jesus told us that when He revealed the 'church's authorized

work.” No, brother Williams, Jesus told the church what it could do when he revealed its authorized work—not what could be done in a temporal structure. This position eliminates any and everything in the building or on the premises that is not a work of the church. Is riding a bicycle on the parking lot a work of the church? Is playing ball by the neighborhood children a work of the church? Is public parking by the community while shopping or working the church's work? Since none of these things is a work of the church, they must be barred from church property, according to brother Williams' reasoning.

Forced to its logical conclusion, brother Williams view becomes an extreme and untenable one. It could be classified as a *reductio ad absurdum*. Putting this in plain language, it means, “disproof of a proposition, etc., by showing the absurdity to which it leads when carried to its logical conclusion” (Webster). Brother Williams' position demands that everything not related to church activity must be kept off the church's premises. No congregation practices this.

My comparison of weddings and funerals to socializing before and after services is parallel, brother Williams to the contrary. I did not say that they were comparable in every aspect, but they are parallel in that neither is a function of the church. Since some are contending that weddings and funerals may not be



conducted in a meetinghouse because they are not works of the church, I maintained in my former article that neither may socializing, games by neighborhood children or parking of automobiles by the local residents while shopping or working, be done on the church's premises because they are not functions of the church.

Brother Williams wants to make the socializing proper and permissible before and after worship on the basis of it being incidental. Webster defines "incidental" as "a chance or undesigned feature of something; casual; hence, minor; of secondary importance." Thus, it appears that brother Williams has no objections to undesigned secular matters in the meetinghouse; just those that are planned. Maybe we need to start having unplanned weddings and classify them under "incidentals." To say a thing is incidental seems to make it right. Seriously, we have as much right to perform a wedding or funeral in the meetinghouse and classify it a matter of judgment as we do to talk about hunting there and classify it an incidental. Neither one involves the church in an unauthorized practice.

Our brother said, "I don't know of any churches or elders inviting the public to freely use the parking lot or the neighborhood children to turn the premises into a playlot." Why don't they stop the practice, then? If their failure to invite suggests that they disapprove, then they ought to terminate playing and parking on the premises. The fact that elders do not stop playing and public parking on the parking lot is evidence that they have no objections. How many churches do you think would turn down children's request to ride their bicycles on the parking lot or deny a request for some business people to use the lot while they are at work? To be this narrow and restrictive would cast the church in a contemptible position in the community.

Who says that weddings and funerals are the primary issue, except brethren who have made them an issue? They are no issue with most of us, and I regret that they have been made a public issue. If I made children playing on the parking lot and socializing before and after worship an issue, they would be the main issue with me. I could say something like brother Williams said, "Of course how these questions are answered regarding weddings and funerals doesn't really meet the issue of using the church's premises for children playing and public parking. First, tackle the primary issue itself. THEN if these other matters need attention for consistency and truth's sake, work at solving them." Really, public parking and playing on the parking lot are just as much an issue as weddings and funerals in the building, and "for consistency and truth's sake," they need solving by the objectors of weddings and funerals in the building.

Some questions are in order just here: (1) Since brother Williams contended that the church's facilities are "sanctified," would it be permissible for a person to make a phone call on the church's phone that is not related to church work? (2) Could a person get a drink of water when the church is not assembled in the building? (3) May the restrooms be used, other than during a service? These things are done in all buildings owned by churches of Christ that are so equipped. Are we to quit allowing these practices on the basis of the facilities being "sanctified"—that they are to be used only in conjunction with the church's activity?

Although I am of the conviction that the usage of the building for weddings and funerals is a matter of judgment, there are some factors to consider as to what may be permitted on the church's premises: (1) Is it morally right? Of course, this goes without saying. (2) What might the potential dangers be to involving



the church in the practice later? (3) Would the people in the community get the wrong impression and thus hinder them from obeying the truth? (4) Has the main purpose of the meetinghouse been changed? It was built for the worship and work of the church. If it is used all week for individual projects and activities, has not the purpose for which it was built been altered? As the old saying goes, “The tail would be wagging the dog.” (5) Is the activity in good taste? Propriety demands, on the basis of the close proximity of the meetinghouse with religious functions, that certain things are out of place on the church's property. Discretion would have to be used here. In conclusion may I say that if a congregation saw fit to refuse a wedding or funeral in its meetinghouse, that would be its prerogative, but it has no right to try to impose its opinions or feelings on sister congregations and thereby disrupt the peace and harmony of brethren over such matters that are purely optional. We have enough legitimate issues without creating some superfluous ones.

### “My Church”

Sometimes, when someone uses the phrase “my church,” they never mean such church belongs to them. Instead they mean the church I attend, or the church I worship with, or the church I am a member of, etc. It is similar to how Paul used the phrase “my gospel” in II Tim 2:8.

The word “my” implies association with the speaker, but doesn't necessarily exclude others - e.g., does “my doctor” mean mine and nobody else's? Does “my school” mean the school I own or the school I attend - which? Does “my team won on Saturday” mean the team that belongs to me, or the team I pull for?

Conclusion: When a person says “my church,” they don't mean they own that church. So we need to quit making the incorrect assumption they do mean that. That is called “evil surmising” in the Bible (I Tim. 6:4).

- Pat Donahue

### Consider All What The Bible Says On A Particular Topic

Many times believers don't follow the truth due to wrong conclusions being drawn because all of what the Bible says on a particular topic is not taken into consideration. For example, the Catholics do that with their doctrine of transubstantiation. About the Lord's Supper Jesus said in Matt 26:27-28 “And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.” The Catholics take that to mean the fruit of the vine supernaturally changed to the literal blood of Jesus when He gave thanks - a doctrine called transubstantiation. And if that were the only passage we had on this detail, I might agree with them. But Catholics ignore the very next verse (29) which would falsify this position - “But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.” Notice Jesus is now calling the liquid “fruit of the vine,” not his blood. So had it already changed back to juice just moments after it had changed to Jesus' literal blood? Or was Jesus using a metaphor all along, like when He said “I am the door” (John 10:9)?

The same mistake is being made when preachers teach salvation is by faith alone. It is true enough verses like John 3:16 teach we must believe to be saved, but no passage says believe only is enough. To the contrary, James 2:24 says “Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.” And Mark 16:16a says “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.” When you take all passages under consideration, we see that John 3:16 is not teaching salvation by faith only.

- Pat Donahue

# DISCOURSE

## Should Weddings And Funerals Be Conducted In The Church Building?

### Weddings and Funerals – A Review No 2

By Ralph D. Williams

Brother Weldon Warnock and I agree the church is not in the business of providing for weddings and funerals. I'm sure we'd agree that such is an individual and family responsibility (1 Cor. 7:2; 1 Tim. 5:8). Yet, when the meetinghouse is used for these affairs, who has provided the place? The individual didn't spend his money to build the facilities. The building, seating, etc. were purchased from the Lord's (church) treasury. If a church were renting a meeting place, would it be all right to use church funds to rent it an extra hour or another evening for a wedding?

Combing the hair and clipping a hangnail, like using the restroom or drinking fountain, need no specific authority. These are individual personal needs which are merely **INCIDENTAL** to the reason for being at the building. To have a parallel with a wedding one would need to announce that brethren were invited to gather with combs and clippers at a certain time for a special service of clipping and combing.

I'll stand upon my statement that Jesus told us how to use the meeting house when He revealed the "church's authorized work." Obviously, the Lord said nothing concerning "a temporal structure" per se. Yet places of assembling are recorded in the N.T. (Acts 20:8,10). And the work and worship required of the church necessitate a place (1 Cor. 11:18-22; Heb. 10:25). Therefore when a place is rented or purchased with the Lord's funds to do His authorized work, the question of **HOW** to use the place should be self-evident!

How shall we use the communion trays? Some seem uncertain about the building itself, but what about this aid to the Lord's Supper? Would a sister decide to take the bread plates home to serve sandwiches at a

bridal shower since the trays weren't being used anyway? The reasoning of some would permit it. The question then is will we use an expedient (building, trays, baptistry) only for the use for which it was purchased with the Lord's funds? In the business world, one who takes company property for his own personal use without authority is guilty of misappropriation. We don't wish to spiritually misappropriate the Lord's funds or property. That's the very heart of this discussion.

Brother Warnock calls my view absurd because he carries it out to an "extreme and untenable" conclusion, which he thinks is necessary. He says no congregation practices keeping off the church's premises everything not related to church activity. (Is *our* standard of right and wrong to be what churches practice?) Certainly we can't police the grounds or put up barbed wire to stop children from riding their bicycles or playing on it. But the fact remains the parking lot wasn't built as a playground. Neither was it designed to aid shoppers and businessmen. Such uses are **INCIDENTAL**. If it's a problem put up a sign: "church parking." That states the purpose of this private property. If people violate it, we can't control that nor would it be wise to make a scene over it. Because we can't completely control what outsiders do on the premises doesn't argue or justify planning and using church facilities in nearly anyway anyone may desire.

True, socializing before and after services is parallel to weddings in that neither are the function of the church. But they are **not** parallel where it would be significant in this discussion. "Socializing" or visiting is **not** a planned activity. Time is **not** set apart for it.



Announcements and invitations are **not** extended for participation. A special service is **not** scheduled for that purpose. A request is **not** made of the elders that the building might be borrowed for such use. I've never heard an outsider speak of our "visiting" as they've been heard to speak about a "church of Christ wedding."

