



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)



UNMASKING SOPHISTRY



As we celebrate our 4th anniversary, we give all glory to God for His faithfulness and guidance. We are deeply grateful for you, our cherished readers, whose prayers and engagement have made this journey possible. May God continue to bless us all as we share His truth and love. Here's to many more years of maintaining the pattern of sound words!

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From The Editor's Desk

This is the 18th edition of Unmasking Sophistry Magazine published since its inception and it is the second issue published in 2025. We thank God for the strength to carry on the work. This journal is designed to teach the truth of God's Word as well as expose the various arguments that have been prepared in defense of false religion and arguments designed to oppose the Christian faith.

In the last edition of this journal, we examined various subjects under each of the sections such as *Is water baptism a swimming exercise?*; *May women speak in a mixed gender Bible class?*; *Division in the Restoration Movement*; *Quibbles that Backfired*; *Calling names of false teachers*; *A brief reflection on Ezekiel 34*; *Christmas: Separating truth from fiction*; *Ahab and Jezebel: The couple who hurt each other and everyone around them*; and other intriguing topics..

Meanwhile, this edition shall focus on topics such as; *Was Peter the first Pope?*; *Lessons from the Melodeon at Midway*; *Commodification of the Gospel: An Unscriptural Trend Among Denominational Churches*; *Establishing Bible Authority – Just a Campbellite Tradition?*; *The dare consequence of whom you marry*; *Is Christianity a religion?*; *Why did Jesus die on the cross?*; *What is the meaning of 'equality' as used in II Corinthians 8:13-14?*; *The greatest need*; and other interesting topics.

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

The open-door policy of the magazine is still very much intact. If anyone disagrees with an article in any edition of the magazine, such could write a rebuttal to it and we would be willing to publish it with a response following. 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 appreciate all the prayers, feedback, and encouragement from readers. We would continue to hold fast the pattern of sound words which we have heard from the apostles, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus (II Timothy 1:13; Acts 2:42).

God's Love and Blessings.

Osamagbe Lesley Egharevba
Editor

CHRISTIAN EVIDENCES

"That Which is Perfect" Does Not Refer to the Second Coming of Christ

By Dylan Stewart | Alabama, USA

Almost all Bible believers agree that 1 Corinthians 13:8-13 teaches that miraculous spiritual gifts will cease "when that which is perfect is come." The problem, however, is disagreement over what is meant by "that which is perfect." Many claim "that which is perfect" refers to the Second Coming of Christ, but if we look closely at 1 Corinthians 13:8-13, we see that the "perfect" refers to something else entirely.

In 1 Corinthians 13:8, Paul concludes love is superior to spiritual gifts because unlike miraculous spiritual gifts, love will never end: "Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away." Thus, we can be certain that prophecies, tongues, and special knowledge all must cease, but the question is when - when will prophecies, tongues, and miraculous special knowledge cease? Paul provides the answer in verses 9-10: "For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away." The "partial" refers to the first century revelation before the Word was complete, or "perfect." God gifted "partial" abilities (the miraculous gifts mentioned in 1 Cor. 12-14) to fill a gap until the "perfect" would come. Since the "partial" in 1 Cor. 13 clearly is in reference to the revelation of God's New Testament law through prophecy, tongues, and knowledge, and since the "perfect" must logically be of the same nature as those parts, then the whole - for the sake of consistency - cannot be anything else except the whole revelation, i.e. the completed New Testament. Since the parts were to "pass away" when the perfect came, the "partial" (miraculous gifts) were done away when the New Testament was completed. If "that which is perfect" refers to the second coming

of Christ, then miraculous spiritual gifts are still in effect today, which is the exact opposite of Paul's primary teaching in 1 Cor. 13:8-10.

In 1 Cor. 13:10-12, we see further how the second coming of Christ is not the point where the "partial" (miraculous gifts) will cease: "But when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known" (NIV). Like a foggy mirror, spiritual gifts gave an incomplete (lacking "completeness") view of God's revelation. These verses could not possibly be talking about us seeing Jesus upon His return because mirrors are for seeing **ourselves**, and not for seeing others.

James describes this mirror in James 1:21-25 by saying, "Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does." James makes it abundantly clear that the Word of God is the fixture upon which we view ourselves. People who have the complete and perfect revelation of God (James 1:25) are able to see themselves clearly and accurately through the mirror described both in 1



Cor. 13 and in James 1. This mirror - the perfect law of liberty - provides an accurate reflection of ourselves, making any blemishes we might possess visible for us to see and, therefore, correct.

WHAT IS THE MEANING OF LIFE?

In Shakespeare's play Macbeth, the title character sums up the emptiness of his evil life in this eulogy for his life.

"Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player That struts and frets his hour upon the stage And then is heard no more. It is a tale Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, Signifying nothing." That sounds a lot like Solomon's *"life-under-the-sun"* philosophy, doesn't it? Where *"all is vanity"* and *"all things are wearisome"* (Eccl. 1:2, 8, 14).



In the Bible's Gospel of John however, life is not summed up in a philosophy, but in a Person: *"In Him was life, and the life was the light of men"* (John 1:4).

If you're looking for the essence of life in a philosophy, you'll go away empty-handed. But if you come to the Person of Christ, you will find that He is life (John 14:6), and you'll walk away with your arms full of His abundance (John 10:10b).

It is sad, but true, that the vast majority of people on Planet Earth have no ultimate aim or goal. Oh, they may have worthwhile goals set before them, but these

goals are usually rather temporary, although they are good. Graduate from school, get a job, get married, raise children, etc. And how do we achieve these goals? We must set a course of action, and then become involved. One cannot graduate from school without applying oneself to study, attend classes, do homework, etc. One cannot get married without giving some serious thought to the kind of person to look for, and then the courtship period, etc.

Then the ultimate end for too many is the funeral and then the graveyard. Oh, many will say they believe in God and the afterlife, but for far too many people that I meet, the afterlife is given little thought and little preparation in their everyday living.

Now, think with me. If you were a student in school, and were given the choice upon graduation with a good record that you would have a good career or otherwise that you would spend the rest of your life in prison, how serious would you be in preparing for graduation? It's quite obvious that you would give careful attention and effort to be sure that you graduated with honors

Jas 4:13 *"Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit.' Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away." Instead, you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that.'*

--J.D. Tant

WORLD RELIGIONS

Let's Not Be Narrow

By Roy E. Cogdill

One of the most dreadful things many people can imagine is that they will be accused of "narrow mindedness" in religion. That literally scares them to death; the very thought that they might be considered narrow drives them completely away from the truth. Yet it should not. Truth is narrow. There is nothing liberal or generous about truth; it all narrows down to just one fact. The proper answer to the mathematical summation of two plus two is four. There just isn't any other answer on earth that is right save that one. Out of all the infinite number of answers that might be given, only one is right. Every other is necessarily false. The answer is not "five"; neither is it "three." Two plus two gives "four" — no more and no less.

At what temperature does water freeze? If we use the Fahrenheit scale, it begins to freeze at 32 degrees at sea level. Of all the answers that might be given to this question, one is right; every other is wrong, just as wrong as wrong can be. What direction is Dallas, Texas, from Lufkin? If you wanted to be exact, you could take a compass and determine exactly and precisely how many degrees west of north the one city is from the other. There is only one correct answer to that question.

Suppose somebody wants to argue the question as to the temperature at which water freezes, or wants to dispute the geographical relationship between Dallas and Lufkin? Is it "narrow mindedness" to insist that there is only one right answer to each of these questions? If someone should prefer to believe that water will freeze at 34 degrees, or 36, or even 33, and should accuse me of being "narrow minded" because I insist on 32 degrees, would not everybody know that truth has no alternative save to be "narrow"? It seems like many people go almost stone blind, and lose all

the good judgment they ever had, when it comes to the subject of religious truth. They will accept principles in religion which they would laugh to scorn in any other area of life.

The very same man who has no difficulty at all in understanding why there can be only one right answer in scientific, or mathematical, or geographical problems, glibly assures everybody that there can be a hundred right answers to religious questions — and those answers can contradict one another in the most open and obvious fashion possible. He says, "You answer the question your way; I'll answer it mine, and we'll be brethren, and everything will be all right for both of us."

If that be the case, truth does not matter. Why have a Bible? Why not let each one believe what he wants to believe, throw the Bible away and forget all about the word of God. Why all of the preaching? If men are perfectly right in believing and following a multitude of contradictory doctrines, then why should any man want to teach anybody anything that is in the New Testament?

Does Jesus teach contradictory doctrines? Can one take the New Testament and find one page of it teaching that a child is born in sin, another page teaching that he is born in Christ "safe in the arms of Jesus"? One human creed teaches that baptism is by immersion only; another teaches that it is also by sprinkling and pouring, according to the preference of the candidate. Both creeds make their appeal to the Bible for substantiation of their doctrines. But does the Bible give any such contradictory teaching? If so, who can believe for a single minute that the Bible is of divine origin? The Lord does not teach a thing two ways, or a hundred different ways. Somebody is bound



to be wrong!

Is it all a matter of "interpretation"? That is the claim that has been made. While people are talking about such a thing as interpretation, they ought not to forget that there can be also misinterpretation. Somebody has misinterpreted the truth. The Lord does not teach immersion only on one page, then turn right around and teach sprinkling and pouring on the next page. If anybody actually thinks he can read such in the Bible, he simply believes that God is not trustworthy, and His word is not reliable or dependable. No one could have any confidence in a man who would talk "out of both sides" of his mouth; neither can man have any confidence in a God who would do such.

Just as certainly as there is religious division in the land, just that certain it is that someone has taught something which is not in God's book. The Lord does not teach, and did not teach, contradictory, doctrines. Christ is not divided in the message He gives. When all men speak "as the oracles of God," they will "be of the same mind, and speak the same things." Suppose we could get all the preachers in a certain city to agree that for one year not a one of them would preach anything save that which is clearly set forth in the Bible. They would lay aside their respective creeds, distinctive doctrines, and peculiar names, and all of them preach only that which they can find in the Bible. Is it not obvious to all that there would soon be complete unity and harmony prevailing among all? The Bible reads alike to all of us; it does not tell you one thing, and tell me something different. If all of us will determine to speak only that which the Bible speaks, leaving out all human tradition, we will soon find the believers completely united. There can be no other alternative.

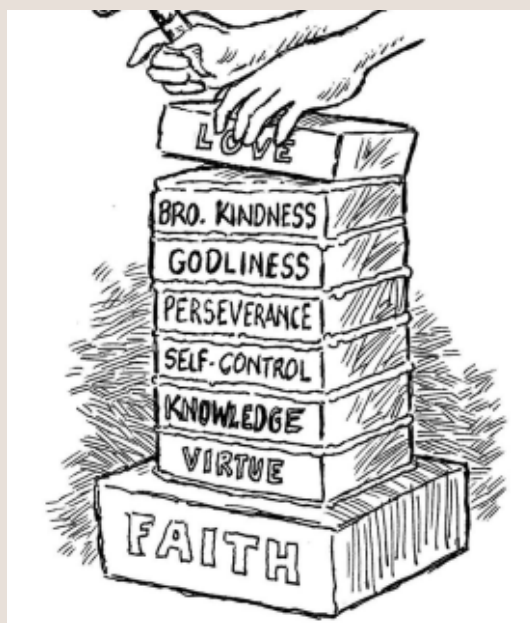
When preachers and teachers are content to confine their preaching to those things for which they can

furnish a "thus saith the Lord," religious division quickly disappears. It would be so in any city in this nation where it might be tried. Christ is not divided in message. The different "messages" that are taught in the name of Christ are not truly messages of the will of Christ. For His will is contained for us in His word. When we have His word, and understand what it says, we will soon overcome the turmoil and division which have disgraced the religious world for these many centuries.

