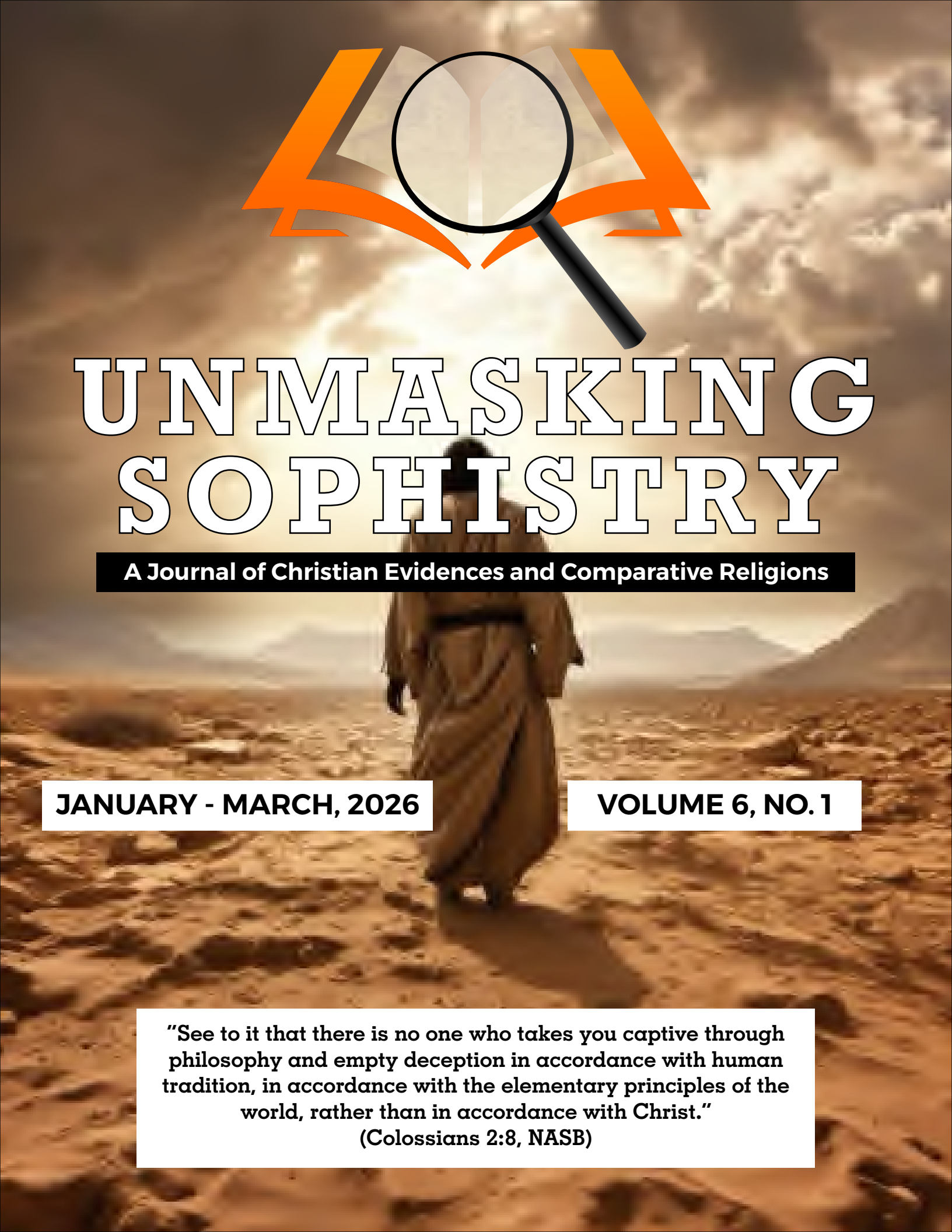

UNMASKING SOPHISTRY

A Journal of Christian Evidences and Comparative Religions

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VOLUME 6, NO. 1

"See to it that there is no one who takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception in accordance with human tradition, in accordance with the elementary principles of the world, rather than in accordance with Christ."
(Colossians 2:8, NASB)

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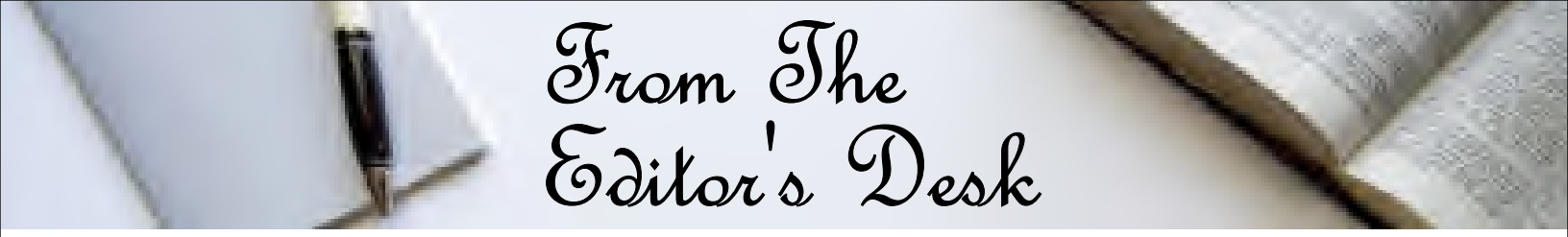


From The Editor's Desk

This is the twenty-first edition of *Unmasking Sophistry Magazine* since its inception and the first issue published in 2026. We thank God for granting us the strength and opportunity to continue this work. The purpose of this journal remains unchanged: to teach the truth of God's Word and to expose arguments formulated in defense of false religion and those designed to oppose the Christian faith.

In the previous edition, we examined a variety of subjects across several sections, including *Speaking Where the Bible Speaks* and *Studying the History of Fallible Religious Leaders*; *Boldness in the Service of the Lord*; *Was Peter the First Pope?*; *The Church and Human Organizations*; *Irresistible Grace: How Are We Saved by Grace Through Faith?*; *The Lord's Supper: More Than a Tradition*; *The Obvious Errors of Premillennialism*; *Proof for the Inspiration of the Bible*; *Quibbles that Backfired*; and other thought-provoking topics.

In this edition, readers will find discussions on *Resolutions from the Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery*; *Why I Believe the Bible*; *The Difference Between Aids and Additions to the Command of Scripture*; *Broken Homes: From Sacred Vows to Shattered Dreams*; *An Exchange on Churches Establishing Schools*; *Was Peter the First Pope?*; *Why Church Programmes Must Be Gospel-Centered*; *Quibbles that Backfired*; and other engaging subjects.

Readers are warmly reminded that *Unmasking Sophistry Magazine* is available online. All past and present editions can be freely accessed and downloaded at www.unmaskingsophistry.com/downloads

The magazine's open-door policy remains firmly in place. Any reader who disagrees with an article published in any edition is welcome to submit a rebuttal, which we are willing to publish alongside a response from the original author in the same edition. Alternatively, a formal proposition may be set for both the author and the dissenting party to affirm and deny respectively, with the shared goal of arriving at the truth on the subject under discussion.

We sincerely appreciate the prayers, feedback, and encouragement we continue to receive from our readers. We remain committed to holding fast "the pattern of sound words" which we have received 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

Why I Believe the Bible

By Keith Greer

Today, God's book is under attack from many enemies. Even some in the church question the Bible's validity. Why should we believe the Bible? Allow me to present, for your consideration, a few of my reasons for believing.

It Is Completely Honest

Consider the honesty of the things revealed in the scriptures. Abraham, the father of the Israelites, was a great man of faith, but he was not perfect. "*Please say you are my sister, that it may be well with me for your sake, and that I may live because of you*" (Genesis 12:13). He lied about Sarah being his wife. This did not happen just once; it happened on two different occasions! (Genesis 20:1-5). Why would God put this account in the biblical record?

What about David and Bathsheba? David was a man after God's own heart (Acts 13:22). But this same great king committed adultery with Bathsheba and tried to hide it by murdering her husband (II Samuel 11, 12)!

These and other incidents given illustrate the humanity of the players in the Bible stories. The Bible tells the bad along with the good.

Jesus chose twelve men to be his disciples. From the beginning, He knew that one of them would betray Him. But that knowledge did not diminish from His love for all of them -- including Judas Iscariot! He forewarned them that their work would not be like a walk in the park (Matthew 10:16-35)!

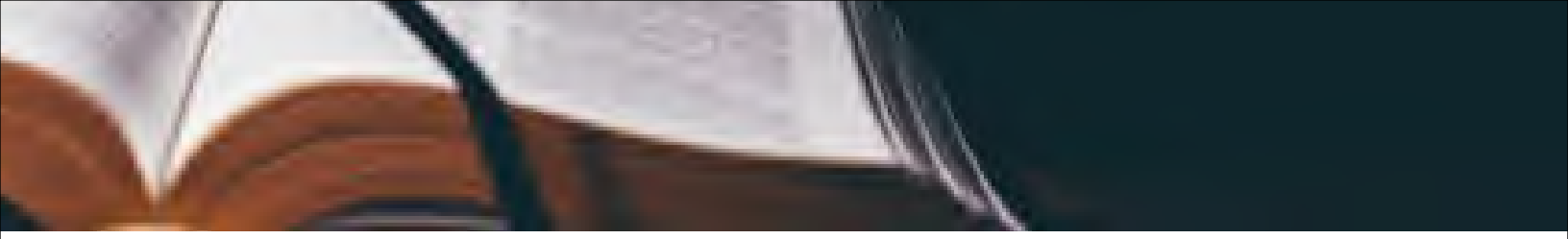
We know this truth from our own life experiences. When truth confronts error, sparks fly. The Bible tells the "entire story" of the men and women whose lives it narrates within its pages. If I were writing a book about my life, I might be tempted to leave out the parts that didn't present me in a good light. The inspired record is painfully honest.