The careful attention given to the word **INCIDENTAL** is important and appreciated. It means "a chance or undesigned feature of something; casual; hence, minor; of secondary importance." Surely, this is part of the key in resolving some of the seeming difficulties in this inquiry. "Incidentals" are a fact of life; something we must live with. They are even found in the Bible. For example, in connection with baptism, who administered it and where were merely incidentals (1 Cor. 1:17; Acts 8:36). However, it's a little hard to believe many brides would be satisfied with an "unplanned" (incidental) wedding. While "socializing" may be "incidental" much of that which I hear is an expression of "care one for another" (1 Cor. 12:25) and courtesy toward visitors (Gal. 6:10). The content of such visiting is indeed a matter of judgment. But this is not the same and I would object if the men wished to meet at the building one evening to talk about and show slides of a hunting trip.

Is it wrong to use the facilities purchased with the Lord's money only for those things for which they were needed in the first place? Should the wishes of the public determine their use? I don't find it narrow to kindly and politely tell folks that the church premises aren't designed for general public use. Tell them (with a smile) if they want to park there to come Sunday at 9 a.m.! Right thinking people, respectful of private property, shouldn't become offended at this truth. Of course, the first consideration ought always to be whether our practice and attitude is offensive to

God.

Again, if the word "sanctified" causes misunderstanding, substitute the words "ear-marked" or "reserved" with regard to the use of the facilities. Clearly none believe the building is like some shrine in which we must remain silent or whisper in hushed tones. The meeting place is "set apart" for the special work of the Lord. The worship that is rendered therein is truly "sanctified" in the strictest Biblical sense of the word.

In response to the three questions: the telephone, like the restroom, exists not specifically for "church work" but to facilitate those who assemble or are at the building at other times (cleaning, bulletin, studying). It serves one's needs while there spiritually or secularly. I wouldn't object if one phoned to check with the baby sitter, called a taxi or ambulance, etc. I would oppose a member coming to the building solely to make social or business calls. If one were at the building legitimately the use of the phone would be merely incidental. If a brother didn't have water or bathroom facilities at home, I'm sure he'd be welcome to come to the building at any hour there was need. In such trying circumstances, he'd no doubt classify as a "needy saint" anyway, thus an object of church aid. But if one has utilities at home, why would he make a special trip to the meetinghouse? The telephone, water, restrooms all serve the incidental needs of those who have reason to be at the building, during services or any other time.

Again, brother Warnock and I agree when he writes in his next to the last paragraph, the meetinghouse "was built for the worship and work of the church." Is it improper or "absurd" to ask brethren simply to apply that truth in practice? The building wasn't built for public use by the Garden club, Rotary, 4H-club, Boy Scouts, ad infinitum. Therefore, the list of five rules or



someone else's ten rules aren't needed to determine what activities may be permitted on the premises and by whom. The church has a work and worship to attend to. A place was necessary to accomplish it. Therefore, let us be content to use the facilities for which they were originally acquired and authorized. While some may consider this a superfluous issue, others are concerned enough to investigate and discuss it calmly and brotherly in the interest of doing only what is right. Let us help ourselves and our brethren never to depreciate a question to the extent we fail to fulfill 1 Thess. 5:21.

### WHOSE RESPONSIBILITY IS IT?

WHOSE RESPONSIBILITY is it to encourage those who are weak and discouraged, or help those who are in need of any assistance? The elders...the preacher...the deacons?

*“Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer, contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation.”*

**(Romans 12:10-16)**

Then in Paul's letter to the church in Galatia: *“Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ.”* (Galatians 6:1-2)

*“We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone.”* (1 Thess. 5:14)

These words are addressed to whosoever is identified as “one another,” “brethren,” “you.” The truth is, we all have a responsibility for one another. Please make a note of those in your number who are absent a good bit, those who seem discouraged, those who need our love. If we don't do it, who will?

Suppose you had a loved one in a distant city who was down? Who would you look to in that city for help? Think about it brethren. Pray about it. Yes elders, deacons and preachers have their responsibilities, but obviously they cannot fulfill *all* the responsibilities of *all* the members.

**AMAZING** – While going through some old Sunday bulletins from the church I worked with in Georgia, I came across the following. “PAUL WILLIAMS in South Africa tells of sister GLADYS WELLS who came from California to S.A. to assist in the work. Sister Wells is 81 years old, and is blind. She came to teach Braille to TRESSA MTHETHWA, an 18-year-old new convert who is also blind. How encouraging. That's truly amazing! Neither age, nor blindness, nor distance kept her from serving.

IF THE PRESIDENT of the United States sent you forth as his special representative, you would feel a responsibility to act in a certain way becoming of your status, and to fulfill your responsibilities to the best of your ability. Well, perhaps President Biden has not called you, but the Ruler of the Universe has called upon you. And every day you are “on the job.” How are you fulfilling your responsibilities as you go about your daily activities, and as you meet people that need to know about your King?

**Continued on pg. 20**

# 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 one of our Bible classes, a brother commented that the reason God required that the elders have children (plural) is because the Jews normally have multiple children and that the law would not be applicable today since some countries of the world today regulate the number of children a family may have, hence, a man with one child may be appointed to serve as an elder. He then challenges me to show him an example of a person in the Bible with just one child. I simply asked that Judges 11:34 and Luke 9:38 be read to the hearing of the whole congregation: "When Jephthah came to his house at Mizpah, there was his daughter, coming out to meet him with timbrels and dancing; and **she was his only child**. Besides her he had neither son nor daughter." (Judges 11:34). Luke 9:38 reads: "Suddenly a man from the multitude cried out, saying, "Teacher, I implore You, look on my son, **for he is my only child.**" God's Word is ever true and powerful!



Curtis Porter met W. C. Wright of the Christian church in a debate in Monett, Arkansas in 1921. While he was a preacher for the Christian church, Wright had gone beyond their ordinary doctrine, and had embraced the doctrine of the Christadelphians. He had become a materialist in concept. He held to the idea of no endless punishment for the wicked, and no resurrection for the unbeliever. Their position is, and his position was, as he had expressed it, that when an unbeliever dies, he is just as we sometimes say a long

time dead. There will be no resurrection for him. He affirmed during that debate that only regenerated people will share in the resurrection of the dead. He defined regenerated people as those who had believed in the Lord, repented of their sins, confessed their faith in Christ and had been baptized into Him. Nobody else is regenerated today, they are God's people and they have no part, anybody but them, in the resurrection. And in the discussion of it, Wright introduced a statement by Paul in I Cor. 15. "As in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive", and he defined as "in Christ" those who had been baptized into Christ. He preached that in Christ all shall be made alive. Nobody shall be made alive except those that are in Christ. Therefore, nobody raised from the dead except God's people; nobody but Christians. Only those "in Christ" will be made alive. Porter said in responding to it, "I know that the term in Christ sometimes refers to those who are Christians, but not always. In this place, I am certain that it does not. For not only did Paul say that "in Christ shall all be made alive," but he said that "as in Adam, all die." As in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive. And if "in Christ" means only Christians, "in Adam" means only sinners. They are used in contrast. If in Christ means nobody will be raised except Christians, then those who die in Adam means nobody will die except alien sinners. And upon that basis then, we would have to reach the conclusion that those who are raised will be those who never died, and not one of those who died will ever be raised."

# Church History

## The Early Reformation

By Andy Sochor | Kentucky, USA

The four previous articles in this series focused on the apostasy that led to the development of the Roman Catholic Church. This was the product of the mindset that Paul warned the brethren in Thessalonica about:

*“Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together with Him, that you not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, 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 2:1-4).*

Some in Thessalonica believed the Lord would return very soon, yet Paul explained that He would not return until after the great apostasy described in the passage above. Furthermore, the natural progression of apostasy is that it tends to get worse as the ones following after the false teachers and their errors move further and further away from the Lord and the standard found in His word. This is why Paul told Timothy, *“But evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived” (2 Timothy 3:13).*

However, as the “church” moved further away from the pattern found in the New Testament, more individuals and groups saw the problems in the dominant religious system and sought to fix them. Unfortunately, these were generally like the reforms of some of the kings of God's people – Asa, Jehoshaphat, and others – who did good and may have eliminated

certain erroneous practices, but *“the high places were not taken away”* where idolatrous worship was conducted (1 Kings 15:11-14; 22:42-43; 2 Kings 14:1-4; 15:1-4, 32-35). They made *reforms* but did not completely *restore* the practices that God gave in His Law. In the same way, many saw the problems in the Roman Catholic Church and endeavored to correct them, but they did not return to the New Testament pattern.

### Erroneous Doctrines and Practices That Had Developed

Before discussing some of the individuals and groups who first attempted to institute change in the Roman Catholic Church, let us briefly notice some of the “strange doctrines” that developed after the first century that were contrary to the teachings of the New Testament:

- Celibacy – The “clergy” were forbidden from marrying. Yet the New Testament taught that the overseers in the church (known as bishops, elders, or pastors) were to be married (1 Timothy 3:2). Even the apostle Peter, who the Catholics erroneously claim was the first pope, was married (Matthew 8:14), as were most of the other apostles (1 Corinthians 9:5).
- Latin mass – Worship services were conducted in the Latin language, which was not the language spoken by the common man. Yet Paul taught that, even during the days of miraculous spiritual gifts and tongue-speaking, the assembly was to be conducted so that all could understand what was being said (1 Corinthians 14:23-25, 27-28, 19).
- Penance – This is a self-inflicted punishment for sin as an outward sign of repentance. However, Paul told the brethren in Colossae that *“self-*



*abasement and severe treatment of the body...are of no value against fleshly indulgence” (Colossians 2:23).*

- Indulgences – These were monetary gifts given to the church as a substitute for penance. Yet when Simon needed to repent, Peter told him to “*repent of this wickedness...and pray*” in order to “*be forgiven*” (Acts 8:22).