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2 PETER 1 VERSES 5-8

2 Peter 1 verses 5-8 "And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ".



DISCOURSE

The apostle Peter was the first Pope of the Roman Catholic Church

Affirmative: John Martignoni | Bible Christian Society

Denial: Thomas N. Thrasher | Church of Christ

The topic for discussion in this section focuses on whether or not Peter was the first Pope. John Martignoni affirms the proposition that "The apostle Peter was the first Pope of the Roman Catholic Church" while Thomas N. Thrasher responds to the arguments. Martignoni's first affirmative and Thrasher's first negative are presented here. Subsequent affirmative and negative articles of both debaters will be published in the coming editions of Unmasking Sophistry

Affirmative: John Martignoni | Bible Christian Society

Martignoni's First Affirmative

My task is to argue the affirmative of the proposition: "The apostle Peter was the first Pope of the Roman Catholic Church." I am not going to try to "prove" that Peter was the first pope, because I obviously cannot offer a piece of definitive evidence that would be accepted by all that "proves," beyond a shadow of a doubt, that Peter was the first pope. After all, we have ample photographic evidence and multitudes of firsthand accounts of the Holocaust, yet there are still those that do not believe the Holocaust occurred.

So, no "proof" is offered that Peter was the first pope, merely evidence for that fact. And, the fact of the matter is, we do have evidence Peter was indeed the first pope, the first head of the Church, while we have little to no evidence that he was not.

Before presenting the evidence that Peter was the first pope, however, I should explain exactly what is meant by the word, "pope." "Pope" is the title given to the leader of the Catholic Church. The word "pope" is the English version of the Latin "papa" from Greek "pappas," which means "father." The title pope (papa) was once used in a broader way than we use it now. In the Eastern Church it was generally used for all priests, while in the Western Church the term seems to have been generally restricted to bishops. It

apparently became a distinctive title for the Bishop of Rome (the leader of the Catholic Church) at sometime in the third or fourth century.

So, was Peter called, "Pope Peter?" Maybe, but at that time other bishops were probably called "pope," or "papa," as well. So, this is not a debate as to whether or not Peter was called by the title of "pope," but rather a debate on whether or not Peter was the first head of the Catholic Church.

The arguments that I have previously seen from various quarters against Peter being the first head of the Church generally follow two main themes, either: 1) They deny that Peter was the chief of the Apostles and, therefore, was never head of the Church in Rome or anywhere else; or 2) They deny that Peter was ever in Rome, thus he was never the Bishop of Rome, thus he was never the "Pope," and thus he did not pass on his authority to the next Bishop of Rome. So, I will argue in the affirmative with these two lines of dissent in mind, and I will use both Scripture and historical documents in my arguments.

Peter as the head of the Apostles. Does the Bible present any evidence to support the Catholic Church's claim to this effect? Indeed it does. Let's start with the simple fact that any time the 12 Apostles are



listed, Peter's name tops the list (Matt. 10:1-4, Mark 3:16-19, Luke 6:14-16, and Acts 1:13). Also, Peter's name is mentioned some 160-170 times in the New Testament. All the other Apostles combined are only mentioned about 95 times. If Peter does not hold primacy amongst the Apostles, why is he listed first and why is he getting so much press?

But, beyond that, who was the only Apostle to receive the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven from Jesus Christ Himself? Was it Paul? No. Was it John? No. Andrew? No. It was Peter and Peter alone to whom Christ gave the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven: "I will give you [Peter] the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven..." (Matt 16:19).

Why is this significant? It's significant because keys are the symbol of authority and power. Peter alone is given this symbol of authority. And it is also significant in light of Isaiah 22:20-22. We see that Jesus was using the identical language in Matthew 16 that Isaiah uses. In this passage from Isaiah, the Lord is talking to Shebna, who is the king's prime minister, he is over the king's household, "In that day I will call my servant Eliakim, the son of Hilkiah, and I will clothe him with your robe, and will bind your girdle on him, and will commit your authority to his hand; and he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. And I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David; he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open."

The passing on of authority is symbolized by the key of the house of David. Eliakim will be over the house of David: he shall open and none shall shut; he shall shut and none shall open. In Matt 16:19, Peter, and Peter alone, is given the keys. Peter, and Peter alone, is tapped, by God, as the prime minister of the new house of David, which is the Church. Whatever he binds (shuts) on earth shall be bound in Heaven and

whatever he looses (opens) on earth shall be loosed in Heaven.

Also, Peter has his name changed from Simon to Peter (which means rock). Peter is the only one of the Twelve to have his name changed, which is always a significant event in Scripture. Then, in John 21:15-17, Jesus tells Peter to, "Feed My lambs," "Tend My sheep," and "Feed My sheep." Who is it that feeds the lambs, tends the sheep, and feeds the sheep? The shepherd! Jesus, knowing that He is to soon ascend into Heaven, is appointing Peter as shepherd of the flock in His absence. Did Christ say these words to any other Apostle? No.

What else in Scripture points to the fact that Peter was indeed the head of the Apostles? Well, Peter received a special revelation from the Father to know that Jesus was the Christ (Matt 16:16-17); Peter walked on water (Matt 14:28-29); Peter generally spoke for the Apostles as a whole (Matt 16:16, Matt. 18:21, Luke 12:41, John 6:68-69), and when it came time to pay the temple tax, who was it that Jesus, through a miracle, paid the temple tax for? He paid it for Himself and Peter (Matt 17:24-27), but not for any other Apostle.

In the Acts of the Apostles, Peter is always the first to act. The 1st half of the Acts of the Apostles is all about Peter. Peter was the one who commanded that Judas be replaced (Acts 1:15); it was Peter who spoke to the crowds on Pentecost (Acts 2:14); it was Peter to whom God told Cornelius to send men (Acts 10:5); it was Peter to whom God gave the revelation to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 10:9-21); it was Peter who meted out the judgment to Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11); and it was Peter who settled the debate at the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15:7-12). In Luke 22:31-32, Jesus says, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you [the Apostles] that he



might sift you [the Apostles] like wheat, but I have prayed for you [Peter] that your faith may not fail; and when you [Peter] have turned again, strengthen your brethren." Jesus prays that Peter's faith may not fail so that he may strengthen his brethren. Jesus did not pray that John's faith or James' faith or Bartholomew's faith may not fail and for them to strengthen their brethren, it was for Peter alone that Jesus prayed. Why did Jesus just pray for Peter here?

Over and over again, we see Peter in a position of primacy. Peter, because of the power of the keys, was indeed put into a position of primacy over the other Apostles and over the Church as a whole. He was made the Prime Minister of God's kingdom.

In other words, there is ample evidence, from Scripture, for the primacy of Peter among the Apostles and in the Church. Now, what about historical evidence for the primacy of Peter?

Tertullian (ca 213 A.D.), "Peter alone [among the Apostles] do I find married, and through mention of his mother-in-law. I presume he was a monogamist; for the Church, built upon him..." The Church is built upon Peter.

St. Clement of Alexandria (ca 200 A.D.), "On hearing these words, the blessed Peter, the chosen, the pre-eminent, the first among the disciples, for whom alone with Himself the Savior paid the tribute..."

Origen (ca 230 A.D.), "Peter, upon whom is built the Church of Christ, against which the gates of hell shall not prevail..."

St. Cyprian of Carthage (ca 251 A.D.), "On him [Peter] He builds the Church and to him He gives the command to feed the sheep; and although He assigns a like power to all the Apostles, yet He founded a single chair, and He established by His own authority a source and an intrinsic reason for that unity. Indeed, the others were that also which Peter was, but a

primacy is given to Peter, whereby it is made clear that there is but one Church and one chair. So, too, all are shepherds, and the flock is shown to be one, fed by all the Apostles in single-minded accord. If someone does not hold fast to this unity of Peter, can he imagine that he still holds the faith? If he deserts the chair of Peter upon whom the Church was built, can he still be confident that he is in the Church?"

These are just a few quotes from early Christian writers that attest to the primacy of Peter in the Church...that Peter was indeed the first head of the early Church.

Now, what about the question of whether Peter was ever in Rome or not? First, what does Scripture say? Well, not much. However, there is one verse in Scripture that seems to suggest he was indeed in Rome. That verse is 1 Peter 5:13, "She [the Church] who is at Babylon, who is likewise chosen, sends you greetings, and so does my son, Mark." Babylon is considered by many to be a code-word for Rome. So, there is evidence, from the Bible, that Peter was indeed in Rome. Now, that is not by any means conclusive evidence from Scripture, but nowhere does Scripture say, "Peter was never in Rome." So, using Scripture alone, there is one verse that seems to indicate Peter was in Rome, and none that say Peter was never in Rome.

Now, let's turn to the historical record. Do we have any historical accounts of Peter being in Rome? Indeed we do.

Ignatius of Antioch (110 A.D.), "Not as Peter and Paul did, do I command you. They were apostles, and I am a convict," (Letter to the Romans).

Caius, Presbyter of Rome, (ca. 205 A.D.), "It is recorded that Paul was beheaded in Rome itself, and Peter, likewise, was crucified, during the reign [of Nero]. The account is confirmed by the names of Peter



and Paul over the cemeteries there, which remain to the present time.”

St. Dionysius of Corinth (ca. 170 A.D.), “You have also, by your very admonition, brought together the planting that was made by Peter and Paul at Rome and at Corinth...”

St. Irenaeus (ca. 190 A.D.), “Matthew also issued among the Hebrews a written Gospel in their own language, while Peter and Paul were evangelizing in Rome and laying the foundation of the Church.”

Tertullian (ca. 200 A.D.), “But if you are near to Italy, you have Rome, whence also our authority derives. How happy is that Church, on which Apostles poured out their whole doctrine along with their blood, where Peter endured a passion like that of the Lord...”

St. Clement of Alexandria (ca. 200 A.D.), “When Peter preached the Word publicly at Rome, and declared the Gospel by the Spirit...”

To summarize, I have given evidence from Scripture and from history for both the primacy of Peter in the Church and among the Apostles, and for the presence of Peter in Rome. Peter was indeed the first head (pope) of the Catholic Church.

CHURCH ATTENDANCE AND EXCUSES

Have you seen the little religious comic strip showing a man saying: *“I’ll never attend another baseball game because they always ask for money, the seats are hard, the umpire says things I can’t agree with, the place isn’t even air conditioned, the players do the same thing every time I go, sometimes the games are longer than I expected, there are hypocrites there who are more interested in soft drinks and hot dogs than the game, they didn’t make me feel welcome, and the manager never came to see me.”*

Well, of course, the point of that little religious comic strip is to show how silly those excuses are for not

attending church services.