It Harmonizes Perfectly

The Bible was written in three languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek) over a period of 1600 years by more than 40 authors who lived at different times and never met. The 39 Old Testament books and the 27 New Testament books blend in perfect unity and harmony. How could this be? They all had insider information! From the creation in Genesis 1 to a final glimpse of heaven in Revelation 22, it paints a perfect picture. The theme and main character are Jesus Christ. He is the common thread that ties the Bible into a beautiful love story. Genesis through Malachi contain prophecies about the coming Messiah. From Matthew, where we read of His birth, through Acts 1, which tells about His ascension back to heaven, we read about the brief life and times of Jesus Christ. Acts 2 through the end of the Revelation tells the powerful message of His promise to return and redeem us eternally! This story, told in perfect harmony and unity, contains no contradictions. It is impossible to believe it could be anything other than God's work.

It Changes Lives

The Bible stands alone as the best "self-help" book ever written! No other book can take lives that are without direction, value, or profit and transform them into wonderful, productive, and fulfilling. It is God's power to save (Romans 1:16). This book tells us how to raise our children, how to have good marriages, how to have good civil government, how to make a difference in the world, and how to get from earth to an eternal home—heaven. What other book can



claim such attributes? Look at Paul's description of love in I Corinthians 13:1-8. Look at the golden rule in Matthew 7:12.

These things alone make the Bible worthy of the time it takes to examine it.

Do you believe the Bible is from God?

THE IMPACT OF CHURCH ATTENDANCE

WHAT MY PRESENCE DID

1. It caused people to have confidence in me.
2. It made people know that I regarded my spiritual welfare as a matter of great importance.
3. It had a good effect on the services.
4. It encouraged the brethren and helped the kingdom of Christ.
5. It caused others to look to Christ for salvation.
6. It made my life stronger.
7. It removed a stumbling block from the sinner's path.
8. It pleased God and I was happy.
9. It caused others to say, "He practiced what he preached."

WHAT MY ABSENCE DID

1. It made some question the reality of religion.
2. It made some think that I was a pretender.
3. It made some think that I regarded my spiritual welfare as a matter of small concern.
4. It weakened the effect of the worship services.
5. It made it harder for the preacher to preach.
6. It discouraged the brethren and, therefore, robbed them of a blessing.
7. It caused others to stay away from the church.
8. It made it harder for me to meet the temptations of the devil.
9. It gave the devil more power over lost souls.
10. It encouraged the habit of non-church-going.

DO NOT STAY AWAY

1. Because you are poor. There is no admission charge.
2. Because it rains. You go to work in the rain!
3. Because it is hot. It is hot at your house too.
4. Because no one invited you. People go to the movies without being begged.
5. Because we have a crowd? What about ball games?
6. Because you do not like the preacher. Remember, he's human like you.
7. Because your job makes you tired. You could lose your job.
8. Because there are hypocrites. You associate with them everyday.
9. Because you have company. They will admire your loyalty to Christ if you invite them along or they will wait until you get back.
10. Because you have plenty of time left. Are you sure?

Author Unknown

World Religions

Is Religion Purely The Product Of Social Conditioning?

By Shane Scott

If you have been following the current series of articles I have been writing, you know that I am responding to some common objections raised against Christianity by unbelievers. There was a time when this sort of study (called apologetics) was a small niche that interested only a handful of Christians. But as our society becomes more secularized, and as unbelievers become more aggressive in promoting their beliefs, the practice of apologetics can no longer be relegated to a narrow, technical domain reserved for intellectuals. Increasingly, apologetics is becoming one and the same thing as evangelism, and all Christians need to be prepared to defend their faith.

This particular series was inspired by a Facebook discussion I had with some friends I have come to know through a hobby we share. So far, I have discussed three objections to Christian faith that they raised in this discussion:

- The notion that faith is belief without evidence.
- The idea that faith is nothing more than wishful thinking.
- The assumption that scientific proof is the only sort of proof that is valid.

In this article, I'd like to address an objection raised by one of my friends who happens to live in Sweden, a very unreligious country. He offered this argument against the validity of faith:

If you're born in the US you are very likely to become a Christian. If born in Iran it's [likely you will be a] Muslim. Etc, and so forth. If I were born in Iran I would without the shadow of a doubt be a Muslim. That to me is strong evidence for religion to be more about social upbringing rather than spirituality.

So what my friend was claiming is that religious belief is simply the product of social conditioning. An American is likely to be a Christian. An Iranian is likely to be a Muslim. An Indian is likely to be a Hindu. This is not because of reason, logic, or evidence, but rather the mere luck of the draw in terms of where a person is born. This therefore undermines the notion that a person's religion is anything other than the product of her environment.

So I asked my Swedish friend this question: Is your belief – that religious faith is the result of social conditioning – the result of social conditioning?

My friend never answered this question.

And if you think about the possible answers, you can see why this question would have been an awkward one to answer. If he said, "Yes, my belief that religious faith is the result of social conditioning is itself the result of social conditioning," then I would have immediately followed up with another question. "Is your socially conditioned belief valid?" If he said "yes," then the obvious point would be that it is possible to hold beliefs that are socially conditioned that are nevertheless valid and true, and therefore religious faith is not inherently irrational simply because it is socially conditioned. And of course, if he said, "No, my socially conditioned belief is not valid," then he has refuted his own argument!

On the other hand, he could have answered my question, "No, my belief is not the result of social conditioning." And in that case, I would have pointed out that he would therefore be claiming that it is possible to arrive at beliefs even if they are not the

result of one's environment, and therefore it is impossible to dismiss all religious belief as purely the product of social conditioning. After all, if he can arrive at beliefs that aren't socially conditioned, then so could I, and so could you.

Therefore, the argument against the validity of Christian faith on the basis of social conditioning fails.

No one would dispute that social factors play a huge role in shaping our beliefs. This is the very reason the Bible teaches parents to raise their children in the Lord's discipline and instruction (Ephesians 6:4), and it is why Scripture warns Christians about the corrupting influence of the world (James 4:4). So yes, where a person is born, how a person is raised, the friends a person makes – all of these environmental influences are going to wield a tremendous impact on what a person believes.

But that is not really the issue. The real issue is, does this social conditioning automatically invalidate religious faith? And the answer is clearly, no. Otherwise we must (to be consistent) agree that since all beliefs are socially conditioned, all beliefs are invalid, including that one! The end result is hopeless self-contradiction.

The reality is that while social conditioning is influential, it is not determinative. Many Americans are not Christians, many Iranians are not Muslims, many Swedes are not atheists, many Indians are not Hindi. And from the first century point of view, the Great Commission was a mandate to defy all social norms with the proclamation that Jesus is the world's true King, and to bring all nations to repentance (Luke 24:47; Matthew 28:19-20). The Book of Acts describes the spread of the gospel across all kinds of cultures, touching people in all strata of society. In story after story, whether it was a Jewish zealot, a Samaritan charlatan, an Ethiopian government official, an Italian soldier, a Philippian jailer, people ventured beyond their social conditioning to follow Jesus. And people still do so today.

PRACTICE RIGHTEOUSNESS

We have a choice to either do what is right or do what is wrong. As followers of Christ, it is important that we choose to do what is right.

However, there are many who have the misconception that if we are Christians, then the righteousness of Christ has been imputed to us. This means that even if we do what is wrong, the perfect righteousness of Christ "covers" us so that God only sees that and not our sins.

It is certainly true that one can only be "righteous" if God declares him to be righteous. Yet who is it that God declares to be righteous?

John contrasted two different types of behavior – practicing sin and practicing righteousness (1 John 3:4, 7). Notice what he said about the latter: "Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous" (1 John 3:7). Righteousness necessarily involves action on our part. We must do what is right. Or, to use the terminology from earlier in this letter, we are to "walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light" (1 John 1:7).

So practice righteousness. We can only be righteous if God declares us to be righteous. For this to happen, we must strive to be like Him by following His will that has been revealed in His word.

Andy Sochor

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 is a continuation of the issue which was started in the last three editions 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 fourth affirmative and Thrasher's fourth negative are presented here. Subsequent affirmative and negative articles of both debaters will be published in the coming editions of Unmasking Sophistry. Previous editions of the magazine can be downloaded at www.unmaskingsophistry.com Following this discourse on Pope is a brief exchange on whether or not the church may establish secular schools.

Affirmative: John Martignoni | Bible Christian Society

Martignoni's Fourth Affirmative

I must have touched a nerve with Mr. Thrasher, as he accused me of using an "insulting epithet" with the term "Campbellite" Church of Christ. No insult intended. I merely used that term to distinguish his faith tradition from the "Catholic" Church of Christ to which I belong. I didn't realize that associating his church with its founders (the Campbells) would cause insult. I find his sensitivity to be a bit disingenous, however, as he has no sensitivity when it comes to insulting my church.

Regarding his arguments, notice how he responds to some things I have posed to him, but not others. He has to be very careful because his faith tradition is prone to contradicting itself over and over again in its theology, and particularly in its interpretation of Scripture.

For instance: He states that we must "respect the silence of the Scriptures!" Really?! This is his main argument in regards to this debate - that nowhere does the Bible actually say, verbatim, "Peter was the Pope," the "Bishop of Rome," or the "Head of the Church." So, his argument goes, since Scripture is "silent" on the matter, Peter was not the first Pope.

Yet, as previously stated, the Bible nowhere calls itself "The Bible." But, he calls it "The Bible." Do the Greek words biblion and biblios (book or scroll) appear in Scripture? Absolutely. Do they once refer to all 73 books of the Bible as "The Bible." No. Does Mr. Thrasher respect that silence? No.

On earth and in Heaven we see musical instruments used in the worship and praise of God (Ps 33:2-3; Rev 5:8). Since God has commanded the use of musical instruments in worship and praise, then if God had changed His mind and no longer wanted us to use musical instruments in worship and praise, one would expect to find that command in the Bible, right? Does the Bible ever ban the use of musical instruments in the worship and praise of God. No. Does Mr. Thrasher respect that silence? No. And, to use Thrasher's reasoning, if Jesus had not wanted us to use musical instruments, He could have easily told us so.