- Confessing sins to the priest – We are to confess to God (1 John 1:19) and, in some instances, to one another (James 5:16). Yet the Catholic Church designated one man – the priest – as the one to whom all the people were to confess their sins in order to be forgiven.

- Transubstantiation – This is the idea that in the Lord's Supper (Catholics call this the “Eucharist”), the emblems are miraculously changed into the substance of the body and blood of Christ. However, when Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper *before His death*, He said, “*This is My body,*” and, “*This is My blood,*” clearly showing that they were *symbols* of His body and blood. When we partake of the Lord's Supper today, we partake of the bread and fruit of the vine, which *represent* the body and blood of Christ (1 Corinthians 11:23-26).

- Purgatory – This is an intermediary state after death for those who have not been sufficiently cleansed of their sins during their lifetime, so they need to endure suffering in order to be purified of sins before they can go to heaven. Yet Jesus taught that there are two possible outcomes after death – paradise and torment – and that no one can pass from one to the other (Luke 16:19-31). In other words, at death, our fate is sealed, and we look forward to either “*a resurrection of life*” or “*a*

*resurrection of judgment*” (John 5:29).

This is not an exhaustive list. However, they provide a sample of the doctrines and practices that developed among those who departed from the doctrines and practices of the first century church.

### **Tyranny of the Roman Catholic Church**

In the previous article of this series, we discussed the development of papal power. However, this was not just in the political realm. As the Roman Catholic Church dominated the nations during the Dark Ages, it also wielded great power over the common man. Some of the “strange doctrines” we discussed helped keep the people enslaved to or dependent upon the Roman Catholic Church.

- The Latin Mass kept the common people uninformed about what was being done religiously, hindering their ability to test what was being taught (cf. Acts 17:11; 1 Thessalonians 5:21-22).

- The doctrine of Purgatory, in essence, enabled the “church” to hold people's loved ones hostage after their death.

- Having all sins confessed to the priest meant that the priest knew every secret and, if he was so inclined, could use that to manipulate or blackmail the people.

The development of these erroneous doctrines and practices may not have been motivated by a desire of the religious leaders to keep the people under their thumb. Yet some of these doctrines enabled them to do so.

### **Early Reformers**

As the Roman Catholic Church became more corrupt, various individuals and groups saw the problems that existed and attempted to make some reforms. They faced severe persecution for their



efforts, yet they would help prepare the way for those who would initiate the Reformation. Who were some of these early reformers?

The Albigenses (this movement was also called Catharism) – This group arose in Southern France in the late twelfth century. They opposed the Catholic doctrine of Purgatory and the practice of worshipping images. They were victims of the Albigensian Crusade launched by Pope Innocent III in the early part of the thirteenth century.

The Waldensians – Around the same time as the Albigenses, Peter Waldo, a wealthy merchant, gave away his possessions and promoted the virtues of “apostolic poverty” and purity of life. His followers opposed the authority of the local bishops and were persecuted by the Catholic Church. They were driven out of France into Northern Italy.

John Wycliffe (1324-1384) – Wycliffe has been referred to as “The Morning Star of the Reformation.” Not only did he oppose the pope's authority and various doctrines and practices of the Roman Catholic Church, but he also translated the Bible into English, which was an essential step in making the Scriptures accessible to the common man.

John Huss (1369-1415) – Huss was a Catholic priest from Bohemia, yet became a disciple of Wycliffe and embraced his ideas. He opposed the tyranny of the clergy and the sale of indulgences. He was tried as a heretic and burned to death in 1415.

John Wessel (1420-1498) – He did not have the notoriety of Wycliffe or Huss, but he opposed the Catholic Church and embraced many ideas that would later be promoted by Martin Luther.

Jerome Savonarola (1452-1498) – Savonarola

was from Florence, Italy. He opposed the pope's authority and condemned the immorality among the clergy. The pope tried to silence him by bribing him with the office of a cardinal. When this did not work, Savonarola was excommunicated. He was then arrested, tried, and burned to death in front of the church where he preached in Florence.

### Summary

Over the centuries, the apostasy grew, and the Roman Catholic Church departed further and further from the teachings found in the New Testament. Eventually, there would be a widespread *Reformation* movement that would completely change the landscape of the religious world. Yet these early reformers helped pave the way for that. While we would not necessarily endorse every doctrine among them, we can admire their courage and appreciate their efforts in the face of severe persecution.

### WHOSE RESPONSIBILITY IS IT?

#### Continued from pg. 16

WHAT CHANGES DEATH DOTH BRING – Dying words of Voltaire, militant French atheist: “I am abandoned by God and man! I shall go to hell! Oh Christ, O Jesus Christ!” And Thomas Paine, author of the **Age of Reason**, as the death chill settled upon him, cried out “I would give worlds, if I had them, if the 'Age of Reason' had never been published. O Lord, help me! Christ, help me! Stay with me! It is hell to be left alone!” What a blessing Christians have to know peace of mind, and to approach the final hour unafraid, only eager to awake in the world to come

-Jefferson David Tant.

# BARBS WITH A POINT

## Division Within the Church: An Ugly Trend to be Avoided

By Rowland Femi Gbamis | Tennessee, USA

Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment ( 1 Corinthians 1: 10-NKJV).

### Introduction

By division, I mean disagreement between two or more groups, typically producing tension or hostility. Generally, people do not just drift into division; they are led into it when disagreement occurs. The church at Corinth was in serious problems. It was divided into various competing groups: disorder prevailed in their assemblies; there were litigation cases among the brethren; the Lord's Supper had been corrupted into a social meal; spiritual gifts were misused; adultery tolerated, and some even denied the resurrection of the dead.

### Discussion

Back to our text, Paul was unwilling to give up on the Corinthian brethren because of his love for the church. Hence, he wrote to see them purged of the terrible sin of divisions plaguing them. Paul writes to them by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit as an apostle of Christ and was firm in renouncing their sin and calling them to repentance. Right away, he writes to them, "Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (1 Corinthians 1: 10). Paul was pleading with the Christians in Corinth to speak the same thing. When Christians speak of their faith and tell people the gospel story, we describe our faith and practice and express our loyalties to God. We must be able to speak the same thing in the process. The members of the church at Corinth were divided, and that division came through in their speeches

because they were saying different things (1 Corinthians 1:11-12; 15:12).

On the contrary, as God's children, we can speak the same thing and be united when we read and believe the word of God (Ephesians 4:1-3). When we each allow the word of God to govern our speech, there is a great likelihood we will be speaking the same thing. In other words, we can always find solutions and give the same answers to our problems regardless of the problem because the Bible is sufficient to address our disagreements within the fold of Christ only if we are willing to humble ourselves and follow biblical injunctions for conflict resolution (Colossians 3: 12-14).

### Our Disposition Towards Division

Of all the harrowing experiences in life, one of the most unpleasant is being in a group with envy, jealousy, immaturity and all carnalities. As Christians, we ought to be people who seek peace (Hebrews 12:14), who pursue peace (Psalm 34:14), and who love harmony and abhor division (Psalm 133:1). As Christians, many of us probably have witnessed a church divided because of issues that ordinarily could have been resolved by patience and prayer through the word of God. This writer has watched with dismay as several local Churches are torn apart into different factions led by different men seeking control within the Lord's church. These men would not talk to each other; they acted selfishly and resentfully. Sometimes, it reaches the point described by Paul in Galatians 5:15 of brethren biting and devouring one another. Brethren, it ought not to be!

Accordingly, we all know Christ did not intend that the church should be a place where people hurt each other or kill each other spiritually. The Lord's church should be a place of warmth, comfort and harmony. God hates division. What He wants is what Jesus prayed for in John 17:20-21. A closer look at verse 9 of our text indicates that **"God is faithful by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord."** God wants us in the fellowship of His Son, united with Jesus Christ as our Lord. There is no virtue in the kind of division that tore the church at Corinth apart.

Instead, what God desires is what Paul described in the following words, **"Perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment."** In every local Church, there will be different ages, different levels of experience and understanding, different cultural/ethnic backgrounds and different personalities. However, amidst all of these diversities in our faith and the expression of our faith, there can be unity, and there must be unity. Consequently, the unity I discuss is achievable when we believe, teach and practice what the Bible says.

### **Two Types of Division**

First, let me reiterate that there comes a time when faithful division may occur among God's children. Hence, I am in no way advocating for unity at all costs at the expense of taking a stand against "redlines" that bother on matters of faith, such as the current trend of instrumental music into worship (Colossian 3:16-17; Ephesians 5:19; James 5:13), women eldership inclusion in the leadership structure of the Lord's church (1 Timothy 3:1-8; Titus 1:5-9), fellowshiping with homosexuals and condoning them in our assembly, even when such perverted individuals are not willing to repent (Romans 1:24, 26-28), institutional arrangements such as centralized

elderships that coordinated the works of many churches under human arrangements of missionary and benevolent societies (2 John 9). Consequently, this kind of division discussed is approved by God (cf. Matthew 10:34; 2 Corinthian 6:16-18). God's children must have nothing to do with the unfruitful works of darkness (Ephesians 5:11). Thus, God's children must take a position against these vices, no seating on the fence!

The second type is a factious division that God's children must avoid because the devil causes it. Paul condemned this kind of division in our text **"...and that there be no divisions among you..."** (1 Corinthians 1:10). In Romans 16:17-18 Paul writes, **"<sup>17</sup> Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. <sup>18</sup> For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple."** When brethren get to the point that they are unwilling to renounce their divisive tendencies and continue to insist on misleading brethren in the wrong direction, then faithful brethren must draw the line.