You see, those are actually the reasons some people give for not worshipping God. They complain that the seats or pews are uncomfortable, the preacher sometimes says something they don’t agree with. They say the services are boring and always the same, or that they are sometimes longer than expected, or that there are hypocrites in the audience. Or they say that no one ever visited them or that they weren’t made to feel welcome.

You probably never heard a sports fan say he wasn’t going to a baseball or football game for any of those reasons. And the real truth is that they’re not the real reasons the overwhelming majority of people who won’t attend church worship services do not attend. The real reason they don’t attend is because they don’t want to attend. All those reasons are smoke screens hiding the real reason: **THEY DON’T WANT TO WORSHIP GOD!**

Well, Hebrews 10: 25 tells us *“Not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together,”* and generally speaking, people who **WANT TO** attend will be there, and the real reason people don’t attend isn’t because of the silly reasons sometimes given. They don’t attend because they **DON’T WANT TO ATTEND**, and they don’t want to attend is often because they lack love and gratitude for **GOD!** Someone said: *“A religion that won’t take you to church services on Sunday certainly won’t take you to heaven when you die.”* Think on these things.

Dennis Abernathy

DISCOURSE

The apostle Peter was the first Pope of the Roman Catholic Church

Denial: Thomas N. Thrasher | Church of Christ

Thrasher's First Negative

It is always a privilege, and also a grave responsibility, to participate in a discussion of God's word. My pleasure is increased because I consider Mr. Martignoni to be a knowledgeable and honest man. Nevertheless, I am convinced he is mistaken on the subject we have agreed to discuss. Rather than spending additional time on introductory matters, however, I will proceed immediately to my response to his affirmation. Since I consider Mr. Martignoni a friend, and also for conciseness, I will refer to him as "John" in my articles.

John confesses, "I obviously cannot offer a piece of definitive evidence" **proving** "that Peter was the first pope." This is quite an admission! Therefore, it is "obvious" that whatever "evidence" he introduced in his affirmative is not *definitive* and **does not prove** his proposition!

John said, "We do have evidence **Peter** was indeed the **first pope**, the first head of the Church" (Note: Bold print in this article is my emphasis, TNT). However, he admits that *pope* "apparently became a distinctive title for the Bishop of Rome ... sometime in the **third or fourth century**." The truth is that the Scriptures **never** state that Peter (or anyone else) was the pope! If my friend had a Bible verse supporting his claim, I'm sure he would have produced it.

Furthermore, John's assertion that "**Peter** was ... the **first head** of the Church" is absolutely false! The Bible tells us that **Jesus** "is the **head** of his body, the Church" (Colossians 1:18. Scripture quotations are from *The New Testament, Authorized Catholic Edition*, 1963, unless otherwise stated). **Jesus** is "**head** over all the Church, which indeed is his body" (Ephesians 1:23).

"**Christ** is the **head** of the Church" (Ephesians 5:23). The Bible declares **Jesus** as head, yet my friend says, "Peter was ... the first head"!

Questions: What **Bible verse** states that Peter was the **first head** of the church and **what year** did he officially become "the first pope" and "the first head"? If Peter was "the first pope," what men (or women) succeeded Peter? Since the entire list is probably quite long, please list the names and dates for the 2nd-10th popes.

John said, "I will use both Scripture and historical documents in my arguments." However, the **Scriptures** do not teach his proposition that "the apostle Peter was the first Pope of the Roman Catholic Church," for they never mention a "Pope" or "the Roman Catholic Church"! In fact, the Scriptures never mention many things associated with the Roman Catholic Church: Pope, Cardinal, Archbishop, Mass, Lent, Rosary, Purgatory, Extreme Unction, Holy Water, Limbo, Immaculate Conception, Assumption of Mary, and many other concepts.

Let's review John's efforts to support his proposition from the Bible. He said, "Any time the 12 Apostles are listed, Peter's name tops the list." Does Peter's name being listed first prove that Peter was "the first Pope"? If so, what about Galatians 2:9?—"James and **Cephas** and John, who were considered the pillars." Does this verse show that by this time James had become the Pope, since his name is listed before Peter's? 1 Corinthians 1:12 states, "Each of you says, I am of Paul, or I am of Apollos, or I am of **Cephas**, or I am of Christ." Cephas (Peter) is mentioned, but he is mentioned **after** Paul and Apollos! 1 Corinthians



3:22 states: “For all things are yours, whether Paul, or Apollos, or **Cephas**.” Since Cephas’ name does not “top the list,” I suppose he was no longer the Pope! 1 Corinthians 9:5 states: “Have we not a right to take about with us a woman, a sister, as do the other apostles, and the brethren of the Lord, and **Cephas**?” Peter is mentioned last! Obviously, John’s argument is without merit.

Furthermore, John said, “Peter’s name is mentioned some 160-170 times in the New Testament.... If Peter does not hold primacy amongst the Apostles, ... why is he getting so much press?” If the number of times an apostle’s name is mentioned proves he is Pope, then it seems the apostle Paul was Pope instead of Peter. According to my count, the apostle Paul (or Saul, Acts 13:9) is mentioned by name more than 190 times in the New Testament—more times than Peter (assuming John’s count is accurate). Paul’s name is mentioned **many more times** than Peter’s after the beginning of the church on Pentecost (Acts 2).

John argues, “It was Peter and Peter alone to whom Christ gave the keys of the Kingdom.” All of the apostles were given the same commission (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16). However, Matthew 16:19 refers to Peter’s role in being the first to preach to the Jews (Acts 2) and to the Gentiles (Acts 10). The other apostles had the same authority to bind and loose as Peter did: “Whatever you [**plural**] bind on earth shall be bound also in heaven; and whatever you [**plural**] loose on earth shall be loosed also in heaven” (Matthew 18:18). The context of Matthew 16:13-20 is not discussing who **Peter** is nor his position, but who **Jesus** is and His position. It does not exalt **Peter**, but **Jesus**. Jesus does not confess **Peter**; **Peter** confesses **Jesus**. The verse is not saying Peter is the rock on which the church is built, but rather it *contrasts* Peter’s name (*petros*, masculine—“a detached

stone or boulder”) to the rock on which the church would be built (*petra*, feminine—“a mass of rock”). The church was **not** built on Peter: “For other foundation no one can lay, but that which has been laid, which is **Christ Jesus**” (1 Corinthians 3:11). Remember that **Jesus** is referred to using the term “Rock” (1 Corinthians 10:4; Romans 9:33; 1 Peter 2:8).

My friend observes that Peter’s name was changed. How does he know that? Because he can read that in the Bible (John 1:42). However, he cannot read in the Bible that Simon was called Cephas (“a stone”) **because** he was to be the first Pope! Incidentally, was John aware of the fact that Jesus gave James and John the surname “Boanerges, that is, Sons of Thunder” (Mark 3:17)?

John notes that Jesus told Peter to “feed my sheep.” True. However, several others were also instructed “to feed the church of God” (Acts 20:28, KJV) and “feed the flock of God” (1 Peter 5:2, KJV). Does John think those people were also **popes**?

John alleges that Jesus appointed “Peter as shepherd of the flock in His absence.” However, Jesus Himself said, “There shall be **one fold** and **one shepherd**” (John 10:16). Jesus is the only shepherd over the whole church—no provision for a Pope over the “one fold”! Furthermore, the Lord said, “I am **the good shepherd**” (John 10:11). If the Pope is a shepherd over the whole church, then he is not a “good” one, because Jesus Christ is **the** good shepherd! The apostle Peter identified **Jesus** as “the chief Shepherd” (1 Peter 5:4, ASV). My friend wrote: “The 1st half of the Acts of the Apostles is **all about Peter**.” This is inaccurate at best. For example, Acts 6 is about the selection of seven men, including Stephen and Philip. Chapter 7 records Stephen’s defense before the Jewish council. Chapter 8 focuses on Philip’s preaching.



Chapter 9 focuses on the conversion of Saul. Chapters 13 and 14 describe the preaching journey of Paul and Barnabas. The first half of Acts tells us about much of Peter's work; however, it is quite an exaggeration to contend that it "is all about Peter"! Even if it were, that wouldn't prove he was Pope!

According to my count, Paul is named 121 times in the last half of Acts, while Peter is named only twice! Does this prove that Paul became Pope in the second half of Acts? If Peter's frequent mention in the first half argues that he was Pope, then why doesn't Paul's vastly more frequent mention in the second half argue for his being Pope during that time?

John alleged that "Peter ... was made the Prime Minister of God's kingdom." Where does God's word say that? Just another pure assertion.

John listed several things "in Scripture" that he claims point "to the fact that Peter was indeed the head of the Apostles"; however, not one of them confirms that Peter was "the first Pope" or "the first head" of the church! Additionally, my friend failed to include several interesting incidents from the life of Peter in his list: Jesus rebuked Peter's lack of faith (Matthew 14:25-31); Peter contradicted the Lord (Matthew 16:21-22); Jesus said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan, thou art a scandal to me; for thou dost not mind the things of God, but those of men" (Matthew 16:21-23); Peter denied Jesus three times, even with curses and swearing (Matthew 26:69-75); Peter was hypocritical, "not walking uprightly according to the truth of the gospel" (Galatians 2:11-14). The various recorded events from Peter's life are not evidence that he was ever a Pope!

My friend asks, "What about **historical evidence** for the primacy of Peter?" He then offers quotations from Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Cyprian of Carthage, concluding, "These are just a

few quotes from early Christian writers that attest to the primacy of Peter in the Church ... that Peter was indeed the first head of the early Church."

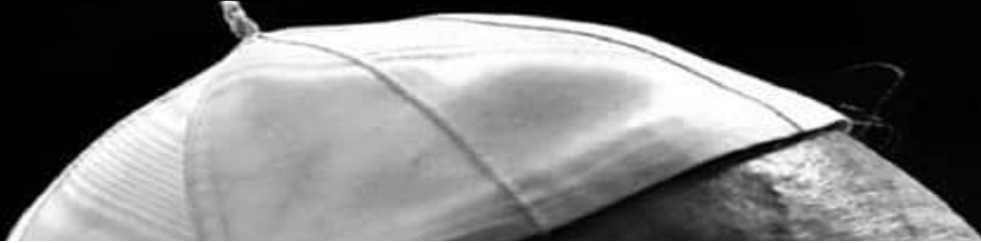
Personally, I must reject anyone's opinion when that opinion conflicts with the Scriptures. For example, if they alleged that "Peter was indeed the first head of the early Church," then they were wrong! As already proven from the Bible, **Jesus** was the head of the church, **not Peter** (Ephesians 1:23; 5:23; Colossians 1:18). Remember, "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29).

Questions: Do you agree with **everything** written by "early Christian writers"? Did each of the four men you quoted write by inspiration, guided by the Holy Spirit **as Bible writers were**?