Does the Bible ever say to use contraception? No.

Does Mr. Thrasher's church of Christ respect that silence? No. Did Thrasher have any comment on this argument? No. If Jesus had wanted us to use contraception, He could have easily told us so.

Does the Bible ever say to meet together at the church on Wednesday night? No. Does Thrasher respect that silence? No. In fact, he tries to twist the verse, "Where two or three are gathered in My name," to somehow make it say, "Gather at the church on Wednesday night." And, to use his fundamentalist method of Scripture interpretation: Jesus says wherever "two or three" are gathered in His name, He doesn't say anything about four or more people, does He? Ridiculous interpretation? Indeed! But it employs his method of scriptural interpretation.

Of all the Bible verses Mr. Thrasher trots out to prove that "God is the source" of the Gospel of Mark, did one of them ever mention the "Gospel of Mark?" No. Did one of them ever say, "God is the source of the Gospel of Mark?" No. Did one of them ever say, "Mark was inspired by the Holy Spirit?" No. Did one of them ever say, "The Gospel of Mark is inspired Scripture?" No. Does Mr. Thrasher respect that silence? No. If Jesus had wanted us to know that the Gospel of Mark was inspired Scripture, He could have easily told us so.

The gyrations and twisting that Mr. Thrasher goes through to get the Scriptures to say what he wants them to say are almost unbelievable! The fact is, even though the Bible nowhere states that God is the source of the Gospel of Mark, and even though Mr. Thrasher has confessed that he doesn't even know who wrote the Gospel of Mark, he believes the Gospel of Mark was written by Mark and it is indeed inspired! The only problem is, he just can't tell us the source for his belief.

To summarize: the Scripture is silent, in his fallible opinion, on Peter being the 1st head of the Church; therefore, he doesn't believe Peter was and he believes the Catholic Church of Christ wrong to teach such a thing. The Scripture is also silent, according to his own words, on who wrote the Gospel of Mark; yet, he believes Mark wrote Mark. The Scripture is silent as to whether the Gospel of Mark was inspired by God; yet, he believes it was. The Scripture is silent on God banning musical instruments in worship; yet, he believes they were. The Scripture is silent on the use of contraception; yet, he believes it's okay to use. The Scripture is silent on Wednesday night church meetings; yet, he attends them. Can we talk double standard? Contradiction? Hypocrisy even?

Mr. Thrasher, I am asking you again to give me book, chapter, and verse that states: "God inspired the Gospel of Mark," or "Mark was inspired by the Holy Spirit," or any similar passage that proves, from the Bible, that Mark was indeed inspired by the Holy Spirit. Or, give me any book, chapter, and verse that states Mark was an Apostle or that he ever performed a miracle. After all, that's your belief about "proof" of inspiration, isn't it? If you cannot do so, then please have the intellectual honesty to admit that your argument about the Scripture's "silence" in regard to it not stating, verbatim, "Peter was the first Pope," is a specious argument and proves absolutely nothing!

Furthermore, he quoted from the Letter to the Hebrews in his reply. Who wrote that letter, Mr. Thrasher? You don't know. Well, if you don't know who wrote it, how do you know it is inspired? Does the Bible somewhere say, "The Letter to the Hebrews is inspired Scripture?" No! Therefore, by the same reasoning you use to "prove" Peter was not the 1st Pope, I can "prove" the Letter to the Hebrews is not inspired Scripture. Who told you, Mr. Thrasher, that the Letter to the Hebrews is inspired Scripture? Or

that the Gospel of Mark is inspired Scripture? I demand you answer those questions, because if you can't, then all of your arguments are worthless and you must concede this debate.

Now, about Mr. Thrasher's previous quotations of early Christian writers in regard to the successors of Peter. Please note pretty much everything he quoted buttressed my arguments. He thought he was somehow trapping me by asking me to name the first ten Popes and then he would pounce on me and "prove" Peter wasn't the first Pope by showing that there was disagreement amongst early Christians as to the order and timing of Peter's successors. Well, he actually proved too much. First of all, the early Christian sources he quoted were not disagreeing about whether or not Peter was the first head of the Church, they simply disagreed about the exact order and timing of Peter's first few successors as head of the Church! Mr. Thrasher was quoting early Christians who all took for granted that Peter was the first head of the Church. In essence, he conceded the debate with those quotations. The argument went from being about whether or not Peter was the first head of the Church, to being about who succeeded him as head of the Church and when! Debate over!

Second, if disagreements among early Christians regarding the facts about Peter's successors, somehow "prove" Peter wasn't the first Pope - as Thrasher believes - then that must mean Hebrews, James, 2nd Peter, 2nd and 3rd John, Jude, and Revelation are all not inspired Scripture. After all, there was disagreement over the canonicity of all of those books amongst early Christians. So, according to Thrasher's logic, since disagreement proves error, those books are not inspired Scripture.

I noticed Mr. Thrasher had no answer for my comments regarding Jesus appointing Peter as the shepherd of His flock, so I must assume that he simply has no answer. Mr. Thrasher, if Jesus is not appointing Peter as the shepherd of His flock in John 21:15-17, then please tell us what He is doing. Explain that passage for all to read.

Now, regarding Thrasher's comments on Isaiah 22:15-22, I find it hard to take them seriously. He states that Shebna is called the "steward," but not the "Prime Minister," as if the exact title mattered and as if the function of the steward in this case and the function of a prime minister are somehow not one and the same. Is he not aware that the "steward" of the kingdom, the one who has been given the keys, is the chief minister, or the "prime" minister in the kingdom, regardless of his actual title? And that, after the king himself, the steward of the kingdom is the highest ranking authority in the kingdom?! Is he really not aware of the authority the "key of the house of David" signifies? I truly find that hard to believe.

And, Mr. Thrasher asked if I think "that Eliakim being given the key signifies that Eliakim was *Pope*?" First of all, please note that he avoided my question of what exactly does being given the key mean? He didn't answer. Why? He can't. At least, he can't in a way that will fit his theology and still make sense.

Secondly, my answer to his question is, yes. He may have ignored it in my first affirmative, but the word, "Pope," simply means, father. And, the Word of God itself calls Eliakim "a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah." (By the way, Mr. Thrasher, don't you believe that we aren't supposed to call anyone "father;" yet, God Himself is calling Eliakim, "father." What's up with that?!) So, Eliakim was the Old Testament equivalent to the Pope. He was the steward of the house of Judah. A father to the people of the house of David. And, is the church not the New Testament house of David? Indeed it is. And,

what does the word, "Pope," mean? Father. Just so, the Pope is a father for the people of the house of David, the Church. And the Pope's role, as holder of the keys, is the same as the role of the steward of the Kingdom. He is the highest authority in the Kingdom, after the King Himself.

Which means, that when Jesus gives Peter, and Peter **ALONE**, the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven in Matthew 16 (hearkening back to Isaiah 22 and Eliakim), He is indeed appointing Peter to be a father (pappas, papa, pope) to His people, just as God appointed Eliakim to be a father (pappas, papa, pope) to His people. And this fatherhood, this authority, was signified by the keys. Also, the fact that Shebna was replaced by Eliakim, denotes succession in the office. As Shebna was succeeded, so was Eliakim, and so was Peter.

So, while the Bible may not say, verbatim, "Peter was the Pope," it is very clear from Matthew 16:16-19 and Isaiah 22:15-22, that Jesus was indeed appointing Peter to be a pope, or a father, to His people.

Finally, Thrasher's response to my argument about Luke 22:24-26 is nonsensical. I can't tell if he is purposely ignoring what I said or simply doesn't understand it. After they ask Jesus who is the greatest among them, how does Jesus respond? He defines the greatest among them as being he that serves the rest. And then what does He do? He turns to Peter and tells him to serve the rest. "Strengthen your brethren," the other Apostles, He says to Peter. Jesus tells all of them, out loud, that He will be praying specifically for Peter to strengthen the rest of them.

[Would be happy to debate which is the real Church of Christ.]

OUR WAYS WILL BE TESTED

As Job endured the trials that had come upon him, he desired to appeal his cause to the Lord (Job 23:3-4). He believed he would be found to be upright (Job 23:7), yet he expressed confusion as to why he was suffering (Job 23:8-9).

Job then said, "*But* [God] *knows the way I take; when He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold. My foot has held fast to His path; I have kept His way and not turned aside*" (Job 23:10-11). Though his circumstances were not pleasant, he held onto the hope that he would come through this period of testing better than he was before.

This is important for us to remember as we face difficulties in this life. James said we should "*consider it all joy...when* [we] *encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of* [our] *faith produces endurance...so that* [we] *may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing*" (James 1:2-4). Peter wrote that "*the proof of* [our] *faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ*" (1 Peter 1:7). If we persevere through trials, we will come out on the other side with a stronger faith.

So remember that our ways will be tested. How we face hardships is a reflection of our faith. Even if we do not understand why we are suffering as we are, let us continue to trust in God that all will be well in the end.

Andy Sochor

DISCOURSE

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

Denial: Thomas N. Thrasher | Church of Christ

Thrasher's Fourth Negative

My friend thinks he "touched a nerve" by using an "insulting epithet" ("Campbellite"). He says, "I didn't realize that associating his church with its founders (the Campbells) would cause insult." John is surely not so naïve or uninformed that he does not know the term "Campbellite" is offensive to us. John's pretense at innocence in repeatedly using that term is quite disingenuous! John then charges that I have been guilty of "insulting" his church; however, he neglects to cite any instances. I have referred to the *Roman Catholic Church* because that is the term used in **his proposition**, and he accepts it. Not only do I not accept the term "Campbellite," I reject it!