### **Evil Qualities of Division**

1. Division diminishes our strength. Division within the Lord's church significantly negatively impacts its strength. When the members of the church are divided, it hinders the effectiveness of their collective efforts in spreading the message of God's love and fulfilling their mission (Matthew 28:18-20). It weakens their unity, leaving them vulnerable to external challenges. Division diminishes the church's ability to provide spiritual support and guidance to its members, as conflicts and disagreements often consume valuable time and resources (Ephesians 4:15-16).

**Continued on pg. 29**

# INSTITUTIONALISM

## Review of Books on Bible Colleges

By Osamagbe Lesley Egharevba | Lagos, Nigeria

Of Bible schools and/or colleges, countless works and scholarly materials exist wherein writers devoted their scholarship towards expounding their take on the issue to the best of their ability. Several views and positions have been taken on this issue. Particularly, concerning the training of Gospel preachers, many think that men must attend Bible schools for them to be effective or qualified to serve as evangelists in the church of the Lord. In other words, they think that the church is not sufficient to train men but that the church must depend on some other institution, separate and apart from her, to train men that will work for her. Little wonder why one would see several congregations today, when requesting the service of a gospel preacher will include in their announcement that the interested candidate must have attended a Bible college or possess some Bible school certificate.

Undoubtedly, human institutions in general whose aim is to carry out some or all of the works of the church for her are acting without divine authority and have done more harm than good to the Lord's cause. However, the aim of this writing is not to give a detailed explanation on whether Bible schools are scriptural or not; rather the focus of the writing is to review certain works of brethren on the subject matter, especially those who have advocated for human institutions as aids or replacement to the church in doing her God-given work.

For the purpose of this writing, the following works will be reviewed:

1. *Ministers' Training and Church Growth* by Usim Solomon Ifeanyi-chukwu (2016);
2. *Are WBS and Church Supported Colleges Scriptural?* By Makinde E.O. (not dated);
3. *An Appraisal Of Selected Teachings And*

*Practices Of The Church Of Christ In South-Western Nigeria* by Owolabi Sunday Abiodun (2014);

4. *Relationship Between Church And Training Institutions* by Hilary Johnson Chukwuma Chukwurah (2016).

It is interesting to note that some of these writers are directors of Bible training institutions in Nigeria while others are products of Bible schools in Nigeria. Hence, one would not doubt the reliability of their scholarships when it comes to issues about Bible colleges for they have been deeply involved in its activities. Meanwhile, since the Bible is the absolute authority for any Christian practice – a fact that all of these writers concede – we shall juxtapose their claims as presented in their works with what the New Testament teaches.

### Issues Arising From the Books

A perusal of the materials referenced above reveals certain issues that need to be addressed. It becomes particularly curious since these claims are mere sophistry – errors presented as truth and intended to confuse the unwary. Let us take a look at these issues and unmask the sophistry behind them one after the other.

### Is Bible College Authorized in the New Testament?

By Bible College, we do not mean a Bible study class of members of a congregation which is usually under the oversight of a local church. Rather, we mean a training institution established which is separate and apart from the church devoted to the training of individuals on Bible knowledge. According to Solomon Usim, *“Leaving a legacy for the church's posterity entails that the church must be futuristic in her plans and programs*

by strategically empowering her training institutions to continue to serve the theological and spiritual needs of the church” (p.111, emphasis L.E).

In the first place, this statement suggests that the spiritual needs of the church cannot be served by the church itself but must depend on an external, separate training institution to get them – implying that the church, as God made it is not all sufficient. This is false and contrary to what the scriptures teach. Is it not ridiculous to aver that the church which is the pillar and ground of the truth (I Timothy 3:15) and which has been in the mind of God before creation, is incapable of equipping her members with this truth and must now depend on some other institution to get this? Paul made it very clear in Ephesians 4:16 and Colossians 2:19 that the church is to grow and carry out its work by itself.

“From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted **by that which every joint supplieth**, according to the effectual working **in the measure of every part**, maketh increase of the body **unto the edifying of itself** in love” (Emphasis L.E)

The above scripture clearly shows that the church is to “edify itself.” Church edification is NOT to be done by another body, separate and apart from the church. How and where did Solomon Usim get the idea that the spiritual needs of the church must be served by some training institution that is separate and apart from the church? Surely, it is not from the scriptures. Secondly, what scriptures authorize the church to establish and empower **“her”** training institutions as hinted in Usim’s statement above? Interestingly, Hilary Johnson Chukwuma Chukwurah seems to have a scripture for it. In his words; *“Acts 19:9 tells us that Apostle Paul established a training institution, which he operated for about two years”* (p.113). On this

same text, he posits; *“The school may have operated for two years and closed shop or may have operated a two-year curriculum of training, which today serves as model for two years program of schools. Whatever may have happened, training occurred: churches were involved and preachers were trained!”* (p.114)

The attempt to use Acts 19:9 as authority for the church to establish a separate institution – a Bible college devoted to the training of men for the church is a straw man and it resembles the argument of those folks who want to defend infant baptism and then run to passages where “households” were baptized and conclude that they have got the authority for infant baptism. Because these men found the word “school” used in Acts 19:9 by some translations of the Bible, and they find Paul reasoning there, they conclude that he established a Bible college. However, a simple reading of Acts 19:9 proves that the “school of Tyrannus” was a “lecture hall,” as indicated by some translations. This was not a Bible college built by Paul, as some would have you believe, but only a place used by Paul to teach the gospel for a while. And not a single thing in the text shows that Paul established a Bible training institution, separate and apart from the church. The text reads; *“But when some were hardened and did not believe, but spoke evil of the Way before the multitude, he departed from them, and withdrew the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus.”*

Will the advocate of this teaching say that every member of the church must be trained at the Bible school to become gospel preachers since the text says Paul withdrew all the disciples and not some of them? In the training of evangelists, not all members are to be trained (II Tim.2:2). God gave SOME to be evangelists (Eph. 4:11) and not all are teachers (I Cor.12:29). If Acts 19:9 is taken as a template for

Bible colleges to train gospel preachers, it means that all members of the church MUST of necessity be taught at a Bible school to be effective since Paul moved “the disciples” and not some of them. Indeed, we can plainly see that our brethren have only forced the text to mean what is not there and there is absolutely no justification for their affirmation.

In Acts 18:24-26, we find the couple, Pricilla and Aquilla teaching Apollos on a matter that he was oblivious of and some have said that such could be called a Bible school. There is no indication that this was a permanent arrangement that was carried out by this couple; rather it is a personal effort that could be done by any faithful couple today. Passages of the Scriptures like these are easy to cite when people only desire to force the Scriptures to say what they practice that is questionable.

### **Should Churches Support Bible Colleges?**

Another issue worthy of note is the support of Bible Colleges by churches. Usim (2016, p.70) lists several colleges in the United States which according to him are “heavily sponsored by congregations of the Lord's church all across America.” He noted that some of these colleges were purely for preaching purposes while others combined ministerial training with secular education. Corroborating this, Hilary Johnson Chukwuma Chukwurah says;

*“Congregations MUST as a matter of necessity SUPPORT our training schools. We must empower our Bible training schools as individuals and body corporate with our financial resources and expertise in different areas of life to ensure that our present is consolidated and our future guaranteed...Paul did that at Tyrannus supported by congregations and the result was tremendous.”*  
(p.119)

*“Training institutions exist for the church. Therefore, the church should support these institutions. It is in her best interests to do so. To do this, congregations should send their men to be trained and support them fully; they should make occasional as well as regular donations of money and materials; take lead in securing lands and construction of permanent structures for these institutions.”*(p.117)

While the American brethren are not our standards in determining what is scriptural, it is sad that not a single scripture is cited by Usim to show the authority of the church to support Bible colleges. It seems that we must only accept it because the American churches are doing it and not because God's word authorizes it. The Bible gives no authorization to the church of the Lord to support any human organization to teach anything at all. The church is the pillar and ground of the truth (I Tim. 3:15). What it should teach is the gospel of Christ and not secular education. And then, by what authority should the church support an institution that combines both secular and religious education together? It should be noted that the statements of Hilary regarding Acts 19:9 is a crass error and fatuous claim. We have no NT record where a church ever supported a human institution whether the institution is doing a good work or not. Paul always emphasized that he, as an individual and gospel preacher received support from the churches (II Cor. 11:8-9; Phil. 1:5; 4:15-17). Not one example shows that a local church supported a human institution. When money was sent from Antioch in Acts 11:27-30 by the disciples, it was sent to the elders of the churches in Judea. These funds were sent for benevolent work and it was never sent to a human institution. We find a similar thing in the case of Romans 15:25-26 when those of Macedonia and

Achaia sent to the Jerusalem church, they sent to relieve the needy in the Jerusalem church and they never sent to a human institution. Averting that churches should support Bible colleges to train preachers without showing the scriptures that authorize such is rebellious. The only people that the Lord has commanded to receive funds to preach the gospel are the gospel preachers (I Cor. 9:14).

Some have brought up arguments in an attempt to defend the existence of Bible colleges and church support of them. Makinde E.O. made some quibble about this in his article when he said:

“Let us assume that the church of Christ at Otonko Calabar are not financially buoyant to continue supporting the programme of preachers training under the oversight of their elders...can they seek for financial assistance from other sister congregations? The Bible shows that congregations acted concurrently (cooperated) in meeting the needs of the Jerusalem church (*Read Rom.15:25-28; I Cor.16:1-4; II Cor.8 & 9*). Despite that the work to be done here was of the Otonko church, but it was greater than what they alone could do, therefore, it is scriptural to seek for assistance. Likewise, when a group of ministers came together to start a bible school or preachers training program and seek financial assistance from both individual Christian and churches, they acted in the scope of the scriptures *II Cor. 11:8; Phil. 4:15-18*...It is scriptural for the church to support the WBS program and Bible School”

It is interesting to note that none of the scriptures above actually teach or suggest that a church or churches sent funds to support a human institution or Bible college as hinted by the writer. The first set of

scriptures refers to aid sent to relieve the poor saints in Jerusalem while the second set of scriptures refers to Paul (an individual preacher) receiving support from churches to preach the gospel. What this brother has done is to draw unnecessary and assumed inferences from these texts to give credence to the church supporting a human institution.