John devoted considerable attention to "whether Peter was ever in Rome or not?" This may be a matter of concern for some people; however, it matters little to me. The simple truth is that, if he was in Rome at some point, such would not make him Pope! The apostle Paul was in Rome for two years (Acts 28:16, 30). Does that prove he was Pope?

John claims "there is **one verse** in Scripture that **seems** to **suggest** he was indeed in Rome... 1 Peter 5:13." This verse mentions Babylon, not Rome, but John says, "Babylon is **considered by many** to be a code-word for Rome." Not very compelling evidence, is it? My friend even confesses, "That is **not** by any means conclusive evidence from Scripture."

Consequently, in the absence of **any** Biblical evidence, John appeals "to the historical record." He cites statements from Ignatius of Antioch, Caius, Dionysius of Corinth, Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Clement of Alexandria. Suppose these uninspired writers were correct and that Peter spent some time in Rome. Does that prove that Peter was Pope? Several of the quotations given also mention Paul's presence



in Rome (of course, that fact is confirmed by the inspired Scriptures). Since Paul was in Rome, that proves he was Pope, according to my opponent's line of argumentation!

Finally, the primacy of Peter, that he was the first pope, and that he was the first head of the church were ideas unknown to the apostles themselves. At the so-called Last Supper, "there arose also a dispute among them, which of them was reputed to be the greatest" (Luke 22:24). The Lord could have put that to rest quickly by telling them it was Peter, but He didn't. In fact, He taught them it was "not so" among them that one would "exercise authority" over the others (:25-26). The Lord missed an excellent opportunity to identify Peter as "the head" of the church!

To summarize, my friend has not given **any evidence** to confirm that Peter was, in fact, "the first pope." I look forward to the continuation of this discussion.

WHO ARE YOU SERVING--GOD OR SATAN?

If I were to ask that question to most young people I know (even older ones), I think the answer I would most likely receive is "Why, I serve God." And that's a good answer. So, let's give some thought to the question and the response that so many would give.

It is obvious that every living being on the earth makes choices every day. We choose what time to get up in the morning, and choose what clothes we are going to wear, and choose what we are going to do that day—work, relax, visit, play, watch TV, etc.

We know that making choices is a part of living in this world. That includes material activities as mentioned, but it also involves spiritual matters. Many don't give much, if any, thought as to their spiritual choices, but choices are made, nevertheless, even if we do not consciously decide this or that with respect to God.

God didn't make us robots, but gave us the ability to choose.

As Israel's leader, Joshua, was nearing the end of his life, he gave the people a choice, and expressed the choice he and his family had already made. "*If it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.*" (Joshua 24:15)

A critical choice we make when we reach the age of accountability, is whether or not to become a Christian. God's Word tells us how to become a part of the family of God. The apostle Paul's letter to the churches in the Roman province of Galatia mentions how we become members of God's family. "*For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.*" (Galatians 3:26-27)

Thus, we are "born of water" to become a child of God, a part of His family. I am aware that some denominations do not practice any kind of baptism, and there are some denominations that "baptize" by sprinkling or pouring water, but all scholars of the original New Testament Greek language agree that the Greek word "baptizo" literally means "to dip, plunge, submerge." And the Bible examples of people being baptized were all people who understood what they were doing, being immersed in water. No babies or infants. (But that's a topic for another study.)

One problem I see is that too many young people want to "experience the world" in their younger years, with the intention of turning to God when they get older. That's a good intention, but too often "good intentions" don't result in reaching the intended goal.

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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.

Some months ago, an article was written by a Nigerian brother living abroad on Instrumental Music in worship. The brother's name is David Abire. Brother David's effort in the article was to show that the passages used by members of the churches of Christ to prove that vocal music (A cappella) is the only acceptable form of worship, have no bearing on the music model in worship and do not in any way or form condemn the use of instruments in worship. In the beginning of his article, David said *“Many Christians do not engage deeply enough with the Bible.”* But while he attempted to address the passages used by members of the churches of Christ to prove that vocal music is the only acceptable form of worship, David said *“A cursory look at these passages...shows that these passages have almost no bearing on the music model or do not in any way or form condemn the use of instruments in worship.”* In response, Brother Thomas Thrasher emphasized that David is guilty of exactly the same thing he accused “many Christians” of. Brother Thrasher said *“According to the online Oxford Languages dictionary, ‘cursory’ is an adjective meaning ‘hasty and therefore not thorough or detailed.’ A further definition is ‘going rapidly over something, without noticing details; hasty; superficial.’ Synonyms listed are ‘quick, brief, passing, haphazard.’* He then asked: “Is that the kind of study of God's word recommended by brother Abire?” Brother David condemns the act that *“Many Christians do not engage deeply enough with the Bible,”* yet at the same time, he adopts the same

approach he condemns in his article when he attempted to address those passages. Brother Thrasher concludes *“Brother Abire seems to be classed among those ‘many Christians [who] do not engage deeply enough with the Bible’!* David criticizes “many Christians” for not engaging *deeply enough* with the Bible, yet he himself takes *“a cursory look”* at Bible passages in proving his point. What a quibble that backfired!

In a debate at Gleason, Tennessee in 1951 between Brother W. Curtis Porter and Mr. Riley, concerning the matter of works, Mr. Riley said, “Works won't do anything for a man but send him to hell.” “Works will do nothing for a man but SEND HIM TO HELL.” Yet when Brother Porter questioned him about live faith and dead faith, Mr. Riley said that faith that saves a man is a faith that must WORK. Porter showed that according to him, a faith that saves is a faith that sends to hell because that is all that works will do for a man.

Church History

Lessons from the Melodeon at Midway

By Andy Sochor | Kentucky, USA

In our previous article for this column, we discussed the division that developed among those associated with the Restoration Movement. One of the chief issues of controversy was the use of instrumental music in worship to God. In that article, we noted that the first instance of a musical instrument being brought into the worship of the church among those associated with the Restoration Movement occurred in Midway, Kentucky, in 1859. The preacher at the congregation was L. L. Pinkerton. This was one of the most significant events of the Restoration Movement. However, the fact that this was a significant event does not mean it was a positive development.

The reason why this was significant was because of the plea voiced by the preachers of the Restoration: speak where the Bible speaks and be silent where it is silent. Every religious practice would have to pass the test of Scripture. If one could not demonstrate that a practice was according to the New Testament pattern (2 Timothy 1:13), that practice was to be rejected because everything must be done by the authority of Christ (Colossians 3:17). Therefore, instrumental music in worship was widely rejected in the Restoration Movement. It did not fit the pattern revealed in the New Testament, which made it unauthorized.

So how did the melodeon find its way into the worship of the church in Midway? It certainly did not happen overnight. If we can learn the lessons from this event, then we will be prepared to guard ourselves against potential apostasies today.

Perceived Problems

The introduction of the melodeon at Midway was the eventual response to a perceived problem. According to Pinkerton, the singing of the congregation was so


bad it would “scare even the rats from worship.” This is a problem – at least by human reasoning it is. But Biblically speaking, is bad singing really a problem?

The New Testament teaches that we are to sing. Paul wrote, “*Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God*” (Colossians 3:16; cf. Ephesians 5:19). The purpose behind singing is twofold – to offer praise to God and to teach and admonish our brethren. Nowhere in the New Testament does it say anything about singing needing to be pleasing to our ears. The ability to carry a tune is not necessary to obey Paul's instruction. Might we *prefer* good singing? Of course, but we are not to depart from the pattern because of our preference. As long as we are singing as Paul instructed, regardless of our vocal ability, we are pleasing God.

We must guard against the tendency to let our preferences and what we perceive to be problems trump the divine pattern. We might prefer to baptize more people, but we must not change the gospel message in order to convert them (Galatians 1:8-9). We might prefer to spend more time with our brethren, but we must not turn the assembly into a time for common meals (1 Corinthians 11:22, 34). There are many things we might *prefer*, but we must first be concerned with what is *authorized*.

Gradual Slide into Apostasy

The answer to the congregation's poor singing was not immediately to bring an instrument into the assembly. Instead, the first step toward apostasy was an innocent one. Some of the brethren would meet together in their homes to practice singing. Then they decided to



use a melodeon in the home where they met to get the right pitch (like we might use a pitch pipe today). Then, the small steps continued. They went from using the instrument to get the starting pitch to having one of the women accompany the singing of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs by playing the instrument. They noticed that the accompaniment improved their singing, so they decided to bring it into their assembly.

Apostasy is something that happens gradually. Paul warned Timothy of those who would “*proceed from bad to worse*” (2 Timothy 3:13) and of others who would “*fall away from the faith*” (1 Timothy 4:1). The Hebrew writer warned, “*For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it*” (Hebrews 2:1).

We must be watchful against those things that appear innocent but will eventually lead us into apostasy. Paul said, “*All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable [expedient, KJV]*” (1 Corinthians 10:23). Just because one thing might be authorized does not necessarily mean it is a good idea to practice it. Was it lawful for the brethren meeting in one's home to play a key on the melodeon to get their starting pitch? Perhaps. However, as we can see from the events that followed, it was certainly not profitable as it was the first step toward their acceptance of instrumental music in worship.

Opposition Evolves into Acceptance

While Pinkerton indicated the instrument was successfully introduced into the worship of the church, that does not mean it was immediately accepted by all. Some of the brethren strongly opposed it, including one of the elders, Adam Hibler. One night after the melodeon was brought into the church building, Hibler had the instrument taken out

of the building and chopped into pieces with an axe in front of the church building. A second melodeon was brought in, and Hibler returned and removed the instrument from the building, this time hiding it in his barn.

Then, a third melodeon was bought and placed in the church building. But this time, Hibler did not remove it, nor did anyone else. Instead, it remained in the church building to be used in the congregation's worship until the building was destroyed by fire near the turn of the twentieth century. The once ardent opposition eventually waned, and the instrument was accepted at Midway.

The same thing can happen today with any number of issues. We must be intolerant of error and firm in our opposition against it. Paul said of the Judaizing teachers, “*We did not yield in subjection to them for even an hour, so that the truth of the gospel would remain with you*” (Galatians 2:5). We must emulate Paul's attitude of refusing to compromise the truth.

Yet it often becomes easy for our opposition to false teachers and those who practice error to become soft. We get tired of fighting the battles, so we stop dealing with the issues, and eventually, we become willing to have fellowship with those who were previously marked (Romans 16:17; 2 Thessalonians 3:6). We must not allow ourselves to do this. If others are engaging in unauthorized practices, we are told, “*Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them*” (Ephesians 5:11). If someone is teaching false doctrine, John said, “*Do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting; for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds*” (2 John 10-11). The passage of time does not change the force of these Scriptures. If a teaching or practice must be opposed

today, it must continue to be opposed in the future.

Conclusion

Let us learn these lessons from the melodeon at Midway. Be careful of perceived problems. Ask if they are really problems. Then, be sure that any action taken toward correction or improvement is according to the New Testament pattern. Be watchful against apostasy as well. It will never come immediately; instead, it is gradual, often creeping in when we do not expect it. Finally, always stand for the truth. Be consistent and steadfast. As Paul told Timothy, *"Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus"* (2 Timothy 1:13).

WHO ARE YOU SERVING--GOD OR SATAN?