John mentions several items again (the term *Bible*, instrumental music in worship, church meetings on Wednesday nights, and authorship of Bible books). Since I have already commented on these matters, since his remarks do not provide evidence for his proposition, and since my rebuttal space is limited, I ask you to re-read my third speech for my replies to these points.

However, my friend also mentions "contraception" again (apparently a topic of great importance to him), yet he has never submitted a single verse supporting his viewpoint on this issue. If he wishes to introduce some scriptural evidence on "contraception," I will respond. However, I am confident that whatever he offers will not demonstrate that Peter was Pope!

John asked, "Do the Greek words biblion and biblios ... once refer to all 73 books of the Bible as 'The Bible'"? John, was that a "trick" question? My Bible has 66 books. However, Revelation 20:12, "And the dead were judged ... by the things which were **written in *the books***" (*tois bibliois*), is an example.

My opponent also asked, "Of all the Bible verses Mr. Thrasher trots out to prove that 'God is the source' of the Gospel of Mark, did one of them ever mention the 'Gospel of Mark?'" 2 Timothy 3:16 states: "**All Scripture** is given by inspiration of God..."

John states: "To summarize: the Scripture is silent, in his fallible opinion, on Peter being the 1st head of the Church; therefore, he doesn't believe Peter was." My friend misrepresents my rebuttal arguments by **ignoring** many points I have made. For example, note the following scriptural evidence that Peter was **not** a Pope:

- According to the Bible, Jesus is the **only** Head of the church (Ephesians 1:22-23; 5:23; Colossians 1:19). What verse teaches Peter or his alleged successors were Heads?
- Peter did not have authority over other apostles. Paul wrote, "In **nothing** was I behind the most eminent apostles" (2 Corinthians 12:11); "I am **not at all inferior** to the most eminent apostles" (2 Corinthians 11:5).
- Jesus condemned exalting one disciple above others: "But you, do not be called 'Rabbi'; for One is your Teacher, the Christ, and **you are all brethren**" (Matthew 23:8).
- Peter referred to himself as *a fellow elder*: "The **elders** who are among you I exhort, I who am a **fellow elder** ... shepherd the flock of God which is **among you**, serving as overseers, ... and when the **Chief Shepherd** appears..." (1 Peter 5:1-4). Peter

did not claim preeminence over other elders. He declared the oversight of elders is limited to the local church. Peter called Jesus (not himself) the Chief Shepherd.

- Peter's name is not mentioned first in several passages (Galatians 2:9; 1 Corinthians 1:12; 3:22; 9:5), so, by John's reasoning, Peter must not have been Pope!
- The power to "bind and loose" was given to **all** the apostles (Matthew 18:18), not just Peter!
- The **12 apostles** were (in some sense) to "sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matthew 19:28).
- Peter did **not accept reverence** from men (Acts 10:25-26).
- The Bible provides no indication that Peter accepted titles such as Pope, Vicar of Christ, Bishop of Rome, Head of the Church (cf. 1 Peter 1:1; 2 Peter 1:1).
- Elders/Bishops were instructed to "shepherd the flock of God which is **among you**, serving as overseers" (1 Peter 5:1-3), not the church universal.
- The term "Holy Father" is never used of Peter. It is only used by Jesus in addressing God the Father (John 17:11).
- Peter said nothing about being a Pope or having any papal successors (Book of Acts; 1 Peter; 2 Peter).
- Peter was a married man (1 Corinthians 9:5; Matthew 8:14). John, who was the last married Pope of whom you have knowledge?
- The office and qualifications of Pope are never mentioned in the Scriptures; however, others are (e.g., apostles--Ephesians 4:11; 2 Corinthians 12:11-12; bishops or elders-Acts 20:17, 28; 1 Timothy 3:1-7; 1 Peter 5:1-3; deacons--Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:8-13); and evangelists (2 Timothy 4:5). "And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers" (Ephesians 4:11), but no mention of Popes, Cardinals, or Archbishops!
- The apostle Paul wrote several letters to or from Rome, naming many individuals (e.g., Romans 16:1-23; Colossians 4:7-14; 2 Timothy 4:9-21; Philemon 23-24). However, Paul never mentions Peter, a peculiar omission if Peter was Bishop of Rome or Pope!
- Peter did not have primacy. Paul wrote: "God shows personal favoritism to no man—for those who seemed to be something added nothing to me. But on the contrary, when they saw that the gospel for the uncircumcised had been committed to me, as the gospel for the circumcised was to Peter (for He who worked effectively in Peter for the apostleship to the circumcised also worked effectively in me toward the Gentiles), and when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised" (Galatians 2:6-9).
- Peter never celebrated mass, never heard confessions, never directed anyone to pray to Mary or the saints, never advocated the use of holy water, never ordered people to abstain from meat on Fridays or during Lent, never taught that priests and nuns should not marry, never presented his foot to be kissed, and never lived in a palace with soldiers to guard him and numerous servants to supply his wants. He didn't do these things and many others ... because he was **never Pope**!

John asserts, "In essence, he conceded the debate with those quotations" concerning the early so-called popes. Completely untrue! My friend offered statements regarding the primacy of Peter from Tertullian (ca 213 A.D.), Clement of Alexandria (ca 200 A.D.), Origen (ca 230 A.D.), and Cyprian of Carthage (ca 251 A.D.), writing approximately 170-221 years **after** the beginning of the church!

My opponent admits, "There was disagreement amongst early Christians as to the order and timing of Peter's successors." That is exactly what I was demonstrating—their testimony is not inspired or necessarily trustworthy. Therefore, we ought to depend upon inspired scripture, not uninspired (and often contradictory) statements of men as evidence for John's proposition. As previously quoted:

"In the article PAPACY we have referred to the **uncertainty** prevailing in regard to the first bishops of Rome. Roman Catholic writers themselves quite generally admit that the **statements of ancient Church-writers on the subject are entirely irreconcilable**, and that it is **impossible** to establish with any degree of certainty the order in which they followed each other, the years of their accession to the see of Rome, and the year of their death" (*Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature*, volume 8, page 409).

John never answered some questions I asked in my second speech: 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**?

My opponent argued that Jesus appointed Peter as "shepherd of His flock" (John 21:15-17); therefore, Peter was over the other apostles and head of the whole church. However, **all the apostles** were told to feed the sheep in the sense of teaching them (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:1516) and caring for them (2 Corinthians 11:28). Bishops/elders were also told to feed the flock (1 Peter 5:1-3; Acts 20:28). Are all of them Popes?

The truth is that there is no passage, including John 21, that calls Peter the Chief Shepherd or that states He has authority over the other apostles. Jesus is the Chief Shepherd (1 Peter 5:4) and Great Shepherd (Hebrews 13:20), not Peter. The fundamental error of the doctrine of Papal authority is that it exalts a man to the place of God. Jesus is Head (Ephesians 1:22-23), Foundation (1 Corinthians 3:11), and Chief Shepherd (1 Peter 5:4).

John asked, "If Jesus is not appointing Peter as the shepherd of His flock ... what He is doing"? After Peter's three-fold denial of the Lord (Luke 22:34, 61), Jesus uses this occasion to restore Peter to His service. Despite Peter's previous failures, the Lord now admonishes Peter to "follow Me" (John 21:19, 22).

John asked, "Don't you believe that we aren't supposed to call anyone 'father'"? **In the sense that Jesus prohibited it, we shouldn't**—"Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven" (Matthew 23:9). John, what do you think the Lord meant when He said that? Should we **do** what He said **not to do**?

John apparently overlooked my response to his argument that Peter's being told to "strengthen your brethren" (Luke 22:24-26) shows he was to become the Pope:

- Paul and his company "returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, **strengthening** the souls of the disciples" (Acts 14:21-22).
- "Judas and Silas, themselves being prophets also, exhorted and **strengthened** the brethren" (Acts 15:32).

- Paul "went through Syria and Cilicia, **strengthening** the churches" (Acts 15:41) and he "went over the region of Galatia and Phrygia in order, **strengthening** all the disciples" (Acts 18:23). Strengthening others does not make a person Pope!

Furthermore, my friend evidently thought that the Lord's praying specifically for Peter meant he would become Pope. However, my friend again overlooked my observation that Jesus also prayed for **all** of the apostles (John 17:9). Were all of the apostles Popes? Furthermore, the context shows that Jesus did not pray for Peter to exalt him as Pope, but because Jesus knew that Peter was soon to deny Him (Luke 22:34). The context also indicates that Peter would not be **over** the other apostles; rather, the apostles [plural] would in some sense "sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (:28-30).

My opponent claims, "It is very clear from Matthew 16:16-19 and Isaiah 22:15-22, that Jesus was indeed appointing Peter to be a pope, or a father, to His people." Actually, neither passage says anything that necessitates that conclusion. Isaiah 22 has nothing to do with the apostle Peter, despite John's assertions.

Peter had important work to do in the kingdom. He opened the door to the kingdom through his **preaching** to Jews (Acts 2) and Gentiles (Acts 10). This is the idea of Peter's having the "keys of the kingdom" (Matthew 16:19); he had **authority** to preach the gospel so people could be saved and enter the kingdom.

Others besides Peter also engaged in preaching work that opened the door to the Lord's kingdom: **Paul** (1 Corinthians 16:9; 2 Corinthians 2:12; Colossians 4:3; Acts 16:14); **Paul and Barnabas** (Acts 14:27); the evangelist **Titus** also had **authority** (Titus 2:15).

The **other apostles** likewise used the keys of the kingdom, for Jesus told them, "Assuredly, I say to you [plural], whatever you [plural] bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you [plural] loose on earth will be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 18:18; cf. Matthew 16:19). The Lord gave all of the apostles **the same** binding-and-loosing authority and the same commission (Matthew 16:19; 18:18; 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-20).

Please give your attention to my friend's closing speech.