### **Is Bible School Necessary For Effective Preachers?**

Is attending Bible school necessary for one to be an effective preacher in the Lord's church? In chapters 4 and 5, Usim (2016) discusses the effects of ministers' training on congregations with informally trained preachers and the effects of ministers' training on congregations with trained preachers. In his view, preachers who are trained in Bible schools are better than those who are trained in the Divine institution, the church. In his words, while giving some recommendations towards the end of his book, Usim said “...as against the antiquated idea of training preachers in congregations, this author recommends in strong terms, that congregations in their quest to train their ministers should send them to notable Christian Colleges in Nigeria such as School of Biblical Studies, SBS Jos..., et cetera” (p.110). In Page 73, he said “Although, it is possible to have ministers informally trained in congregations, it is still very necessary that Bible Schools, which are the largest educational ministry of the church, be attended for elaborate and systematic training, especially in Biblical languages.”

Usim referred to the training of gospel preachers in congregations as an “antiquated idea.” The word antiquated, when looked up in the dictionary means “old” or “obsolete.” And so, the God-given plan of training men in the pillar and the ground of the truth is, in the view of Usim an obsolete idea. And so, in

order for men to be trained as preachers, they must be sent to a separate college established by men. One wonders what Bible school Timothy, Titus, Silas, and even Paul attended before they were qualified to preach the gospel. It leaves much to be desired when men conjure up their own ideas and would like to circulate it as if it is what the Lord has said. So, shall we conclude that these NT preachers received some antiquated training and were not so effective? Apollos was a preacher that everyone would desire yet we never read of him being trained by any human institution. If it is VERY NECESSARY for Bible schools to be attended by men in order to have the elaborate training, then these men we have mentioned never received elaborate training. That is questionable.

Great preachers that I have known in Nigeria today are men who never received Bible training at any human institution but were taught in the Lord's church. On the other hand, the so-called Bible school graduates have done much havoc in the brotherhood so much that one wonders what is special about their training. Some of them have turned out to be mere inspirational speakers, sermonizers, counselors, etc. When you ask them to teach basic Bible principles, they goof. Some of them have written bad reports and thesis about the church and wreaked havoc on the Lord's church. Some of these negative effects of Bible schools established by men will be examined in a moment. Besides, from which Bible passage comes the idea that Bible schools are the largest educational ministry of the church? Not a single Bible passage was cited for that. Sometimes, it is worrisome when men give their opinions on Biblical issues and pass it on as if it is a "thus says the Lord."

### **Bible Training Assisting The Church In Her Work**

According to Hillary Chukwurah,

"Our Lord is depending on His church to take the Message of Salvation to the world, because the Church of Christ is His Divine Orientation Agency (Ephesians 3:10). Bible training institutions are willing to assist congregations of our Lord's church achieve this objective. Therefore, let congregations partner with our schools to ensure that this is realized. (p.121)

Also, according to Ekanam (2008, p. 143) cited in Usim (2016, p.71), Christian institutions help develop leadership for the church." Usim corroborated this by saying; "Of great importance is the fact that these institutions do not only train students to preach, but also award degrees (Usim, p.71).

If the Lord is depending on "His church" to take the message of salvation to the world, what business does a human institution have in that? Why must they give unauthorized assistance to the Divine institution that God has made to do the work? These men need to understand that one cannot help God (Job 22:2) and when Uzzah gave an unauthorized assistance to prevent the ark of God from falling in the Old Testament, he received instant Divine judgment – death (I Sam. 6:6-7; II Chro. 13:7-14). This example was written for our learning (I Cor. 10:6-11; Rom. 15:4). Our dear brethren who foster and operate Bible college for preachers' training in order to "help" the church will do well to learn from this example and put things in proper order.

Unfortunately, Hilary Johnson Chukwurah tries to create the idea of mutual helpfulness between churches and human institutions with his opinionated sophistry when he said; "*While congregations financially support preachers' training schools, these institutions will in turn become feeders of congregations because the people they train will at the*

*end serve with existing congregations as well as many who will chart new paths by going to virgin areas to plant new congregations (Romans 15:20)”* (page 117).

The truth is that the Lord did not make any such arrangement that there should be mutual helpfulness between the church and human institutions in carrying out His work.

### **Negative Effects Of Bible College**

Usim (2016) made several efforts to show that training received from Bible colleges is better than the one received from the church. However, looking at the experiences of some of the Bible school products in Nigeria, one wonders if such is really true. Let us be practical a little bit; Biodun Owolabi, the long-standing and incumbent Director of West Nigerian Christian College & School of Biblical Studies (WNCC & SBS – a Bible training institution) in 2014 wrote a Ph.D thesis. This thesis was so damaging to the church that one wonders what he had in mind while writing it. Thankfully, with the effort of one of the brothers who is neither a Bible college graduate nor a gospel preacher, the thesis was masterfully reviewed and its errors exposed.

In page 220 of his thesis, Owolabi made the following statements about the church of Christ that he is a member of;

“the Church of Christ prides itself as the true church with exclusive historical connection with the early church. Since this claim cannot be substantiated with significant evidence in history, it is recommended that the Church of Christ should own up to her history by accepting that the church actually started in the 19th century out of the desire to restore primitive Christianity and unite Christians on the basis of the Bible.”

You can imagine the director of a Bible college making

this statement about the church of Christ. This is the same school that Usim (2016, p.110) advised that churches must send their men to, in order for them to be trained as gospel preachers if they must be effective. What would they learn from such a school when their director is even making such statements? On page 221, he said that the belief of the church of Christ that miracles have ceased is not correct and that they should have a rethink about it. He even went ahead to cite men who believes that miracles still exist. This is the same man who churns out Bible College graduates every time and sends them out to preach. If he is like this, what should we expect from the graduates?

Owolabi (2014, p.223) recommends the “need for the Church of Christ to abandon her sectarian exclusivism and embrace Christian ecumenical movement aimed at advancing and defending the cause of Christianity.” And in page 224, he says “This realization of how the Church of Christ began and where it is today should engender ecumenical spirit to seek and pursue peace with other Christian denominations without necessarily compromising the faith but fostering unity within the body of Christ and extend the frontiers of the kingdom.” This is the same place we have been told to go in order to be more effective in preaching. How inexpedient *even if they could prove it is lawful! I am willing to affirm scripturally that these Bible schools are a bad influence and hindrance to the gospel of Christ.*

In the school of Biblical Studies, Jos it is said by one of the students that his project supervisor is not a member of the church of Christ. This is the same school that is expected to train men for the church of Christ. Men from the denominational churches are deployed to supervise supposed Christians who will go and work in the churches of Christ. How unfortunate!

Besides, who determines when a Bible school has gone astray in its teaching? And who calls them to order? When the director did something as grave as that and worthy of discipline, nothing was done, rather some were even supporting his actions. This is one great negative effect of the school. There is discipline in the church as designed by God but these colleges are run by men's idea and lack discipline.

Another negative effect of Bible colleges is that these schools train men and women as well as Christians and non-Christians. Some of these unbelievers attend the school because they wish to get a degree in theology so that they can become pastors in their denominational churches. These Bible schools train them to achieve their aim. What is the purpose of training women in the Bible school since they claim that it is to train preachers for the churches of Christ? Are there women preachers there? The command is for the preacher and the church to train "faithful men" (II Tim.2:2). The Greek word for men in this verse is "*anthropos*;" and we find the word used in I Cor. 7:1 referring to the male individual, excluding female. So, the fact that *anthropos* is used in II Timothy 2:2 does not mean Paul is saying Timothy should train female preachers. Training of unbelievers and female preachers in these schools is a complete aberration.

### **Conclusion**

The church is the pillar and ground of the truth. It is all-sufficient to carry out the work that God wants it to carry out and so men should not introduce gimmicks by setting up parallel institutions that would do the work of the church for her. An attempt to help God is to incur His wrath.

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The divided church also sends a conflicting message to the world, undermining its credibility and relevance (John 17:20-21). Unity is integral to the strength of the Lord's church, and division hampers its ability to fulfill its purpose.

2. Division displaces our loyalty. When the church is divided into groups, each group becomes loyal to a faction instead of putting their loyalty or allegiance to God. The marks of carnality in the New Testament include envying, strife and divisions (1 Corinthians 3:3). In other words, carnality is more than revelries, drinking, and other immoral activities listed in Galatian 5:19. Of critical note also is the word "dissensions" among the works of the flesh, which relate to a "state of affairs in which men are divided and feuds flourish among God's Children.
3. Division diffuses our focus. Division causes us to focus on fulfilling personal plans and goals for our factions instead of God's will (James 3:13-4:1). It causes us to lose sight of the one true purpose that God has for the church, which is to be a testimony to the nations by preaching the gospel to the world (Mark 16:15-16).

### **Conclusion**

As I conclude this writing, God hates the destruction of unity among brethren (Proverbs 6:19). In the church, those who cause division and offenses are to be marked and withdrawn from (Romans 16:17, 18). God longs for His people to be united (1 Corinthians 1:10-13), which was what Jesus prayed for in John 17:20- 21 because love among God's children shows the genuineness of our discipleship (John 13:35). Let us always remember what the Bible says, "**Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!**" (Psalm 133:1).

# INSTITUTIONALISM

## The History of the Institutional Controversy

By Jefferson David Tant | Tennessee, USA

This is a continuation of the article written by Jefferson David Tant on the history of the institutional controversy which was started in the previous editions.