Continued from pg. 17

Please understand that if you are not a Christian, a baptized believer, then you are serving Satan, even if that is not your intention. There are only two spiritual masters we can serve. You may not be a wicked person and you are not committing theft or fornicating or lying, and by the world's standards, you may be a good person. But if you are not a member of God's family, then you are serving Satan, no matter how "good" you may be. That's how Satan deceives us. He is a liar.

Note Christ's words to the religious leaders of his time: *"You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies."* (John 8:44).

Please understand that if it is in your mind to begin serving the Lord *"some day,"* that thought is in your

mind because Satan has put the *"some day"* there. He has the power to influence people, even though they don't hear an audible voice.

There are some obvious dangers to the *"some day"* manner of thinking.

(1) An obvious danger is the fact that the young die, as well as the old. A while back I spoke at the funeral of 16-year-old Franklin. He was a good young man, but he had never been baptized to become a child of God. I believe he intended to do that *"some day,"* but that day never came. Young people die in accidents, from disease, and even from violence. Death shows no mercy.

(2) Another "gamble" is that we do not know when the Lord will return and this world will come to an end. There are various "prophets" through the years who have given the date of Christ's return, but they are all false prophets and liars, even though they may be sincere. Note what Christ said about the Second Coming and the End of the World: *"But of that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone. Take heed, keep on the alert; for you do not know when the appointed time will come."* (Mark 13:32-33)

I'm not sure how the so-called prophets know more than Christ does, but they claim they do.

So...if you're not ready when the end comes, it won't do any good to plead with the Lord, saying "Please give me a few minutes to find some water where I can be baptized." You're too late!

(3) And yet another problem is what we call "a hardened heart." Some young people enjoy the things of the world so much, that they become more or less "attached" to the pleasures of this world and find it hard to give them up.

Continued on pg. 30

BARBS WITH A POINT

Commodification of the Gospel: An Unscriptural Trend Among Denominational Churches

By Osamagbe Lesley Egharevba | Lagos, Nigeria

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “The just shall live by faith.”

(Romans 1:16-17)

In our text above, we can identify at least two very important truths about the Gospel of Christ. The first is that the gospel is described as God's power to save man. And the second is that the righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel. This should tell us how important the Gospel of Christ is. The Gospel is the good message about Christ. Paul told the Christians in Corinth that the Gospel that rescued and saved them is the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:1-4). Christians obey the Gospel by dying to sins, burial in baptism, and rising to the newness of life (Romans 6:4).

Unfortunately, many churches today have commodified the sacred gospel of Christ. What does this mean? To commodify is to treat or consider something as a commodity, that is, a product that can be bought and sold. Thus, commodification is the process of transforming inalienable, free, or gifted things into commodities, or objects for sale. And so, commodification of the gospel refers to the practice of treating religious messages, services, etc. as something to be bought and sold, often for personal gain, rather than as a spiritual gift or message. This can involve selling of items (such as “holy water” as practiced in some churches), promoting a prosperity gospel, or using religious platforms for self-promotion. This is not surprising *“because many false prophets have gone out into the world.”* (I John 4:1).

Lately in Nigeria, a denominational pastor was criticizing some “gospel artistes” for charging churches very exorbitantly before they could come and “perform” at the churches. A Nigerian singer, in turn responds to the pastor and criticizes him for charging so highly at his own school of ministry. The singer argues that if the gospel artistes should perform in churches for free, then pastors should stop asking congregations to pay for any teaching whatsoever in the house of God. But then, in the first place, is the church of God supposed to be a place where gospel artistes are invited to “perform” and entertain members or should the church be a place where you *“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord”* (Colossians 3:16)? The church should be a place where Christians are gathered together *“speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.”* (Ephesians 5:19). But because many pastors are not interested in obeying God, they resorted to preaching another gospel, bringing in entertainment into their worship. All of these are done to get more crowd and make more money. They have perverted the gospel and turned it into a commodity that is now sold for people to buy so they can make gain. In the same vein, the church is not to be a place where people are charged to be taught, rather, it is a place where people receive the word freely and then, as part of their worship obligation to God, give upon the first day of the week as God has prospered them (I Corinthians 16:1-3). This giving is freewill and not by compulsion or levying (II Corinthians 9:6-7).



In Matthew 21:12-13, Jesus rebukes certain people for their hypocrisy and commercialization of the temple, which was meant to be a place of prayer, not a marketplace. Similarly, today, the church is to be a place of worship and not a place for entertainment or jamboree. Worship to God must be in spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24). To worship God in spirit and truth means that worship must be from the heart, not just outward acts and that it must be done in exact obedience to God's commands. The worship must be directed to Him, not to the whims of the worshipers. When we introduce entertainment in worship, we have lost the focus of our worship. When worship is merely window dressing for an entertaining performance, it cannot please God. The apostle warned, *"Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son."* (II John 1:9). Paul condemned things that "have indeed a show of wisdom in will worship" (Colossians 2:23). 'Will worship' is that worship fashioned after man's desires as it is practiced in many denominational churches.

The gospel of Christ is one and we must reject any other gospel even if it comes from an angel – *But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.* (Galatians 1:8-9).

If you find yourself in a church where the true gospel has been commodified, Paul had said *"Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. 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."

WATCH OUT FOR DECEIVERS

In John's second letter, he wrote to those who were *"walking in truth"* (2 John 4). They were doing this *"according to [the Lord's] commandment"* (2 John 6).

However, even though they were on the right track, John gave them a warning: *"For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist"* (2 John 7). Those who teach a message contrary to the Lord's will usually do not announce that they are teaching error; instead, they will attempt to portray it as being the message of God. Sadly, some will be deceived.

So John told them, *"Watch yourselves, that you do not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward"* (2 John 8). Though they had been faithful to the Lord, they could forfeit their reward by turning away from Him. John explained that those who go beyond the word of God or welcome those who do, lose their fellowship with God (2 John 9-11).

There are false teachers today just as there were then. Even though the particular error may be different, the fact that they try to portray man's word as God's word is the same.

So watch out for deceivers. God's word is true; therefore, a message is only true if it harmonizes with His word. Let's make sure we know and follow the Scriptures so as to keep from being deceived.

–Andy Sochor

INSTITUTIONALISM

Establishing Bible Authority - Just a Campbellite Tradition?

By Dylan Stewart | Alabama, USA

I have been very surprised of late to hear some gospel preachers of my generation disregarding or outright scoffing at the notion of establishing Bible authority via commands, examples, and necessary inferences. In fact, it has even been said by some that this method of establishing authority is merely a "Campbellite tradition." Yet, the idea that Bible authority is established via commands (statements), examples, and necessary inferences is not some "Campbellite tradition" borne out of the Restoration Movement of the 19th century. To the contrary, this method of establishing authority is not some condemnable man-made tradition such as what Jesus denounced in Mark 7:6-7, but instead is exactly how the apostles and first century Christians established authority when they sought to properly discern the will of God. For example, Acts 15 records a debate among the early church in Jerusalem about whether or not Gentiles needed to be circumcised. How did they discover the answer to this doctrinally significant question? By commands, examples, and necessary inferences.

Approved Examples

In v.4 & 12, we see the church look to Paul and Barnabas's approved example in working among the Gentiles, leading the church to conclude that if God had not approved of what they were doing, then Paul and Barnabas would not have been permitted to preach to the Gentiles. Then, in v.7-10, Peter recounted the conversion of Cornelius and his family, serving as another approved example of the gospel being preached and received by Gentiles: **"And when there had been much dispute, Peter rose up and said to them: 'Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the**

gospel and believe. So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us, and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?'" As a result of these examples, Peter could deduce that Gentiles were not bound to the Law of Moses (v.11).

Commands / Statements

After considering the examples of Peter, Paul, and Barnabas, James thought it was wise to remind everyone of some previous statements from God showing that He intended for Gentiles to eventually become part of the family of God: **"And after they had become silent, James answered, saying, 'Men and brethren, listen to me: Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name. And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written: 'After this I will return And will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will set it up; so that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, even all the Gentiles who are called by My name, says the Lord who does all these things'"** (v.13-17; see also Amos 9:11-12). James not only considered the example of Peter (Simon), but he also made sure to compare Peter's example with what God (the prophets) had already said on the matter (like the Bereans in Acts 17:11). These statements from God that James presented to the group further informed the church how they needed to answer the question of circumcision.

Necessary Inferences

The examples of Peter and Paul and Barnabas did not outright state but rather implied that Gentiles did not need to keep the Law of Moses in order to be saved. Additionally, the statements that God and His prophets had already made on this matter were not exactly "black and white," causing the church to carefully examine all the information presented and arrive at a conclusion. A "judgment," or inference, was made based on the approved examples and previous statements from God, leading the church to conclude, **"Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God, but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood"** (v.19-20). Necessary inferences require people to take in all the information about a subject at their disposal and then draw necessary conclusions based on that information. That is exactly what the early church did in v.19-20 to establish truth as to whether or not circumcision was binding on Gentiles. Once the early Christians in Acts 15 arrived at the proper conclusion, there was no decision for each person to go their way and teach what they personally felt was true. Instead, the whole church with one accord determined there was no other conclusion (hence the term "necessary inference," or necessary conclusion) that could be drawn except that Gentiles were not bound to the Law of Moses (v.22-29); no other possible conclusion could be drawn.

Conclusion

After examining statements made by God, considering the examples God approved, and drawing necessary conclusions based on all the evidence, the church was able to accurately determine that Gentiles did not need to be circumcised. It looks like the

the method of establishing Bible authority via commands, examples, and necessary inferences predates the 19th century Restoration Movement, doesn't it? If this method of establishing authority was sufficient for the apostles and the first century church, how dare anyone mock the idea that such a method is just some 19th century "Campbellite tradition." By rejecting divine tradition (2 Thessalonians 2:15; 1 Corinthians 11:2) and creating their own new traditions in establishing Bible authority, brethren are ultimately rejecting the commandments of God (Mark 7:9). Rather than coming up with "new" and novel methods of interpretation and for establishing authority, we should simply heed the words of God through His prophet, Jeremiah, who stated, **"Stand in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where the good way is, and walk in it; then you will find rest for your souls"** (Jeremiah 6:16).

FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT



Myth Buster

Is Christianity a Religion?

By Emmanuel Oluwatoba | Niger, Nigeria

Introduction

Many people believe that Christianity is not a religion. This is because many of them associate religion with *meaningless* ceremonies and hypocrisy, and that is certainly not what Christianity is. Some people believe religion presents a barrier to unbelievers and try to remove it to make Christianity more accessible to anyone, but the problem is when we distance ourselves from religion, we also distance ourselves from clear commands from the scriptures in an attempt to make Christianity more appealing and convenient. Christianity is not just a religion but it is the **only** religion which leads to salvation.