THE FEAR OF THE LORD IS WISDOM

Job posed the question: "Where can wisdom be found? And where is the place of understanding?" (Job 28:12). Throughout history, man has searched for wisdom. Many recognize its great value. "Pure gold cannot be given in exchange for it, nor can silver be weighed as its price" (Job 28:15).

So where can wisdom be found? And what do we need to possess in order to obtain wisdom? Job said, "God understands its way, and He knows its place" (Job 28:23).

Because God is the creator of all things, wisdom – true wisdom –may be found with Him. He alone can impart it to us through what He has revealed. But how can we obtain it? Job continued, "And to man He said, 'Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding'" (Job 28:28).

Continued on pg. 19

DISCOURSE

A Congregation Can Establish A School Under Necessary Inference

Affirmative: Mike Udam | Church of Christ

Denial: Emmanuel Alonge & Joseph Oyerinde | Church of Christ

The following article was posted to various Nigerian brethren WhatsApp groups by brother Mike Udam. Among the numerous responses received were that of brothers Emmanuel Alonge and Joseph Oyerinde. It has been requested that Brother Udam's article and both responses of brothers Alonge and Oyerinde be reproduced in this edition of Unmasking Sophistry. We are happy to do that.

The Establishment Of Schools By Congregations Under Necessary Inference

By Mike Udam | Church of Christ

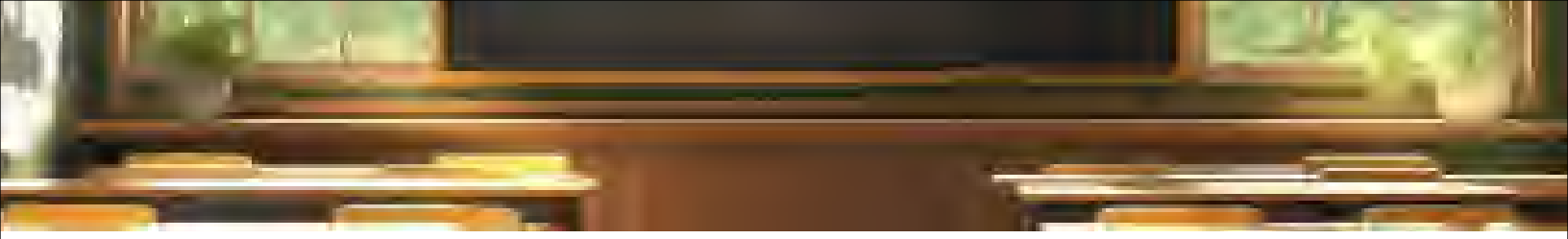
While it is true that there is no direct command in the New Testament to establish schools to teach secular subjects and grow our children academically with a tone of strong moral principle, and while there is no approved apostolic example, a congregation can establish a school under necessary inference.

God knows we will have children. God also knows that we are commanded to train our children: "And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children" (Deuteronomy 6:6–7). Again, Scripture says, "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6). The apostle Paul reminds fathers, "Bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4). These passages show clearly that God has placed the responsibility of training children on His people. The world today is filled with spiritual and moral corruption, and it is unsafe to leave our children to the influence of such a polluted system. If the church is to be sustained in the future, then the church needs to wake up and establish schools that will train our children academically while grounding them in strong Christian values.

It is indeed a shame and a paradox that we criticize denominations for leaving the truth, yet we still run to their schools to give our children the very training we claim is spiritually compromised. This is hypocrisy, and it weakens our argument against denominationalism. If we truly believe in raising a new generation of Christians who will keep the church strong and pure, then we must provide schools that reflect the truth and moral integrity we preach from the pulpit.

If we cannot do it as a church, because some may still argue, then faithful brethren should come together and start schools across the country. There is an urgent need for schools in Abuja, Kaduna, Makurdi, Port Harcourt, and Lagos. If we fold our hands and refuse to act, the world will continue to shape our children to its own pattern, and we will pay dearly for it in the next generation.

Brethren, the time is now. We have to wake up, come together, and start a school today. The future of our children, the survival of the church, and the preservation of the truth demand urgent and decisive action. Let this awake us to action rather than argument. Whichever divide you belong—whether you believe the church as a body can start it, or you believe brethren must gather privately to start it—let



us begin. Let the church build a team and start one today. Let brethren who are convinced the church cannot, gather and start one today. But let both sides compete in action, not in endless argument.

THE PRICE OF VICTORY IS HIGH

Former Alabama football coach, Paul Bear Bryant said: *"The price of victory is high, but so are rewards—My attitude has always been, if it's worth playing, it's worth paying the price to win."* Coach Bryant was right on when it came to football, but the same can also be said for Christianity.

Jesus said there is a price to be paid if we are to follow Him. Therefore we must count the cost and be willing to renounce all we have to be His disciple (READ *"Lk. 14: 26-33)*. Many will happily follow Jesus as long as He is going where they want. But when He leads down the road of sacrifice, self-denial, suffering, or even death, are they willing to trust Him and keep following? Are we?

At times, Jesus had large crowds following Him. People loved His miracles, healing, and at times free food. He was cool, the talk of the town, the latest fad! But Jesus knew they desired the benefits of *"what He did"* rather than an understanding of *"Who He was."* They loved His gifts, not the life He was calling them to. In Jesus' earthly ministry, there came a time when the public opinion turned ugly, the cheering crowds became jeering crowds, and He knew those who were willing to follow Him, simply for what they could get, wouldn't stick around when the going got tough.

How many love the idea of eternal life, escaping hell, and having Jesus at their beck and call, but, who are not willing to leave the life they now live? Their desires, lifestyle, and sinful habits are too precious to them! Sadly, we want the rewards, but are we willing to pay the price? Are we willing to *"deny ourselves, and take up our cross daily, and follow Him?" (Lk. 9:23)*. Think on these things.

Dennis Abernathy

EVERYTHING GOD MADE IS VERY GOOD

The Bible begins with the account of creation: "*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth*" (Genesis 1:1). The rest of the opening chapter describes how God created all things in six days.

On the first day, after creating light, the text says, "*God saw that the light was good*" (Genesis 1:4). Throughout the chapter, as God added more to this new world He was making, He "*saw that*" each new thing He made "*was good*" (Genesis 1:10, 12, 18, 21, 24). Finally, He "*created man in His own image*" and set him over His creation (Genesis 1:27-30).

At the end of all of this, once He finished creating all things, the record says, "*God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good*" (Genesis 1:31). Each part on its own was "*good,*" but everything working together in harmony as God designed it was "*very good.*"

God, in His perfect wisdom, designed His creation to work together. This is true of the plants, animals, and everything else in nature. It is also true of mankind – husbands and wives with complementary roles and humans exercising dominion over the world God has made. When done according to God's plan, it reflects the Creator's wisdom.

So remember that everything God made is very good. We cannot improve upon His design. Let us recognize His wisdom and then work within the framework of what He has made.

Andy Sochor

DISCOURSE

A Congregation Can Establish A School Under Necessary Inference

A Response To "the Establishment Of Schools By Congregations Under Necessary Inference"

By Alonge Emmanuel Olusegun | Church of Christ

While it is not bad for individuals or groups to start schools and other institutions, it is a weak argument to say that the church can start secular institutions because God knows that we will have children and train them.

There are several good things we do. God knew them before we did. Some He places in the hands of families and others in the hands of the government.

If the church will now deviate from her primary mission because of what denominations who preach no gospel at all (Gal. 1:6-9) (because perversion is not a gospel) then the church would have lost focus.

You said there was no direct command and no apostolic examples. Where then does the necessary inference come from? I hope brethren are not losing focus of what is called necessary inference. It is a conclusion we cannot avoid (Fact we can deduce) based on a direct command or the apostolic example. For Jesus to have come out of water in baptism, He must have gone into the water. It was necessarily inferred in the apostolic days and now it is. If children were trained and brought up & nurtured in the apostolic days without the church venturing into secular education and faithful brethren till date still bring up their children and they serve God faithfully, what brings about the inference today that before we can nurture children the church must dive into secular school.

We should not forget that necessary inference in the subject of authority has to do with how to establish authority. The subject of secular education is within the purview of what individuals can choose to or not to do. It's not under what the church is authorized to do. No direct command, no apostolic examples and we can't infer anything from anywhere to establish it.

Meanwhile, individual Christian, families, groups of Christians or government may venture into secular institutions without violating laws if it is done without the involvement of the Lord's church & purse.

Thanks

THE FEAR OF THE LORD IS WISDOM

Continued from pg. 16

The wise man echoed this sentiment: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding" (Proverbs 9:10). We must first acknowledge who God is, recognize His greatness and our place before Him, and humbly submit to His will. Only then will we be able to obtain wisdom.

So remember that the fear of the Lord is wisdom. Rather than pursuing the wisdom of the world around us, let us seek after the wisdom that God has revealed to us. Though it is extraordinarily valuable, we do not need the riches of this world to obtain it; we simply need the proper attitude.

Andy Sochor

DISCOURSE

A Congregation Can Establish A School Under Necessary Inference

Re: The Establishment Of Schools By Congregations Under Necessary Inference

By Joseph I. Oyerinde | Church of Christ

This is to appreciate Bro. Mike Udam for his loving concern on the training of our children in the way of the Lord as parents. This should always be the concern of godly and faithful parents (Ephesians 6:4). For the past years, this concern has been brought to the attention of brethren who are parents. Thanks to God for parents who have taken up their responsibility and done the needful to bring up their children academically in the Government and the Private Schools without religious or denominational affiliations.

However, it is flagrant error to contend that there is a necessary inference for the church to establish secular school or any human institution from Bible passages that Bro. Mike cited in his writing. Instructions in Ephesians 6:4 is to the parents; and not to the church. The passage clearly says, "And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4, NKJV). "Fathers" in this text are not the church. Hence, the passage is for parents, as well as Deuteronomy 6:6-7.