### What Does the Future Hold?

Is there any hope for reconciliation? The history of divisions does not present an optimistic picture. Historian Ed Harrell reported after a meeting with institutional brethren in Arlington, Texas in 1973:

“Does anyone seriously believe that ... the thousands of unscriptural promotions dreamed up will ...suddenly, or slowly, begin to disappear? Of course not. No man could bring it off; not 20 or 50 or 200 men could bring it off. And not only could they not, they will not bring it about.”

Steve Wolfgang remarked:

“Such a movement to turn the clock back would require that institutional brethren in thousands of places make a conscious decision to place fellowship with their non-institutional brethren on a higher plane than the support of human institutions — and I think everyone knows that simply isn't going to happen.”

Another preacher expressed such a possibility in these words:

“It isn't just supporting an orphanage anymore. The liberal church in town here split this congregation almost eighteen years ago over the orphanage issue — but ironically doesn't support one to this day! What they have done is to accept people we have withdrawn from, no questions asked; or accept in full fellowship people who have left here after hearing preaching they didn't like on divorce and remarriage, the role of the Holy Spirit, examination of premillennial claims or of the Masonic Lodge —all of them 'shaken in' with the clear understanding that they will not hear any

preaching on those of other controversial issues. Don't let someone tell you it's just 'sending a few dollars a month to an orphanage' — it's how we look at the Bible, the church, living the Christian life, and much more. The longer it goes on, the more incompatible we will become.”

The division is seen in an exchange between two preachers at a meeting in Leakey, Texas where the two sides seek to come to a meeting of the minds. Joe Fitch was there, and reported this exchange between two preachers:

“One preacher said, 'Give us the Scripture authorizing the things you are doing and advocating; that is all we ask.' A prominent preacher retorted, 'Give us Scripture! Give us Scripture! You can teach an old green parrot to say 'Give us Scripture.' That is all you fellows say.' I was amazed! Some churches could surely use an old green parrot to cry out, 'Give us Scripture! Give us Scripture!' ... Few preachers are saying it.”

Paul Williams tells of a discussion on institutionalism in South Africa. An American preacher defended the questioned practices by saying, “These practices must be scriptural, for brethren in the U.S. have practiced these things for many years.” The African preacher responded: “Brother, if we were practicing the same things we had done for years, we would have cooked you white men and had you for lunch.”

# Myth Buster

## What Makes A Prayer Effective?

By Emmanuel Oluwatoba | Niger, Nigeria

### Introduction

In Christianity, the effectiveness of prayer is not a debated topic. In fact, there seems to be a consensus on the power of prayer as exemplified by the common phrases we hear every day; “*prayer is the master key*” and the likes. However, there seems to be a divide on what actually makes prayers effective, with different groups of people holding different beliefs. We are going to examine some of these popular beliefs to discover the truth by comparing them with the scriptures.

### What does not make prayer effective

There are some popular beliefs on what makes prayers effective, these beliefs are simply not true, they include:

**Location:** Some persons believe that locations such as top of mountains, church halls or designated “*holy*” grounds make prayers effective. However, Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well in John chapter 4 highlights that this is indeed not the case, “*Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour comes, when neither in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, will you worship the Father. You worship that which you do not know. We worship that which we know; for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour comes when the true worshipper will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for the Father seeks such to be his worshippers. God is spirit and those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth”* (verse 21-24, NHEB). We do not need to go to a specific location to pray for our prayers to be effective, God is everywhere.

**Pitch of voice:** Some people believe that praying with a higher pitch of voice makes prayer effective. However, the bible says “*Look, the Lord's hand is not*

*shortened, that it can't save; neither his ear heavy, that it can't hear*”. Believing that you have to shout before your prayers are effective implies that God cannot hear us. We do not have to shout at the top of our voices to be heard by God. When we pray silently, God listens (cf. I Samuel 1:12-16).

**Length of prayer:** Some people believe that the longer the prayer, the more effective it is. However, the effectiveness of prayer is not measured in words but in the sincerity and depth of the connection with God. Jesus' statement in Matthew 6:7-8 makes it clear that the length of prayer doesn't determine its effectiveness: “*And in praying, do not use vain repetitions, as the unbelievers do; for they think that they will be heard for their much speaking. Therefore do not be like them, for your heavenly father knows what things you need, before you ask him*” (NHEB). In 1 Kings chapter 18, we see that Elijah's short prayers were effective (vs. 36-37) which was in contrast to the prophets of Baal, who offered prayers from morning till evening without response (vs. 26-29). We do not need to offer the lengthiest prayers for prayers to be effective, God knows our needs even before we ask of it.

### What makes a prayer effective?

According to the Bible, there are a few things that make prayers effective, they include:

**Faith:** One who prays must believe in God to whom he is praying as James 1:6-7 says “*But let him ask in faith, without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. For let that person not think that he will receive anything from the Lord*”. Praying with faith and without doubt makes prayers to be effective.



**Righteousness:** For prayers to be effective, Christians have to ensure that they are free from sin. Proverbs 15:29 says “*The lord is far from the wicked, but he hears the prayers of the righteous*”. For our prayers to be acceptable to God, we must live right with Him.

**Fasting:** As we see in Mark 9:29, “And he said to them, “*This kind can come out by nothing, except by prayer and fasting*”. This passage clearly exposes how fasting when combined with prayers makes the prayers more effective.

**Persistence:** The Bible makes us understand that we are to apply persistence to our prayers as we see in parable of Jesus recorded in Luke 18:1-8. Verse one says “*He also spoke a parable to them that they must always pray and not give up*”. The parable shows that the widow's petition was granted only due to her persistence. So, persistence is necessary for effective prayers.

**Alignment to the will of God:** For our prayers to be effective, we must ask in accordance to the will of God. Matthew 6:10 says “*Let your kingdom come. Let your will be done on earth as it is in heaven*”. Here, Jesus was teaching His disciples to pray and He pointed out the importance of praying in line with God's will. Moreover, Jesus set an example about this in Matt 26:19, “*And he went a little further, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt*”. While praying, we need to surrender to the will of God for our prayers to be effective (I John 5:14).

**Right motive:** The book of James 4:3 says “*You ask, and do not receive, because you ask with the wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures*”. For our prayers to be effective, we must always ensure that we are praying with the right motive.

## Conclusion

The location, pitch of voice, or length of prayer does not make prayer effective. For our prayers to be effective, we need to pray with faith removing all doubt and ensure that our prayers align with the will of God. We are to live a righteous life and also pray with the right motives. Also, we are to apply persistence to our prayers and fast in addition to our prayers.

## MERCY OR JUSTICE?

Once a young boy was running across some railroad tracks and he tripped and fell. He was unable to get up off the tracks even though a train was coming. Suddenly out of nowhere, the boy was pulled off the tracks by a man who saved his life. A few years later this boy was standing before a juvenile court. As he stepped up to the bench for the Judge's decision, he saw through his tear dimmed eyes the same man who had saved his life just a few years ago. He said to the judge, “Don't you remember me? I am the boy you saved a few years ago on the railroad tracks. Please sir, have mercy on me.”

The judge said, “Son, I remember you. A few years ago I was your saviour, but now I am your judge!”

Why not obey Jesus now while you can approach Him as saviour? He stands ready to shower His mercy upon you. If you don't obey Christ now, you will meet Him as judge and He will give you only what you justly deserve.

# IDEAL HOME

## Why I Want To Marry A Christian

By Ward Plato

Living a life that is pleasing to God in this day and age is becoming increasingly difficult. Look at all the things that Satan and his army bombard us with on a daily basis. Sexual immorality, drunkenness, obscene music, movies, books, and television shows; not to mention immodest dress and the various forms of idolatry today. Look at Washington DC and Hollywood, the corruption, the immoral lifestyles, and the total disregard for anything godly, good, or moral. So why would I want to complicate my personal and home life further, by selecting as my mate a non-Christian? –A mate whose main focus in life is not the Lord or serving Him and getting to heaven when she dies. By having a non-Christian mate, I would be making it infinitely more difficult to serve God and live the Christian life. There are five different reasons that I would like to give for marrying a Christian in the remainder of the article.

(1) I want someone who loves the Lord and cares about my soul.

Deuteronomy 6:5 says: “And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.” Can a non-Christian do this? No! Because he/she knows not God and has not obeyed the Gospel. (II Thessalonians 1:7-9). My unbelieving spouse would be part of this group. Her god would be the god of this world, who is Satan, that is who she would be following and loves whether I want to admit it or not. (Matthew 6:24). I want to marry a devoted child of God – one who has the same morals and beliefs as I do. One whose values are shaped by the New Testament. A spouse who lets the word of God be a lamp unto her feet and a light unto her path. (Psalms 119:105). I want to wake up every morning knowing that we love the Lord and that we are going

to be an encouragement to each other as well as the world around us. I want to be sitting next to my spouse during worship service having the same mind and spirit. I want both of us together through our worship and our Christian lives to bring glory to the Lord God almighty! The unbelieving spouse cannot do this. Proverbs 31:10 says: “Who can find a virtuous woman? For her price is far above rubies.” So what type of mate are you looking for?

(2) I want to marry someone who wants to serve the Lord - who is interested in going to heaven.