Doctrine

Christianity is founded on the core doctrine of Christ that define its beliefs and principles. Acts 2:42 says *“And they continued steadfastly in the **apostles’ doctrine** and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.”* This passage and the entire account of Acts of the Apostles show beyond any doubt that the early Christians had a unifying doctrine which they followed. Moreover, 2 John 9 says *“Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in **the doctrine of Christ**, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son.”* The doctrine in Christianity provides a framework for faith, teaching about God, salvation, sin, grace, and eternity. Unlike many religions that rely on human traditions and philosophies, the Christian doctrine is divinely inspired. The one doctrine of Jesus, the Apostles, and the early church form the foundation upon which Christian life and practice are built.


Guides for Living

Christianity provides clear moral and ethical

guidelines for believers. The scriptures instruct Christians on how to live righteously. “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, *for instruction in righteousness*, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16 - 17). Love, forgiveness, humility, and faithfulness are core virtues that Christians are called to embody. Unlike religions that focus solely on external rituals, Christianity emphasizes inner transformation by the Holy Spirit, leading to a life that reflects God's character (Romans 12:10). The apostles did not teach that Christians could live their lives as they pleased. In fact, they did quite the opposite as we see in the scriptures. *“But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person”* (1 Corinthians 5:11). This passage shows us that those who failed to live up to the standards of character should be shunned. Also, 2 Thessalonians 3:6 says *“But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us.”* From these passages, it is clear that a Christian is tasked with ensuring that they pursue righteousness in their practices (Titus 2:12; 2 Tim. 2:22; 2 Pet. 1:5-11).

Communal Practices

Baptism and the Lord's Supper (Communion) are two of the various practices that Jesus commanded His followers to observe. Baptism symbolizes the believer's identification with Christ's death, burial,



and resurrection. “Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:3-4). Also, 1 Peter 3:21 says “The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ:”

Communion was instituted by Christ on the Passover night and this practice continued. His disciples commemorated His sacrifice on the cross. “**For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, that the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, this cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord’s death till he come.**” (1 Corinthians 11:23-26). Also, worship gatherings and fellowship with other believers reinforce spiritual growth and strengthen the faith community (Heb. 10:25-26).

Conclusion

While some argue that Christianity is not a religion, it clearly possesses defining elements of a religious system including doctrine, moral guidance and practices. Christians have religious obligations. Some individuals oppose the fact that Christianity is a religion because they have a negative idea of what religion is. However, Jesus never condemns religion, but only condemns false religion. “**Pure religion and**

undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world” (James 1:27).

REMEMBER WHY YOU DO WHAT YOU DO

At the beginning of the book of Revelation, the Lord addressed seven churches in Asia. Most received both commendations and corrections.

The church in Ephesus was commended for several things: “*I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false; and you have perseverance and have endured for My name’s sake, and have not grown weary*” (Revelation 2:2-3). However, the Lord also said, “*But I have this against you, that you have left your first love*” (Revelation 2:4).

Their “first love” was Christ. Everything they did was to please and honor Him. Yet they lost sight of this. Even though their deeds were commendable, they forgot *why* they were doing them. So Jesus said, “*Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place—unless you repent*” (Revelation 2:5).

It is important that we carry out the works that the Lord instructed us to do. But we must also remember *why* we are doing them. Everything we do must be done to please and honor Him.

So remember why you do what you do. If we forget our “why,” it is easy to become discouraged, give up, or do the right things for the wrong reasons. Let us hold onto our love for Christ and use that as our motivation in life.

—Andy Sochor



IDEAL HOME

The Dare Consequences of Whom You Marry

By Rowland Gbamis | Tennessee, USA

Introduction

Several articles, journals, books and seminars have been published and conducted on marriage. As I looked through my archive, I saw many books I have read in the past 26 years written by godly men and women, many of which have formed and molded me in my marital journey. Therefore, this brief article is written at the request of an elder at a singles' forum for young Christian men and women contemplating getting married. The wise man says, "*He who finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains favour from the Lord*" (Proverbs 18:22-NKJV). The reverse is also true, "Whoever finds a husband finds a good thing."

Additionally, I could say that whoever finds a good wife or a good husband is blessed. The author of Hebrews writes, "*Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled*" (Hebrews 13:4). This passage underscores the significance and seriousness of how God wants marriage to be among his children. Hence, we must strive to get it right from the onset.

Important Considerations

- A. The presence of love
- B. Whether he will be a good father and she will be a good mother
- C. Whether s/he is too selfish to make a marriage work
- D. Whether s/he has learned self-discipline
- E. Whether they are both mature enough to make a home together
- F. Whether he will make a living and whether she will live within their means
- G. The need to select a wife/ husband who is eligible to marry

Most importantly, you want to marry someone who is

a faithful Christian because you want to be concerned with marrying someone who will help you get to heaven. Your soul is your most important possession; hence, saving it should be of utmost consideration. Jesus says, "*For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?*" (Matthew 16:26). To decide to pair up with someone who will be a continual hindrance to one's divine goal is nothing short of foolhardiness or spiritual thoughtlessness. The ideal to strive for is to be "*Heirs together of the grace of life*" (1 Peter 3:7).

Consequences of Marrying Outside the Faith

The Lord knew His people would have problems when they marry outside their faith. That is why He told the Israelites not to marry among the heathen. "¹⁵*lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and they play the harlot with their gods and make sacrifice to their gods, and one of them invites you, and you eat of his sacrifice,*¹⁶*and you take of his daughters for your sons, and his daughters play the harlot with their gods and make your sons play the harlot with their gods*" (Exodus 34: 15-16). God warns the Israelites against forming covenants with the inhabitants of the land they are entering. The concern is that such alliances could lead the Israelites to adopt the idolatrous practices of those nations, thereby compromising their faith and loyalty to God. The same is true today. Think of many children of God who had left the faith and followed the people of the world because of unholy relationships and are today not in the Lord's body all because of marriage. How sad!

Remember, one consequence of the Israelites marrying outside the faith can be seen in Nehemiah's



time, where some of God's people had intermarried with the heathen, and it resulted in serious consequences. ²³*"In those days, I also saw Jews who had married women of Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab. ²⁴And half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod, and could not speak the language of Judah, but spoke according to the language of one or the other people"* (Nehemiah 13: 23-24). This passage underscores the importance of maintaining covenant faithfulness to God. God called the Israelites to be a distinct people set apart for God's purposes. The children's inability to speak Judah's language symbolizes a loss of cultural and religious identity because language is a key vehicle for transmitting religious teachings and cultural values. By losing their language, the Israelites risked losing their connection to their heritage and faith. Consequently, intermarriage with foreign nations threatened this distinctiveness and could lead to the adoption of foreign gods and practices that could undermine their covenant relationship with God.

Over the last 30 years, I have seen and heard of numerous instances where a Christian married someone outside the Church and was led away from the faith. While some might say they have seen those who married outside and are today remaining faithful, the numbers are indeed insignificant compared to the large-scale damage the Devil is wrecking within the fold. Even when one does not allow himself to be led away, such a brother or sister will likely be in for a lifetime of tension and struggle with the mate to maintain his faith. Why would someone want to be in such a compromising position? Considering that some get tired of the struggle, quit the Church and lapse into indifference. Others become weary of the tension and join their spouse's religion or faith to keep the peace. They convince themselves that it does not make that much difference to which Church they

belong; along the way, they unlearn many of the truths of New Testament Christianity.

Furthermore, in considering the dare consequences of whom one marries, one consideration is to select a wife or husband eligible to marry because the Lord does not permit just anyone to marry. Like I said before, it is sad and harrowing to see how many Christians have gotten themselves into a mess by marrying someone the Lord has not permitted to marry. To this end, I want to suggest that those eligible to marry scripturally are:

- A. Those who have never been married are eligible to marry (Genesis 2:24)
- B. One whose spouse has died is eligible to marry (Romans 7:1-3)
- C. One who puts away one's spouse for fornication is eligible to marry (Matthew 19:9).

Conclusion

It has been the case, therefore, that some who claimed to be Christians were not good marriage material. They did not live and act as Christians and treated their spouses shamefully. Indeed, many of these people (brothers and sisters) were hypocrites, and sadly, many of them were elders' or preachers' children. It would have been helpful if those who married them had looked deeper and saw to it that they were not just Christians in name only but faithful Christians.

Final thought: while it is hard to be careful in selecting a wife or husband, some people seem to give more thought to choosing a house, a car, a job, a bank or an investment expert to manage their financial portfolio than they do when selecting a spouse. Let us not forget that in marriage, one invests body, soul, and spirit in a lifetime relationship. Prayerfully take your time. Investigate. Listen. If you are unsure, do not go



through with the marriage plan. When you finally decide, resolve by the grace of God to make your marriage a lifetime commitment (Malachi 2:16).

Matthew 19:4-6

⁴And JESUS answered and said to the Pharisees, "Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female,'⁵ and said, 'For this reason, a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? ⁶So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let not man separate."

WHO ARE YOU SERVING--GOD OR SATAN?

Continued from pg. 21

We might liken this to becoming addicted to tobacco. I had a close friend who began smoking cigarettes when he was young, and in later years tried to give it up. Time and time again he vowed to quit smoking, and even called a prayer meeting for several of us to pray over him. He might quit for a while, but the addiction was so strong that it pulled him back. He eventually died at a relatively young age. He did not "overcome."

And so it is with the pleasures of this world. Perhaps they are not wicked or evil things, just pleasant things that claim our time and attention more than spiritual matters. Our hindrances might just be the time and effort devoted to our job. The thought might be, "I need to work extra hard while I am young so I can provide for my old age." But then the habit of hard work and long hours becomes ingrained, and there is no time found for God. Or as said earlier, it may just be the pleasant things of this world that we indulge in that leave no time for God.

- Jefferson David Tant

THE LAMB WILL OVERCOME

The book of Revelation is filled with symbolic language. Because of this, the meaning of the visions and references are sometimes difficult to understand. Yet the overall theme of the book is fairly easy to identify.

The enemies of God would fight against Christ, but they would be defeated. John wrote, "*These will wage war against the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, because He is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those who are with Him are the called and chosen and faithful*" (Revelation 17:14). Even though they were described as being powerful creatures, Jesus (the Lamb) would be victorious.

Those who are on His side are "*the called and chosen and faithful*." In other words, those who heed the call of the gospel (2 Thessalonians 2:14), enter into His body (Ephesians 1:4; Romans 6:3), and faithfully obey Him (Matthew 7:21; James 2:24, 26) will share in His victory.

We face a lot of uncertainty in this life. But this is certain: Jesus will prevail over all who oppose Him. We need to make sure we are on His side.

So remember that the Lamb will overcome. He is "*Lord of lords and King of kings*." No one is superior to or more powerful than Him. Let's submit to the Lord and fight for His cause, knowing that His victory is assured.

-Andy Sochor

SALVATION

Why Did Jesus Die on the Cross?

By Andy Sochor | Kentucky, USA

Many people talk about our purpose as Christians in terms that seem to have reduced it to things that pertain to *this world* – loving others, being a good neighbor, being part of a close-knit community of Christians, and so on. All those are good and important, but is that all there is to being a Christian?

If the Lord's purpose for us is that we would essentially be part of one big social club that makes a positive impact on those around us, we might ask the question: *Why did Jesus have to die on the cross?*

After all, even atheists and religious people who do not believe in Christ (Muslims, Hindus, Jews, etc.) can form close relationships with others and help the people around them. Yet none of them acknowledge the Lordship of Christ, and they believe the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth was nothing more than a historical fact (if that).