In view of the foregoing, our brother Mike has not only misapplied the passage for the church; but he has perverted its application by claiming for necessary inference where there is no inference nor any necessity for the church to build a school or take up the responsibility of parents. It is disheartening that despite his good concern, he considered those who object to the issue of the church involving in establishment of human institutions as just making unfounded "arguments." Parents who failed in their duty by sending their children to religious affiliated schools where falsehood resides may be involving in hypocrisy. But such supposed hypocrisy doesn't have any bearing on the truth that there is no scriptural authority for the Lord's church to have any business in the business of human institutions. Both parents who send their children to such religious affiliated schools and churches that get involved in school business are trending on the dangerous path of lawlessness; unless they repent before it is too late. To those who trend such path, the Lord Jesus declared, "...'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'" (Matthew 7:23, NKJV).

Dear brother, while your concern is valid and good, but your suggested solution in that the church should establish secular school to train our children is misleading and dangerous. We are not to do evil that good may come (Romans 3:8).

PREACHING WORK IN NIGERIA AND GHANA

In October, 2025, Osamagbe Lesley Egharevba had the opportunity to host Chris Reeves (an American preacher and friend) in Lagos, Nigeria and to work with him in both Nigeria and Ghana, preaching the gospel for a few days from 22nd to 27th of October, 2025. A report of the trip is available here: https://www.unmaskingsophistry.com/2025/11/29/my-preaching-work-in-nigeria-and-ghana-in-2025/

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.

In a debate with Mr. W.A. Ivan, at Washburn, Missouri, in 1931, concerning the issue of baptism, Brother W. Curtis Porter introduced an argument based upon the statement made by Paul in the Colossian letter concerning the circumcision of Christ. In Colossians 2:11-13, the apostle said, "In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ. Buried with him in baptism where also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God who hath raised him from the dead. And ye being dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you of all trespasses." And upon the basis of the statement made by the apostle Paul, Porter showed that the circumcision to which the apostle referred took place, or occurred in baptism. Here is the circumcision that is called the circumcision of Christ; that is the circumcision that the Lord authorized. The word circumcision indicating a cutting loose or a cutting around; that there was a cutting loose of something, and that which is referred to is the circumcision of Christ. And that circumcision is described as putting off the body of the sins of the flesh and having your trespasses forgiven. When we are circumcised, with the circumcision of Christ, it is the cutting loose of our sins; and therefore, forgiveness of our sins cannot be accomplished except through this divine operation. But it is accomplished, Paul said, when we are buried with him in baptism and raised with him through the faith of the operation of God who hath raised him from the dead.

In response, Mr. Ivan said that this cannot be accomplished in baptism. That this circumcision cannot take place there and forgiveness of sins mentioned cannot be accomplished that way, for he declared the apostle Paul said the circumcision was made without hands, and he has never seen any baptism taken place without hands. The preacher, the man who administers baptism always uses his hands when he baptizes, and therefore it cannot refer to a circumcision taking place in that. It is a circumcision without hands. Well, of course, the circumcision is without hands, because that is the divine side. God is the one who cuts loose the sins. That is the operation God performs, it is without hands, but that certainly does not indicate that the baptism cannot be performed by men in connection with the circumcision that Jesus makes. On the same basis Porter replied that men cannot be saved by the preaching of the gospel, at least in most cases, he very seldom see any man who preached without his hands, and that circumcision is made without hands.

Church History

Resolutions from the Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery

By Andy Sochor | Kentucky, USA

On June 28, 1804, Barton W. Stone (1772-1844) and five other men signed the *Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery* (we discussed this in a previous issue – *Unmasking Sophistry*, Volume 5, Number 1). This document was one of the most significant of the Restoration Movement. It expressed a desire to dissolve their recently-formed body (the Springfield Presbytery) as they recognized that all such denominational bodies and creeds were inherently divisive. The *Last Will and Testament* also encouraged the members of other such bodies to do the same and unite together simply upon the teachings of the Bible.

"We *will*, that this body die, be dissolved, and sink into union with the Body of Christ at large; for there is but one Body, and one Spirit, even as we are called in one hope of our calling."

"We *will*, that the people henceforth take the Bible as the only sure guide to heaven; and as many as are offended with other books, which stand in competition with it, may cast them into the fire if they choose; for it is better to enter into life having one book, than having many to be cast into hell."

"Finally, we *will* that all our *sister bodies* read their Bibles carefully, that they may see their fate there determined, and prepare for death before it is too late."

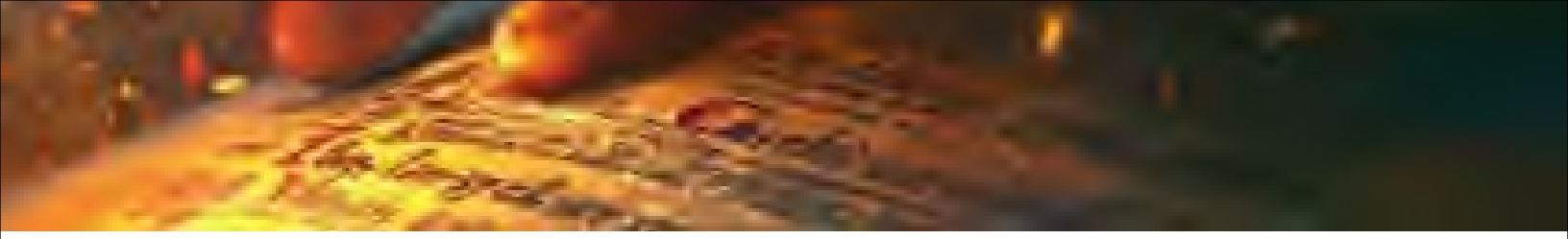
The excerpts above contain some of the highlights of this document. These ideas helped influence the direction of the Restoration Movement. They are also Scriptural. There is "*one body*" (Ephesians 4:4), the Lord's church (Ephesians 1:22-23; cf. Matthew 16:18); therefore, all religious bodies that are not Christ's are contrary to His purpose. The Bible is the only sure guide to heaven as it contains the words of eternal life (John 6:68) and is the standard by which we will be judged (John 12:48). Jesus said, "*Every plant which My heavenly Father did not plant shall be uprooted*" (Matthew 15:13). Therefore, we must leave or dissolve any man-made body prior to the time when we will have to give an account to the Lord (cf. Matthew 7:21-23; 2 Corinthians 5:10).

All of these are important lessons. Yet when we study this document in its historical setting, we often tend to consider its impact on a broad scale – how it affected churches and an entire movement as a whole. However, there are also lessons for us to take and apply as individuals.

At the beginning of a new year, many people make resolutions in order to make corrections from the previous year and improvements for the next. Of course, such growth and change can take place at *any* time. But as we resolve to improve ourselves (whether at the start of the year or at any other time), we can consider the resolutions contained in the *Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery* and how we can apply them to our lives.

Consider the following resolutions that each one of us can make:

1. Be active in the Lord's service – "We *will*, that our name of distinction with its Reverend title, be forgotten, that there be but one Lord over God's heritage, and his name One." One of the problems that has persisted throughout religious history, ever since the Lord established His church in the first century, is the elevation of certain men into a "clergy" role distinct from the "laity." Even without a formal distinction, it is possible for brethren to adopt this



mentality by thinking that the work of the church is only for certain individuals (preachers, elders, etc.). Yet it is for all of us. Paul described the ideal function of the church as being when "*the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love*" (Ephesians 4:16). Each one of us needs to be actively involved in the Lord's work for the church to function as the Lord intended.

2. Elevate God's word over our opinions – "We *will*, that our power of making laws for the government of the church...forever cease; that the people may have free course to the Bible, and adopt *the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus.*" The problem that the signers of this document sought to correct was that of making of laws and religious rules and then considering them as equal with the Scriptures. Jesus condemned the Pharisees for this: "*But in vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men*" (Matthew 15:9). There is nothing wrong with having personal opinions on any number of topics (provided that these opinions are not contrary to the expressed will of God); however, when we promote and defend them with the same (or more) zeal as we do the Scriptures, we turn people off from following the Lord. We do not want to stand in the way of someone hearing and accepting the gospel because we insist that they accept our opinions, too.

3. Be patient with others – "We *will*, that preachers and people, cultivate a spirit of mutual forbearance; pray more and dispute less..." There is a time for disputing (Acts 15:1-2; Titus 1:9; Jude 3); however, our attitude should be characterized by patience toward others. Paul explained to the brethren in Ephesus how they were to walk: "*With all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*" (Ephesians 4:2-3). Especially as we face difficult times, we need encouragement from our brethren and they need the same from us. This is best achieved when we are "*of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in Spirit, intent on one purpose*" (Philippians 2:2).

4. Be careful not to make unfair judgments of others – "We *will*, moreover, that our past conduct be examined into by all who may have correct information; but let foreigners beware of speaking evil of things which they know not." Those who signed the *Last Will and Testament* were open to criticism and correction. However, they warned that those who would pass judgment without understanding the situation, decisions, and actions of the parties involved were guilty of "speaking evil of things which they know not." Often we are tempted to pass judgment against others based upon partial or inaccurate information. In the age of social media, it is easy then to pass on that unfair judgment to others. By doing this, we can be guilty of causing division and separating "*intimate friends*" (Proverbs 16:28; 17:9). We need to be sure we do not condemn others based upon rumors, gossip, and falsehoods. Sometimes condemnation is warranted (cf. Galatians 2:11-13), but it must be based upon accurate information and the truth of God's word.

There are certainly other lessons we could take from this document, but these are just a few for us to consider. The spirit of these men was commendable in that they desired simply to follow the teachings of the Bible and maintain unity with those who would do the same. Let us strive to do this today by being active in the Lord's service, putting His word above our opinions, and being patient and fair with others.