Joshua 24:15 says: “And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood or the gods of the Amorites in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” An unbelieving mate doesn't care about serving the Lord. If she did, she would be a Christian. She is serving a different God than I am. She is serving the God of this world, Satan who is the Prince of Darkness. I Corinthians 15:33 says: “Be not deceived evil communications [companionships] corrupt good manners [Morals].” Is there any company more intimate or influential on our lives than our spouse? Think about it. If I marry “*bad company*” how can I escape the evil influence that she would have over me when such a large portion of my life is spent with her? This corruption will not take place overnight, like the devil and sin it will creep up on me over the years. My unbelieving spouse will exert more bad influence than good as the years go by. By taking the attitude of; “do you have to attend every service? Look at all that money you're just giving away to the church when we could use it on something else like a vacation, new car, clothes, furniture etc. Honey



don't make the kids go with you to church they don't really want to go, besides this is the only day I have to spend quality time with them, with work and all my other activities." An unbelieving spouse will keep you from getting together with other Christians by telling you: "they are so boring all they ever do is have singings or talk about religion, the Bible, and how they're always right and the rest of us are wrong. Like they are the only ones that are going to heaven!" Do you think that this is true or false? It is very true if you will be honest with yourself! Look at what happened to Solomon and he was the wisest man who ever lived. Read I Kings 11:1-13 and see what it says. Verse 1 says: "King Solomon loved many strange women." Verse 2 says: "Of the nations concerning which the Lord said unto the children of Israel, Ye shall not go in to them, neither shall they come in unto you: for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods: Solomon clave unto these in love." Verse 3 says: "And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines: and his wives turned away his heart." Verse 4 says: "For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart and after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the Lord God, as was the heart of David his father." Don't be foolish enough to think that it can't and won't happen to you! Think about Solomon and let us learn from his mistakes!

In Matthew 28:18-20 we are given the great commission to go into all the world and preach the gospel teaching, baptizing, and teaching. In I Timothy 4:11-16 Paul exhorted Timothy to give attendance, to meditate, to give himself wholly to the doctrine and teachings of the gospel. For in doing that he would be able to save himself and those who heard him teaching the gospel. (II Timothy 4:6-8). In writing to Timothy, Paul said that his life was over,

that he had fought a good fight, finished the course and kept the faith. Because he had done all of these things he knew that there was a crown of righteousness that the Lord would give him for his labors. The non-Christian cannot do these things that we as Christians are commanded to do. So with my Christian spouse, we will be able to do all these things and after this life is over, being in covenant relationship with God, we shall find our names written in the Lamb's Book of Life and hear the Master say: "Well done thy good and faithful servant enter into the joy of thy Lord" (Matthew 25:21). This means being in heaven, that crown of life Revelation 2:10, and being in the presence of the Godhead for all eternity with all the redeemed of all the ages. I wouldn't find an unbelieving spouse there. She cannot and will not make it to heaven on "my coattail,"

(3) I want to marry someone to help me raise Godly children.

Proverbs 22:6 says: "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it." Think of Timothy and the example that he had growing up and what it did for him. II Timothy 1:5 says: "When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that is in thee also." Timothy had the influence of Godly people in his life, his mother and grandmother. This helped him make his life what it was supposed to be towards God. II Timothy 3:15 says: "And that from a child thou has know the holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." I want my children to grow up to serve and love the Lord. Think about how hard it is going to be with two Godly parents! On issues such and drinking, dancing, mixed swimming, bathing suits, immodest dress,



prom, cheerleading etc. Children learn young about all this and more. A non-Christian's sense of morals is not the same as mine. That's because they do not use the Bible as their standard of authority like a Christian does. They are influenced by society and more than likely will change along with society. So what happens as my child grows older and older and sees his parents constantly disagreeing with each other on what their child can and cannot do. They see one parent always taking the easy way: the broad path that leads to destruction. (Matthew 7: 13-14). They also see that by being a Christian you have rules and restrictions! But if allowed to live like the unbelieving parent, life is fun you can do whatever you want. If this child never sees the light and does not obey the gospel then because of the example that was not set in the home life -I have brought a living soul into this life that will spend eternity in hell in the next. An unbeliever cannot bring up a child in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. (Ephesians 6:1-4). In most circumstances, it takes both parents to do this. Making it a reality in today's world is very difficult at best. So we need to think about how much more difficult it will be with an unbelieving spouse pulling in the opposite direction. What an awesome responsibility it is to bring children into this world!

(4) I want to marry someone who respects me as a Christian.

Who can do this better than another Christian? No One! I don't want to have to constantly defend my beliefs, or why I do the things I do for the Lord, to my unbelieving spouse. I want a devoted spouse who truly understands what Ecclesiastes 12:13 means and says: "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man." Well I can't have that if I marry a non-Christian. My unbelieving spouse will not ever

be able to understand Luke 14:26. She will expect me to make her the center of my life. Yet I know as a Christian that God must absolutely positively be first in my life in order for me to be pleasing unto Him. My non-Christian mate will not be able to know why she should follow Ephesians 5:22-28. The idea of submission to your husband will be ludicrous to her. Most non-Christian women today would be appalled at being called the weaker vessel, I Peter 4:7, for they can do anything that men can do!! It will be hard for someone who has no respect for the Bible and its authority or for God and His authority to have a respectful attitude toward you and your beliefs.

I have something that I would like the young Christian women to think about as well. Look at the way the world treats godly women today. They belittle and ridicule women who stay at home, raise their children and put the needs of their family before their own. The world thinks that it is crazy for a woman to do that. So why would you deliberately go and put yourself in subjection to a man who is not a Christian - who does not follow God or walk in the paths of righteousness, and in reality has no respect for you, your beliefs, or God – regardless of what we may have fooled ourselves into believing. So why would I want to spend my life with someone who doesn't respect me for belonging to God and doesn't respect God for who He is? That doesn't even make good nonsense!

(5) I want to marry someone who will help make our home a center of Christian activity.

I like having people in my home, but I love having Christians in my home. People who mean the world to me that I can learn from, and receive edification from, who love the Lord as much as I do. My unbelieving spouse will not feel the same way because she doesn't have as much in common with Christians. She may



feel that Christians are boring and I don't want any "Bible-bangers" in my home teaching my children to be "religious fanatics." How difficult it becomes then for me to teach my children how important it is to study their Bibles regularly, pray regularly, when the non-believing parent either by verbal or nonverbal communication is telling them it isn't necessary. When I'm married I want me and my spouse to be able to fulfill Matthew 28:18-20 together. I want my children to see both their parents living out God's word in their lives by being examples of good, not evil. (Romans 6:16-18). I want us to be able to pray as a family, study our Bibles as a family, and have home studies with other Christians as well as those outside the body of Christ. I want to live in a godly home filled with wholesome activities and a love for the Lord and all His commandments. A home where both parents agree on discipline, morality and what is godly and what isn't. In short I want to be like Joshua! "As for me and my house we will serve the Lord." I cannot do this if my spouse is not a Christian.

I have resolved that if and when I marry, it will be to a Christian. The reason is because I have a simple goal. I want to be with God in heaven. I would want my spouse to be with God in heaven. I would want any children that we might have to be with God in heaven. Knowing that such a goal is possible, having a good Christian spouse will only help make it easier to obtain – and also my life on this earth a more pleasant thing. There are two kinds of people in the world. There are those who are children of God and those who are children of the devil. If I marry a child of the devil then I am going to have Satan as my father-in-law, asking him to come into my house and be a resident there. Think about it! It may be smooth sailing in the beginning but sooner or later you are going to have trouble with your father-in-law. More often than not,

marrying a non-Christian is the biggest mistake a Christian could ever make. Remember what Paul said in II Corinthians 6:14 "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness." I hope that you will think about these things before you join into any marriage with a non-Christian.

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#### IS YOUR NAME WRITTEN IN THE BOOK OF LIFE?

Near the end of the book of Revelation, there is a description of the final judgment in which "*the dead, the great and the small, [stood] before the throne*" (Revelation 20:12). Here, all will be judged "*according to their deeds*" (Revelation 20:12).

In John's vision of this scene, he saw "*books [that] were opened,*" one of which was "*the book of life*" (Revelation 20:12). He explained, "*If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire*" (Revelation 20:15).

In contrast, the next chapter describes the glorious scene of the city of God. This place was only open to "*those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life*" (Revelation 21:27).

The book of life contains the record of those who are saved. Whoever's name is recorded in it will be with the Lord in heaven. However, if someone's name is not written in this book, he will be cast away into eternal punishment.

Is your name written in the book of life? In the end, this is the only thing that matters. Let us use the time we have now to do the Lord's will so we can be in His presence for eternity.

–Andy Sochor

# SALVATION

## What It Means To Be A Christian

By Samuel Matthews | Oregon, USA

*"King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest. Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian. And Paul said, I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds" (Acts 26:27-29). (KJV)*

What is a Christian? The name is God-given (Isa. 62:2; Acts 11:26). We are to glorify God in this name (1 Pet. 4:16). The name "Christian" properly means "a follower of Christ." This name honors Christ.

Becoming a Christian and living the Christian life is important and not to be taken lightly. It must involve the heart—the intellect, emotion, and will. It must be done sincerely and conscientiously (Rom. 6:17-18). Becoming a Christian means that "all things are become new" (2 Cor. 5:17).

### **The Christian Has A New Relationship**

When a child reaches the age of accountability he becomes a man of sin—guilty of sin. To be forgiven and have hope of salvation, he must change his relationship.

By the grace of God the man of faith receives his New Relationship as a Christian when he confesses his belief that Jesus is God's only begotten Son, repents of his sins, and is immersed in water for the forgiveness of his sins by the blood of Jesus (Rom. 10:9-10; Acts 2:38; Matt. 26:28).

When one becomes a Christian, he puts to death the old man of sin, and becomes a new creature in Christ (Col. 3:3-10; Rom. 6:3-6).

His New Relationship means coming into Christ, being made a part of His spiritual body – the church(es) of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13, 20, 27; Rom. 16:16). He becomes a child of God, having been born into God's spiritual family (Jn. 3:3-7; Gal. 3:26-27; Eph. 3:15).