If we reduce Christianity to being nothing more than eating together, helping one another, and showing concern for those around us, how are we different from atheists and unbelievers who simply try to get along with others and help those in need?

The difference comes from HOW we understand the death of Christ on the cross. Yes, it was a historical fact, but it was more than that. Through Jesus' death on the cross, we can be more than just “good” people. We can be forgiven of our sins, become part of His special people, and have the hope of eternal life.

So why did Jesus die on the cross? Consider these reasons given in the New Testament:

- **To make atonement for our sins and make salvation possible** – *“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the*

wrath of God through Him. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation [atonement, KJV]” (Romans 5:8-11). All of us have sinned (Romans 3:23), and no amount of “good” deeds will absolve us of that. This is why Jesus had to die on the cross – to make forgiveness of sins possible so we could be reconciled to God.

- **To redeem a people for His own possession** – *“[Jesus] gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds”* (Titus 2:14). Since He provides forgiveness, we are no longer slaves of sin (cf. John 8:34, 36; Romans 6:6-7). He has redeemed us, and we are now His people. Yes, we are to be eager or zealous to do good deeds, but those are meaningless if we are not first purified of our sins and belong to Him.
- **To purchase the church** – *“Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood”* (Acts 20:28). The church is His body (Ephesians 1:22-23), and is made up of those who are saved (Ephesians 5:23; Acts 2:47). Therefore, it is critically important that we belong to His church and serve Him in it. This includes being part of a local church where we work with other Christians and worship God together (cf. Acts 9:26; 20:7; Ephesians 4:16; *et al.*). Any form of “Christianity”



that minimizes the importance of the church misses one of the fundamental points of Christ's crucifixion.

- **To put His covenant into effect** – *“For this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant, so that, since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance. For where a covenant is, there must of necessity be the death of the one who made it. For a covenant is valid only when men are dead, for it is never in force while the one who made it lives”* (Hebrews 9:15-17). The old law has been nailed to the cross (Colossians 2:14). Jesus is *“the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises”* (Hebrews 8:6). This covenant went into effect when He died on the cross.
- **To be raised from the dead to give us hope** – *“But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep. For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead”* (1 Corinthians 15:20-21). Jesus' resurrection following His death on the cross gives us hope for something beyond this life. This promise is available to all who will be *“buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection”* (Romans 6:4-5).

To be clear, Christians are to *“abound in love for one another, and for all people”* (1 Thessalonians 3:12). We are to be *“devoted to one another in brotherly love”* and

“give preference to one another in honor” (Romans 12:10). Shortly before His death, Jesus told His apostles, *“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another”* (John 13:34-35).

However, Jesus died on the cross to make us not just “good” people but *His* people. This will result in us doing good to others and enjoying fellowship with those who have been redeemed and added to His church. Thankfully, it also provides us with hope for *eternal* life in heaven with Him – something the “good” people outside of Christ have *“no hope”* of receiving (1 Thessalonians 4:13).

We ought to enjoy the bonds we have with our brethren and let our light shine to those around us through our good deeds. However, let us never forget all of the reasons why Jesus died on the cross. Instead, let us be forever grateful for the love He has shown to us.

SALVATION

The Great Commission in the Book of Acts

By Andy Sochor | Kentucky, USA

After Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead, He gave His apostles the “Great Commission.” Notice the details of this commission that are recorded in the synoptic gospels:

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:19-20).

“And He said to them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned’” (Mark 16:15-16).

“And He said to them, ‘Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things’” (Luke 24:46-48).

In Luke's account, we also see Jesus' instruction to *“stay in the city [Jerusalem, as] until you are clothed with power from on high”* (Luke 24:49). The gospel of Luke closes with the apostles witnessing the ascension of Christ and then returning to Jerusalem as Jesus instructed them to do (Luke 24:50-53).

In the book of Acts, Luke picked up where he left off and provided additional information about what happened during the “forty days” (Acts 1:3) between Jesus' resurrection and ascension. The final recorded statement Jesus made to His apostles was this:

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to

the remotest part of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

This verse is essentially a restatement of the Great Commission. It can also be thought of as the *theme of the book of Acts*, as it tells of the gospel being preached in Jerusalem (Acts 2-7), Judea (Acts 8:1; 11:1), Samaria (Acts 8), and to all the nations (Acts 10; 13-28).

As the book of Acts contains a record of the apostles carrying out the Great Commission, it also shows us two important points about this commission: (1) how to obey the gospel that the apostles were commissioned to preach and (2) how effective the work of preaching can be. Let us consider each of these.

How to Obey the Gospel

When we combine the accounts of the Great Commission, we get a complete picture of Jesus' instructions for how one would be converted and become one of His disciples. After hearing the gospel (Mark 16:15), they would have to believe in Christ (Mark 16:16), repent of their sins (Luke 24:47), and be baptized (Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:16).

When the gospel was first preached on the day of Pentecost, we see these instructions being followed by those who responded to the message. Notice what Luke recorded:

“‘Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ this Jesus whom you crucified.’ Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Brethren, what shall we do?’ Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is



for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself. And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, 'Be saved from this perverse generation!' So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls" (Acts 2:36-41).

After hearing the gospel, these people believed in Christ (evidenced by the fact that they were "*pierced to the heart*" when they learned who He was), repented of their sins, and were baptized for the forgiveness of their sins.

We also find this same pattern in the conversion of Saul (later known as Paul). This is significant because Paul told Timothy that his conversion was "*an example for those who would believe in [Christ] for eternal life*" (1 Timothy 1:16). Notice what he did:

"As he was traveling, it happened that he was approaching Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him; and he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?' And he said, 'Who are You, Lord?' And He said, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting, but get up and enter the city, and it will be told you what you must do'" (Acts 9:3-6).

"And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank. Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and the Lord said to him in a vision, 'Ananias.' And he said, 'Here I am, Lord.' And the Lord said to him, 'Get up and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying..." (Acts 9:9-11).

"So Ananias departed and entered the house, and after laying his hands on him said, 'Brother Saul, the Lord

Jesus, who appeared to you on the road by which you were coming, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.' And immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he regained his sight, and he got up and was baptized" (Acts 9:17-18).

Paul (or Saul) believed in Christ (he referred to Him as "*Lord*"), repented of his sins (his praying and fasting were evidence of this), and was baptized.

The book of Acts contains many accounts of conversion, yet not every one *specifically* details each of these steps (belief, repentance, and baptism). However, at the beginning of this article, we noticed the three accounts of the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:46-48). None of the accounts *specifically* mention each step (belief, repentance, and baptism), yet we see the complete picture when we put them all together. In the same way, we see the complete picture of how one is to respond to the gospel when we put together all of the conversion accounts in the book of Acts (belief, repentance, and baptism). We can even include *confession* (the verbal affirmation of our belief) as this is recorded in the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:35-37). Paul also spoke of this as he discussed the conversion of the Christians in Rome (Romans 10:9-10). But even though every account of conversion does not *specifically* mention each step, every account of conversion is *consistent* with that pattern – belief (which includes a verbal confession), repentance, and baptism.

The Effectiveness of Preaching

When we study the book of Acts, we ought to be impressed with the rapid growth of the church in a relatively short period of time. What did they do that was so effective? They simply did what Jesus told them



to do – “*preach the gospel*” (Mark 16:15). Consider a few passages:

- “*Therefore, those who had been scattered went about preaching the word*” (Acts 8:4). Though the Great Commission was given specifically to the apostles (Matthew 28:16; Mark 16:14), all of the disciples were involved in spreading the message of Christ. Even when persecution forced them to flee Jerusalem, they kept preaching wherever they went.
- “*When they did not find them, they began dragging Jason and some brethren before the city authorities, shouting, ‘These men who have upset the world have come here also’*” (Acts 17:6). The preaching of the gospel upset the status quo because it called people to repentance. Those who opposed Paul's preaching saw this as turning “*the world upside down*” (KJV).
- “*But when some were becoming hardened and disobedient, speaking evil of the Way before the people, he withdrew from them and took away the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus. This took place for two years, so that all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks*” (Acts 19:9-10). By preaching daily from this location in Ephesus, the gospel spread throughout the province of Asia. Even Demetrius, who was an enemy of Paul and stirred up the crowds against him, confirmed how effective this preaching was: “*You see and hear that not only in Ephesus, but in almost all of Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away a considerable number of people, saying that gods made with hands are no gods at all*” (Acts 19:26).

- “*If indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister*” (Colossians 1:23). This was written about thirty years after the gospel was first preached on the day of Pentecost. Yet in that short amount of time, Paul could say that the gospel had reached “*all creation*,” just as Christ intended (Mark 16:15).

We may be tempted to change the message in order to appeal to a broader group of people. We may think we need some organization larger than or other than the local church through which to work to spread the gospel. We may contemplate using carnal tactics and try to reach people using food, fun, and entertainment. Yet the early church did none of those things, and the gospel spread throughout the world, even in the face of zealous opposition and extreme persecution.

Conclusion

The book of Acts contains a history of the early church from its establishment until Paul arrived as a prisoner in Rome (approximately thirty years). This history is important because it shows us how the apostles carried out the Great Commission, how people obeyed the gospel, and how effective preaching can be.

As we continue the work of preaching today and try to reach people with the gospel, let us remember the lessons we find in the book of Acts. Rather than being discouraged when the visible results of our efforts are not what we would like them to be, let us be encouraged by the work of the apostles and early disciples who boldly preached the word in its simplicity and purity. Let us do the same and trust in God, who gives the increase (1 Corinthians 3:6).

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

What is the meaning of equality as used in II Corinthians 8:13-14?

By Osamagbe Lesley Egharevba | Lagos, Nigeria

Question

Please explain the meaning of equality as used in II Corinthians 8:13-14? Does it mean all the churches must have the same amount of money in their accounts? In situations where rich members wear expensive cloths and other members wear less expensive cloths, is there equality? Wouldn't equality mean that rich members sell their things and bring to the church to share the proceeds with the needy like Barnabas did in Acts 4?

Answer

"For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened; but by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may supply their lack, that their abundance also may supply your lack—that there may be equality." (II Corinthians 8:13-14)

In the context of the above passage, Paul was instructing the Christians in Corinth to give out of their means in order to help the poor Jerusalem brethren (Romans 15:25-26; I Corinthians 16:1-4).

It is in the usual practice for a local church to help destitute members among them (Acts 2:44-45; 4:34-35; 6:1) or destitute (needy) members outside their local assembly (Acts 11:27-30) especially when the need of the receiving church is greater than what she alone can handle.

In the case of II Corinthians 8, the church in Jerusalem had needy members that were more than what the Jerusalem church could care for. Hence, Paul encouraged other churches in the region of Macedonia, Achaia and Galatia to send support to help the needy members in Jerusalem.

Paul commanded these churches to send to Jerusalem *"that there may be equality"* – thus the reason for their sending.