BARBS WITH A POINT

The Difference Between Aids And Additions To The Command Of Scripture

By Osamagbe Lesley Egharevba | Lagos, Nigeria

Introduction

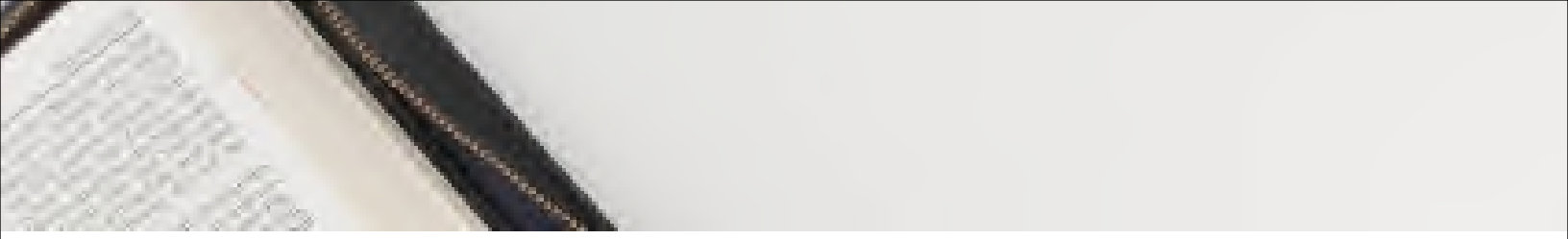
One crucial principle in biblical interpretation and congregational practice is the distinction between **aids** and **additions**. To be obedient to God's Word (II Timothy 3:16–17), faithful Christians must carefully observe what God has commanded while avoiding the temptation to alter, improve, or embellish divine instruction. At the same time, we must recognize that not every tool or expedient used in carrying out God's commands constitutes a sinful alteration of His will. Understanding the difference protects the church from both human innovation and unnecessary restrictions. In this writing, we would examine the difference between aids and additions to the command of Scripture.

An **aid** is something that helps us carry out what God has commanded without changing the command itself. The example of Noah illustrates this principle beautifully. When God instructed him to build an ark in Genesis 6:14, He specified the material to be used (gopher wood) but did not specify how to get the wood. In carrying out this instruction, Noah may have employed various tools to cut and shape the wood. The tools were not new commandments. They simply made obedience possible. Another good example is found in the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20 and Mark 16:15-16 when Jesus told His disciples to go into all the world to preach the gospel. He specified what to preach (the gospel) but He did not tell them how to travel. In fulfilling this instruction, the disciples may go either by walking, sailing, driving, or flying and the command to go remains unchanged. Books, classrooms, websites, or media tools can help fulfill this mission. These are aids. These methods assist the command. They do not alter it. That is the essence of an aid. It supports obedience. It does not reshape or redefine it.

An **addition on the other hand,** is different. It changes the nature of what God commanded. It takes an instruction from God and transforms it into something that no longer resembles the original. Using the same examples above, suppose Noah decided to use a different kind of wood than gopher wood which was specified, Noah would have added to the instruction. A different kind of wood such as cedar or pine would have been an addition to and a violation of the instruction. Similarly, suppose the disciples chose to go and preach something other than *the gospel,* then such would be an addition to the instruction. Changing the gospel message so that it is more appealing, or replacing teaching with entertainment, would be additions. That would change the nature of the task.

Nadab and Abihu discovered this truth when they offered unauthorized fire to God. Scripture does not say they were trying to be rebellious. Their intentions may have been sincere but what mattered is that God had not instructed them to offer that fire. In the same way, King Saul offered sacrifices that God never authorized him to perform (I Samuel 15:1-35). Good intentions did not protect him from the consequences. Additions often come from a desire to improve or enhance. Yet they end up replacing what God wanted with something He did not ask for.

Another illustration of this distinction concerns the act of singing. The New Testament instructs Christians to sing (Colossians 3:16). It tells us to make melody in our hearts (Ephesians 5:19). It depicts



congregations lifting their voices together in praise and thanksgiving. It never presents mechanical instruments as part of Christian worship. Aids to singing, such as songbooks, projected lyrics, or microphones, do not change the act of singing. They simply help the congregation sing together, clearly and in unity. Additions, however, introduce something else entirely. Mechanical instruments, recorded accompaniments, or specialized performing groups add a new action. The worship becomes a mixture of singing and something God never authorized. The issue is not whether instruments are enjoyable. The question is whether God included them in Christian worship. Since He did not, they are additions rather than aids. A people determined to honor God's voice will not confuse the two.

Concerning the Lord's Supper, Jesus gave us bread and the fruit of the vine and asked us to remember Him with these elements (Luke 22:17-19). Trays, plates, cups, and a meeting place help us observe this memorial. These are aids. Replacing the elements or turning the Supper into something other than a weekly memorial meal would be an addition. It would alter what the Lord established.

Concerning baptism, Scripture teaches immersion in water (Colossians 2:12). The location may vary. Rivers, lakes, pools, or baptistries simply provide a place to obey. They are aids. Sprinkling or pouring water is an addition. So is baptizing without repentance or without the purpose God gave to baptism (Acts 2:38). These alter the command.

In some cases, God gives a generic command. When the command is generic, human judgment is necessary. The chosen method must still meet certain criteria taught in Scripture. It must be lawful. It must be beneficial. It must not cause others to stumble. An expedient method never replaces or changes the command. It merely helps fulfill it. An addition, by contrast, becomes a new practice that alters what God required.

Why This Distinction Matters

This principle is very important because it is about honoring the simplicity and sufficiency of Scripture. Understanding this principle helps us in the following ways:

It protects the purity of worship: Worship is our gift to God. We offer Him what He desires, not what we wish He desired.

It affirms the adequacy of Scripture: God's instructions are complete. Additions suggest that His ways need improvement.

It recognizes the authority of Christ: Christ is the head of the church. We have no right to adjust His design.

It promotes unity: When God's people cling only to Scripture, unity is possible. When additions enter, division quickly follows because additions always reflect human preference.

Conclusion

Everyone must ask whether they are truly following God or quietly reshaping His commands. The distinction between aids and additions helps us answer this question with honesty. Aids allow us to follow God's path with clarity. Additions lead us down a different path entirely. The early Christians lived by the principle that anyone who speaks must speak as the oracles of God (I Peter 4:11). That principle still guides the faithful today. We want to hear God clearly, honor Him fully, and walk in His will without alteration.

Institutionalism

Why Church Programmes Must Be Gospel-Centered

By Osamagbe Lesley Egharevba | Lagos, Nigeria

"for he vigorously refuted the Jews publicly, showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ" **(Acts 18:28)**

This above passage reveals a fundamental principle of gospel preaching as practiced by Apollos: his message was firmly rooted in Scripture. His authority, evidence, and persuasion did not arise from secular literature, human philosophy, or cultural opinion, but from the revealed Word of God. By "showing from the Scriptures" that Jesus is the Christ, Apollos demonstrated the proper source and method of all faithful teaching within the church.

This example carries important implications for the church today. Faithful preachers and teachers must continue to rely on Scripture as the foundation of their instruction. Yet, an observable trend among some brethren raises concern: many church programmes intended for edification increasingly adopt topics and themes that lack clear scriptural grounding. In many cases, these programmes emphasize general lifestyle matters while failing to reflect the gospel message the church is divinely commissioned to proclaim (Mark 16:15; 2 Timothy 4:2).

Consider, for example, certain church programmes organized in recent times. One congregation in Lagos organized a women's seminar with topics such as *"The Effects of Excessive Screen Time on Humans"* and *"Finding Balance in This Digital Age."* Another congregation in Ogun State hosted a programme that included the topic *"Your Health Is in Your Hands."* While the intentions behind such programmes may be sincere and well-meaning, the concern lies not in effort but in emphasis. As presented, these topics appear more secular than scriptural, with little or no explicit connection to biblical teaching or the gospel of Christ.

The church of Christ exists by the will of God and for the glory of God. It was established through the sacrificial work of Jesus Christ and continues through steadfast devotion to apostolic teaching (Matthew 16:18; Acts 2:42). Consequently, everything the church does including its worship, evangelism, teaching, etc. must be firmly anchored in Scripture and centered on the gospel. When church programmes drift toward purely secular themes, even unintentionally, they risk obscuring the church's divine purpose.

This concern is particularly relevant in a modern context where issues such as technology, health, family life, career pressures, and social change dominate everyday discussion. These matters undoubtedly affect Christians and deserve thoughtful consideration. However, the critical question is not whether the church may address contemporary issues, but *how* it addresses them. The church must always approach such matters through the lens of Scripture, ensuring that every programme maintains a clear spiritual purpose and biblical foundation.

The New Testament describes the church as "the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:15). Its primary responsibility is to proclaim God's Word, teach sound doctrine, and equip the saints for faithful Christian living (Matthew 28:19–20; Ephesians 4:11–12). The church is not a social club, a motivational platform, or a general life-coaching center. Although it may address practical concerns, it must do so as a spiritual institution entrusted with a

divine mission.

When church programmes focus mainly on general lifestyle topics without clear biblical framing, they risk becoming indistinguishable from secular seminars or community workshops. Subjects such as digital technology, domestic responsibilities, or personal health are widely discussed in society. What distinguishes a church programme is not merely the relevance of its topic, but the scriptural perspective through which it is taught.

Since the Bible specifies that the church is to continue in the apostles doctrine (Acts 2:42; II John 9), it necessarily excludes the church as a provider of secular education. One must ask: how does a gospel preacher "show from the Scriptures" the effects of excessive screen time on humans? Where does such a topic, as framed in purely scientific or sociological terms, fit within the gospel of Christ? These questions highlight the danger of allowing secular frameworks to replace biblical teaching within church activities.

At the heart of every church programme must be the gospel of Christ. The apostle Paul affirmed this priority when he wrote, "For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2). While not every programme must be a full sermon on conversion or salvation, every programme should flow from the gospel and direct Christians back to Christ as the source of godly living.