His New Relationship means he has been separated spiritually from the world (SAVED) and added by the

the Lord to the body of Christ - His church (Acts 2:47; Matt. 16:18).

The word "church" (ecclesia) means "called out body." A Christian is one who has been called (delivered) out of darkness and translated into the kingdom of Christ (Col. 1:12-13). Christians are therefore said to be "sanctified" or "saints," meaning set apart (1 Cor. 1:1-2).

### **The Christian Has New Blessings**

Christians are blessed with all spiritual blessings in Christ (Eph. 1:3). These include but are not limited to: forgiveness of past sins through Christ's blood (Acts 2:38; Eph. 1:7; Rev. 1:5); reconciliation; that is, we have been brought back into fellowship unto God (Eph. 2:16); constant access to the cleansing blood of Christ, as long as we walk in the light and make confession of our sins (1 Jn. 1:7-9); the Fatherly care, protection, and guidance of God (1 Pet. 5:7).

We may call upon Him in prayer as our Father (Matt. 6:9; Phil. 4:6-7). We may come boldly unto the throne of grace (Heb. 4:16). Through His Spirit living in us (Rom. 8:10-11), our lives are enriched and we become a blessing to others.

### **The Christian Has New Responsibilities**

When we commit sin, we must take the responsibility for that sin. Getting rid of sin involves personal responsibility – REPENTANCE. Serving the Lord as a Christian involves personal responsibilities. Some of the responsibilities we must grow into, but others we take on immediately when we become Christians.

Some of our New Responsibilities are emphasized by terms that are used in the Bible to describe



Christians: "Lights" and "Salt" – descriptive of our influence for good (Matt. 5:13-16); "Branches" of Christ and the vine – emphasizing our obligation to bear fruit for the Master (Jn. 15:1-8); "Soldiers" – making plain our responsibility to "fight the good fight of faith" (2 Tim. 2:3).

Every Christian has a place to fill and a function as a member of the ONE body or church of Christ (Ephesians 4:4, 16). However, not all are capable of doing the same things in the building up of the body (1 Cor. 12:4-11).

Some may develop into preachers, teachers, elders, deacons, etc., while others may not be able to take a public part but still carry out the Lord's marching orders by sowing the seed and teaching in an effort to lead others to Christ (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16).

The Christian's New Responsibility means we must grow (1 Pet. 2:2; 2 Pet. 3:18). We all start out as new born-again babes in Christ, but must not continue as babes. We must go on unto perfection (Heb. 5:12-14). We grow by learning God's word more perfectly and continually applying it in our everyday lives (James 1:22-25). Though we will make mistakes, we must not be discouraged, but be willing to correct them and profit by them.

Our New Responsibility means we put the Lord first in our lives (Gal. 2:20; Phil. 1:21). We must display a Christian vocation at all time. That means we must exercise patience and perseverance (Heb. 10:35-36) as we walk (live) in a manner worthy of our calling into the unity of the Spirit (Eph. 4:1-3).

As Christians we are commanded to: worship God in spirit and truth (John 4:24; Heb. 10:25). That means each first day of the week (Sunday) Christians are to assemble with the saints to give as we have been prospered, and remember the body and blood of Jesus

by partaking of the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:23-30; 16:1-2; Acts 20:7). During our worship we also sing, pray, and hear the word of God proclaimed.

WARNING: Those who are merely "Sunday morning Christians" are hypocrites and lost (Matt. 23:27-28).

### **The Christian Has New Loves**

We are to love the kingdom of Christ above material things (Matt. 6:33) as we are to set our affections on things above rather than things on earth (Col. 3:1-2).

### **The Christian Has New Hopes**

We are heirs of God (Rom. 8:17; 1 Pet. 1:4). We have the "new Jerusalem" whose builder is God (Rev. 21:1-7). We look forward to the promise of a home in heaven (Jn. 14:1-3).

Dear friends, there is no greater honor or privilege than that of being a simple New Testament Christian. The cost of being a Christian may be thought to be great (Luke 14:28), but the cost of NOT being a Christian is much greater (Matt. 16:24-27).

### **TRUE/FALSE REVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. The name "Christian" was a name given to the Lord's disciples in derision by the enemies of Christ.
2. The name "Christian" means a denominational church.
3. A Christian "saint" is one who is sinless (without sin).
4. All things remain the same when one becomes a Christian.
5. There is no need for further growth after becoming a Christian.
6. Only the leaders in the church have a part to play as a Christian church member.
7. It is sinful and wrong for Christians to enjoy material possessions.
8. Being a Christian means never again having to worry about temptation.
9. Being a Christian involves only a change in appearance before others.
10. It is a sin for a Christian to exalt God and His Kingdom above all else.

(NOTE: **False** is the correct answer for all the above). The God of Heaven is so good. We love you all with the love of the Lord (John 13:34-35).

# QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

## Question:

We have a problem with some Christians imitating the Pentecostal's mass prayers where many people pray out aloud at once. I need your help with the Bible refutation.

## Answer:

People tend to gravitate to things that are exciting and novel. A large noisy party is exciting. A lectureship in comparison is dry. Yet, in a party, there is very little communication taking place. Oh, people talk with others individually, but nothing is communicated to the group as a whole. In a lectureship, there is communication to all but less individual participation.

When the church is assembled for the worship of God, is it for individual worship or worship as a group? Paul's point in I Corinthians is that worship is a joint effort and expresses our unity. *"Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread which we break a sharing in the body of Christ? Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body; for we all partake of the one bread"* ([I Corinthians 10:16-17](#)). This concept is not limited to just the partaking of the Lord's Supper.

*"When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification. If anyone speaks in a tongue, it should be by two or at the most three, and each in turn, and one must interpret; but if there is no interpreter, he must keep silent in the church; and let him speak to himself and to God. Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment. But if a revelation is made to another who is seated, the first one must keep silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all may be exhorted; and the spirits of prophets are subject*

*to prophets; for God is not a God of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints"* ([I Corinthians 16:26-33](#)).

If all pray at the same time, there is no building up of the group. Each individual might claim to benefit himself, but the church exists to build up the group. *"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"* ([Ephesians 4:11-12](#)). Instead, mass prayers give way to mass confusion and this is not what God desires.

Source: <https://www.lavistachurchofchrist.org/cms/we-have-problems-with-people-wanting-to-do-mass-prayers/>

## JESUS SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD

The Hebrew writer listed several ways Jesus was superior to the Levitical priests under the Law of Moses. One of the surprising proofs that Jesus was to be preferred was because of his posture.

*"Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God"* (Hebrews 10:11-12).

The Hebrew writer described the Levitical priests *standing* while Jesus was *sitting*. Why is this significant? The priests *standing* indicated that they never reached a point where their sacrifices were fully sufficient. Jesus, after just one sacrifice, *sat down* because His work in this regard was completed.

This is why the Hebrew writer added, *"For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified"* (Hebrews 10:14). It was *"impossible"* for the sacrifices offered by the priests under the old law *"to take away sins"* (Hebrews 10:4).

**Continued on pg. 40**

# ADDENDUM

## Should A Believer Be Baptized Immediately?

By Samuel Matthews | Oregon, USA

“Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus. And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?” (Acts 8:36). (KJV)

Loved ones, J.D. Greear served as the 62nd president of the Southern Baptist Convention from 2018 to 2021. He humbly said this concerning “immediate” baptisms.

“Our church (the Summit Church) chose to hold our first [spontaneous] baptism service after we noticed the biblical pattern of spontaneous baptisms while preaching through a series in the book of Acts.

What is becoming known in the religious world as 'spontaneous' baptism is taking root because many are seeing the lack of delay in narratives given throughout Acts.

We see baptisms at midnight, immediately upon believing, straightway, and so forth, but why then do we see delay today? Why do we see future dates set? 'Baptism Sundays?'

If an event were so important that the Apostle Paul baptized in the midnight hour (Acts 16:25-34), what would stop us? If The Eunuch saw he needed baptism immediately, again, what would stop us?

When we consider the purpose of (water) baptism, it then becomes clearer why this was immediate! It is why we do not hesitate to meet, even now, at the midnight hour to baptize a penitent person.

If baptism is for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16), if it is for the Lord adding you to His church (KINGDOM Matthew 16:18-19; Acts 2:41-47; Colossians 1:13), if it is for being placed into Christ (Galatians 3:26-27; 2 Timothy 2:10), if it is where God cuts away our sins (Colossians 2:11-13), if it is where we are saved by the power of Jesus' resurrection (NOW 1 Peter 3:20-21), THEN it makes sense why

we do not schedule “Baptism Sunday” or why we do not tell someone they are saved and months later will schedule their baptism. If this event, baptism, is so important then certainly we can understand WHY it should not be delayed.”

We appreciate the concession of J.D. Greear on this matter and the attitude he has taken to adopt a more biblical pattern concerning water baptism (Matthew 28:18-20) - the soul saving command resulting in our salvation by grace through obedient faith (Acts 10:47-48; Ephesians 2:8-10).

Dear friend, if you have delayed baptism knowing the purposes above, why wait? Please visit a congregation of the churches of Christ at your next opportunity (Romans 16:16). They will love to help you submit to God's sovereign will. The God of Heaven is so good. We love you all so much.

### JESUS SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD

**Continued from pg. 39**

But Jesus offered just one sacrifice because “*there is forgiveness*” through His death on the cross.

So remember that Jesus sat down at the right hand of God. There is no need for Him to continue to offer Himself as a sacrifice for us because His blood perfectly cleanses us of our sins. Let us take advantage of His sacrifice to have our sins forgiven so we can be where He is in heaven one day.

- Andy Sochor