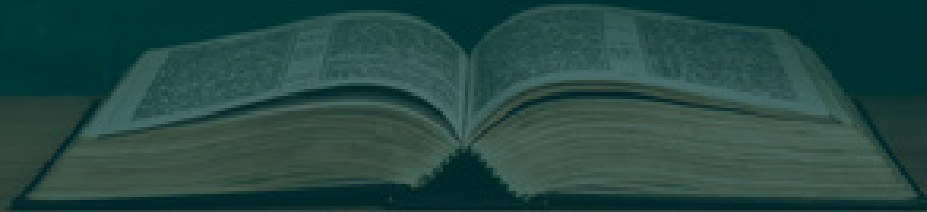
In this response, we shall look at what equality means in the context that it was used in the Bible passage under discussion.

What Does Equality Mean?

Merriam Webster's Dictionary defines equality as the quality or state of being equal. To be equal, according to the same dictionary means to be alike in quality, nature or status. In what sense is Paul talking about equality in II Corinthians 8:13-14?

Equality in this verse means that all the churches have mutual freedom from want. In other words, there was no need among the saints in any of the churches. Let me illustrate with the following example:

Suppose Brother A who is a salary earner receives his salary at the end of the month. He stocked his house with enough foodstuff that would last until the next salary comes and disbursed the remaining funds according to his needs. Suddenly, there was a heavy downpour which flooded the house of Brother A and destroyed all his foodstuff. Brother A suddenly becomes needy (destitute of daily food – James 2:15-16). He has no hope of survival until his next salary comes. It was announced in church what happened to Brother A and it was said that he would be needing 100,000 naira to buy foodstuff if he would survive until next month. Upon hearing this announcement, Brothers B and C decided to give 50,000 naira each out of their abundance to brother A so he can buy the foodstuff he needs. Brother A collects this money, gets the foodstuff and is no longer needy. When this is done, there is now an equality among brothers A, B and C. How are they equal? They are equal in the sense that none of them is needy. The abundance of brothers



B and C have supplied the needs of brother A, and so, they are now equal since none of them is needy. Equality does not mean that brothers A, B and C have the same amount of money in their bank account or that brothers B and C had to become poor in order to help brother A.

What Equality is Not

In II Corinthians 8:13-14, equality does not mean that each church had the same number of members or the same number of Naira in their bank accounts, but that there was no need among the saints in any of the churches. Paul said it clearly that his aim was not for the Corinthian church to become burdened in order to ease the pain of the needy Jerusalem saints but that there should be equality – mutual freedom from want.

The gathering of the manna in the wilderness serves to illustrate equality. *“He that gathered much had nothing over; and he that gathered little had no lack”* (II Corinthians 8:15; Exodus 16:16-18). Notice that there was equality in the gathering of the manna, but all of them did not have the same quantity of manna. Some had **little** and some had **much**. Same way, there will be members who have much and there will be members who have little. As long as needy members of the church are helped and no one is in need, there is equality.

A needy is a person that is destitute of basic necessities of life and do not have the ability to work and earn a living (James 2:15-16). A person who can work but would not work and would want to keep asking for help is not a needy person (II Thessalonians 3:10). If Brother A choses to resign from his work with the intention of asking the rich brethren money every month to buy foodstuff, then he would not be qualified to receive help. The Bible says such should not eat. So, not everyone who does not have money is

a needy person.

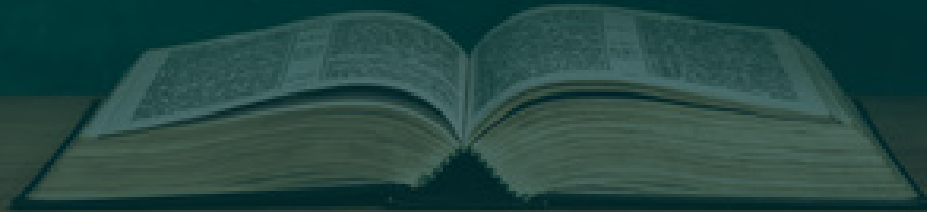
Why Equality Does Not Mean Equal Amount of Money or Strength

The parable of the talent shows the master gave the servants different quantity of talents (Matthew 25:14-15). If equality means the same amount of money, Jesus would be promoting inequality here.

Unlike other churches, the church in Philadelphia had **“a little strength”** (Revelation 3:8). If equality means that no church should be richer than the other, then why did God commend the church in Philadelphia for being faithful despite their little strength?

James teaches that different people will come to the assembly, some with “fine clothes” while others with “filthy clothes” (James 2:1-7). This proves that Jesus recognizes that we must not all wear the same type of clothes to be equal. Those with “fine clothes” are obviously richer than those with “filthy cloths” and they are all members of the same church. We are still equal even with the different categories of clothing and the different amounts of money in our bank accounts.

In Acts 20:35, Paul says we should support the weak. For how long? For as long as they continue to be weak (if the weakness is not a deliberate attempt on the part of the brother to remain weak). If he is weak as a result of accident, then we must support for as long they exist and as we have the opportunity (Galatians 6:9-10). If it is a deliberate act of being weak (such as unwillingness to work or change), we must discipline. If Brother A works so hard, made money to buy an expensive car, there is no sin in that. There is no sin in using or buying expensive things. Mary used an expensive perfume on Jesus (John 12:3-8). Jesus was buried in a new, unused tomb belonging to Joseph of Arimathea, a wealthy follower of Jesus, fulfilling the prophecy in Isaiah 53:9 that the Messiah would be



buried with the rich (Matthew 27:57-61). There is nothing wrong in using expensive things but the rich must remember that they have an obligation to take care of the poor as they have the opportunity (I Timothy 6:17-18; Matthew 25:31-46).

The rich man was not condemned because he was rich or because he enjoyed his life on earth but because he refused to be rich in good works (Luke 16:19-31; I Timothy 6:17-18).

Conclusion

The Bible says godliness with contentment is great gain (I Timothy 6:6).

Christians must be contented (Philippians 4:11-13).

Lack of contentment will lead to envy and that will make one to miss the clear meaning of equality. One will be envious of those who have and would want them to empty their purse for you – that is not equality.

Let us work very hard to become rich in good works and not have the mentality to always be the one to keep receiving help because it is more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:38).

THE LORD WILL REIGN FOREVER

In the imagery contained in the book of Revelation, John saw a book sealed with seven seals (Revelation 5:1). One by one the seals were broken, revealing the mystery contained in it.

When the seventh seal was broken, a new set of seven was revealed – the seven trumpets (Revelation 8:1-2). Each one, when sounded by an angel, revealed a new vision.

The seventh trumpet declared the power and superiority of Christ: *“Then the seventh angel sounded; and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, ‘The kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever’”* (Revelation 11:15).

It would take much more space to examine and explain the meaning behind all of the seals and trumpets than we have in this short article. But in all of the symbolic (and sometimes confusing) language of the book of Revelation, we should not lose sight of certain fundamental points that have been clearly stated like this one.

The kingdoms of this world are temporary. The Lord's kingdom is eternal and He will never be overthrown. We must always keep this in mind.

So remember that the Lord will reign forever. We must give Him our complete allegiance and devotion. No matter how powerful earthly rulers become, they will never defeat the Lord.

–Andy Sochor

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Are miracles still occurring because they are not specifically listed as ending?

By Jeffery Hamilton | Nebraska, USA

Question

Hello Mr. Hamilton,

I have a question for you. I know how people believe that miracles have ceased according to [1 Corinthians 13:8-10](#). But I have a question about that. In those verses, it says: "Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears."

It never mentions miracles. It sounds as though miracles haven't ceased. If they ceased, does that mean people can't be cured of illnesses through prayer? What are your thoughts?

Thanks for your time.

Answer

When dealing with a large set of things, we often select one or two as examples instead of listing every possibility. For example, in [1 Corinthians 6:9-10](#), Paul lists out several sins that can keep you out of heaven. "*Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God*" ([1 Corinthians 6:9-10](#)).

We know that Paul's list is not complete, but it is a sample based on prevalent sins in Corinth. Even so, Paul only selects one sin (fornication) to give detailed arguments on the excuses given to justify this sin. However, his arguments also apply to the other sins, so he doesn't need to repeat himself.

Similarly, a list of gifts of the Spirit are given: "*For to*

one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues" ([1 Corinthians 12:8-10](#)). Notice that there are categories of gifts:

- Gifts of information: wisdom, knowledge, and faith
- Gifts of divine intervention: healing, miracles, prophecy
- Gifts of communication: distinguishing spirits, tongues, and interpretation

When Paul later says, "*But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away*" ([1 Corinthians 13:8](#)), he selected a gift from each category to represent the group. What is said about the one applies to the whole.

Source: <https://www.lavistachurchofchrist.org/cms/are-miracles-still-occurring-because-they-are-not-specifically-listed-as-ending/>

Addendum

The Greatest Need

Author Unknown

The greatest need of all mankind is the Christ. We need to know more about Him, we need to obey Him, we need to serve Him, and we can all agree on these things. Christ is the hope of the world and the only source of real happiness. This was the theme of the early church: Christ and Him crucified. They seemed to recognize no need for anything else. They labored under the impression that if they could just get men and women to "Serve no other man, save Jesus only," the world could be converted. How well they succeeded is graphically described in such expressions as: "*These men do exceedingly trouble our city*" ([Acts 16:20](#)) and "*These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also*" ([Acts 17:6](#)). Yet Paul just preached "*Christ, and Him crucified.*" Philip converted the eunuch by merely "*preaching unto him Jesus.*" ([I Corinthians 2:2](#); [Acts 8:35](#)).

Maybe I'm a bit old-fashioned, but it seems to me that the greatest need today is just plain, positive preaching, as characterized by Peter, Paul, and Philip. I am not opposed to colleges as individually supported institutions, but to hear some folks talk about their college careers and degrees of learning, one would think that the greatest need in the church today is for more colleges to turn out more preachers. This is not so. We need more positive preaching of the gospel; then, we have a right to expect more from those fortunate enough to possess such training. "*For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required; and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more*" ([Luke 12:48](#)).

Of course, there will always be some among us who think that what we need is bigger and better institutions through which to do the charity work of

the church. This is not true! We need to do the work given to the church. For years, I have insisted that individually supported homes are scriptural, and I have not changed my mind on that score. But there are times when I wonder what we may next expect.

In case you wonder about this, read the June issue of the paper published by one of the most prominent homes. This home sponsors a chorus for personal tours among churches. In commenting on their visit to his congregation, one preacher reported that the one-night "performance" of these "star troupers" did more good than a gospel meeting could have done. And here we have been teaching all these years that the "*gospel is the power of God*" and that it "*pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.*" Now comes word that a one-night "performance" by "star troupers" from one of our homes can do more good than a couple of weeks of preaching the gospel of Christ. That preacher's report did not help me to convince myself that I should continue to support such institutions. If sending young people out to sing for the churches will do more good than sending preachers out to preach the gospel, we need more singing and less preaching. But no faithful man will ever agree that that is what is needed! The commission still reads, "*Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel unto every creature.*" That's what God said to do! That must be what the world needs. And it must be what the church needs, too. Just plain, positive, gospel preaching.

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