It is important to clarify that insisting on a scriptural foundation does not imply that the church should ignore modern challenges. On the contrary, the gospel speaks meaningfully to every generation. Issues related to digital devices, social media, and technology in the home are real concerns, particularly for families and women managing domestic responsibilities. However, the church's role is not to analyze these matters merely from a sociological or psychological perspective. Rather, it is to guide Christians in living faithfully and wisely in a changing world. For instance, instead of focusing solely on the effects of digital devices on domestic activities, a church programme could explore biblical principles such as wise stewardship of time (Ephesians 5:15–16), guarding the heart and mind (Proverbs 4:23; Philippians 4:8), maintaining godly priorities within the home (Titus 2:3–5), and using lawful tools without becoming enslaved by them (1 Corinthians 6:12). When modern issues are framed in this way, Scripture remains central, and the church fulfills its teaching mission without becoming secularized.

One of the subtle dangers facing some congregations is the gradual secularization of its activities. This occurs when church programmes begin to resemble motivational talks, corporate training sessions, or social seminars, with little distinction between what is offered by the church and what is available in the world. Jesus warned that His disciples are "the salt of the earth" (Matthew 5:13). Salt that loses its flavor is no longer effective. Likewise, church programmes that lose their scriptural flavor lose their spiritual power and distinctiveness.

In conclusion, church programmes play an important role in teaching, encouraging, and equipping believers. However, their true value does not lie in how trendy, appealing, or practical they appear, but in how faithfully they reflect the Word of God. While addressing modern issues is necessary, such discussions must remain anchored in Scripture and centered on the gospel. The mission of the church is clear: to teach and preach God's Word. When programmes are rooted in Scripture, they strengthen the faith of the saints, preserve the church's identity, and glorify God in all things.

Myth Buster

Speaking in Tongues Today: Myth or Biblical Reality?

By Emmanuel Oluwatoba | Niger, Nigeria

The subject of speaking in tongues is one of the most discussed and misunderstood topics in modern Christianity. Many today equate tongues with ecstatic speech, heavenly languages, or spontaneous utterances that require interpretation. Others see tongues as proof of Spirit baptism or spiritual maturity. But what does the Bible actually teach about speaking in tongues, and are such practices meant to continue today?

To address this, we must set aside modern experiences and return carefully to Scripture as our only authority (2 Timothy 3:16–17).

What Were Tongues in the New Testament?

In the New Testament, the word "***tongues***" simply means **languages**. This is most clearly seen in Acts 2, the first occurrence of speaking in tongues in the Bible. On the Day of Pentecost, the apostles spoke in tongues, and the listeners heard them "***each in his own language***" (Acts 2:6). Luke goes further to list specific national languages and regions, leaving no doubt that tongues were real, intelligible human languages, not ecstatic or unknown sounds.

There is no biblical example where tongues were meaningless noises or private prayer languages. Whenever tongues occurred, they were capable of being understood, either directly by the hearers or through interpretation (1 Corinthians 14:27–28).

Why Were Tongues Given?

Tongues were not given as a badge of spirituality or as a regular worship feature. Scripture identifies three main purposes:

First, tongues served as a sign to unbelievers. Paul states plainly, "***Tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe, but to unbelievers***" (1 Corinthians 14:22). In Acts 2, the miracle confirmed that the gospel message came from God, arresting the attention of unbelieving Jews.

Second, tongues confirmed divine revelation. Mark 16:20 explains that the apostles preached while God worked with them, confirming the word through accompanying signs. Tongues were among those confirming signs.

Third, tongues assisted in the early spread of the gospel. In a time before the New Testament was fully written and widely distributed, miraculous gifts helped establish the church and authenticate its message across linguistic barriers.

Tongues Were Temporary, Not Permanent

An important question is whether tongues were intended to continue indefinitely. Scripture gives a clear answer. In 1 Corinthians 13:8–10, Paul writes that tongues would cease, along with other miraculous gifts, when "that which is perfect has come."

The "perfect" in this context refers to the completed revelation of God's will, not heaven or the second coming of Christ. Paul contrasts partial revelation with complete revelation. During the first century, the church received God's truth in parts through inspired men. Once the full New Testament was revealed and confirmed, miraculous gifts were no longer necessary. This aligns with Jude 3, which speaks of "the faith" having been once for all delivered to the saints. There is no ongoing need for revelatory signs when God's word is complete.

Order and Control in Tongue Speaking

Even while tongues existed, God strictly regulated

their use. In 1 Corinthians 14, Paul rebukes the Corinthian church for disorderly practices. He insists that no more than two or three speak in tongues, one at a time, and only if an interpreter is present. Otherwise, the speaker was to remain silent. Importantly, Paul states that "***the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets***" (1 Corinthians 14:32). This contradicts modern claims that tongue speakers lose control or are overtaken by the Spirit. Biblical tongues never involved confusion, chaos, or loss of self-control, because "***God is not the author of confusion but of peace***" (1 Corinthians 14:33).

Modern Tongues Compared to Biblical Tongues

When modern tongue-speaking practices are measured against Scripture, significant differences appear. Modern tongues are often unintelligible sounds, while biblical tongues were real languages. Modern tongues are commonly practiced publicly without interpretation, directly violating apostolic instruction. Modern tongues are frequently used as evidence of salvation or Spirit baptism, yet the Bible never teaches this. In fact, not all first-century Christians spoke in tongues (1 Corinthians 12:30). Additionally, modern tongue-speaking often centers on personal experience rather than the edification of the church. Paul repeatedly emphasizes that all worship activities must edify others, not exalt individuals (1 Corinthians 14:12, 26).

The Role of the Holy Spirit Today

Rejecting modern tongue-speaking does not mean denying the work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is active today through the inspired word He revealed. He convicts, teaches, and transforms hearts through Scripture (John 16:13; Hebrews 4:12). Rather than seeking signs, Christians are called to walk by faith, not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7). Our confidence rests not in miraculous experiences but in the sufficiency of God's completed word.

Conclusion

The Bible teaches that speaking in tongues was a miraculous ability to speak real human languages, given for a specific purpose during the early days of the church. Scripture also teaches that this gift was temporary and would cease once God's revelation was complete. Modern tongue-speaking does not match the biblical pattern in nature, purpose, or practice. When we allow the Bible to define tongues, the confusion surrounding the subject is removed, and we are reminded once again of the importance of doing all things "according to the pattern" revealed by God (Hebrews 8:5).

Ideal Home

Broken Homes: From Sacred Vows to Shattered Dreams

By Rowland Gbamis | Tennessee, USA

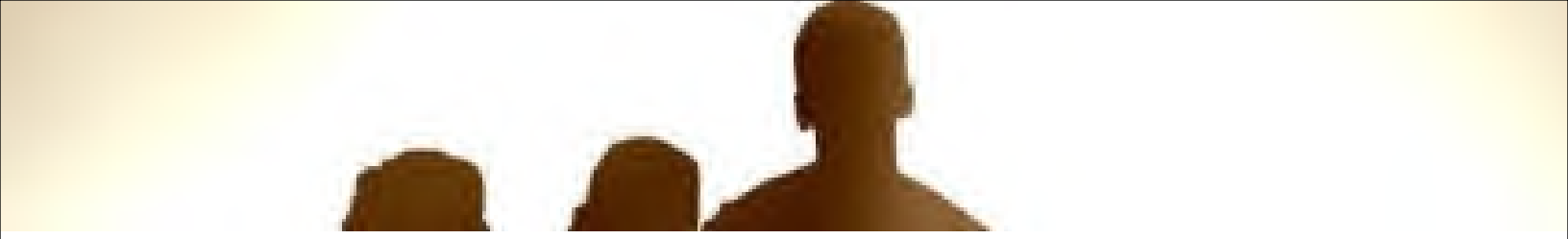
Introduction

I have witnessed many marriage vows and the enthusiasm that accompanies them, yet over the years, I have also observed what can only be described as a crisis of faith and commitment. I vividly remember several wedding ceremonies where the preacher declared, "We are gathered here this day before God and in the presence of family and friends to join 'Adam and his dear wife, Eve,' in Holy Matrimony." The joy, hope, and sacred promises of those moments seemed unshakeable. As someone who has lived on two continents and in three countries for many years, I have unfortunately witnessed a heartbreaking transformation. Many of those same couples who once gazed into each other's eyes with intense love now sit at separate tables in courtrooms, with lawyers between them. Two people who formerly hoped, planned, ate, worked, played, slept, and worshipped together now await a judge's decision about not only their own futures, but their children's as well. What a catastrophic destination for what began as a sacred covenant! Could anything be more tragic than this journey from altar to courtroom? The epidemic of broken homes in our society stems primarily from abandoning God's original design for marriage. Yet there is hope: understanding and faithfully following biblical principles can both prevent marital breakdown and restore families to the blessing God always intended them to experience.

God's Blueprint

Marriage is an institution God planned from the beginning, establishing it as the cornerstone of human society. Before sin entered the world, before governments were established, before the church was founded (even though it was in God's mind from the foundation of the world (Ephesians 3:10-11), God created marriage as the foundational relationship upon which all other social structures would rest. Recognizing that "it is not good that man should be alone" (Genesis 2:18), He fashioned woman as man's suitable helper and companion, declaring that "a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). In His infinite wisdom, God designed the home to be the basic unit of society. In this sacred space, love, commitment, and covenant intersect. This divine institution was meant to reflect His own character and provide stability for generations to come. When the home breaks down, lives break with it, creating ripple effects that extend far beyond the couple to affect children, extended family, and entire communities.

Though most Christians enter marriage with sincere intentions and work diligently to build happy relationships, the sobering reality is that marriages sometimes fail. Even among God's children, the pressures of modern life, unresolved conflict, and spiritual drift can gradually erode what God intended to be permanent. The enemy of our souls actively works to destroy what God has established, making the battle for marital success both spiritual and practical (cf. Ephesians 6:11-12). Understanding God's original design is therefore crucial for both preventing marital breakdown and restoring strained relationships. Only by returning to His blueprint can couples build marriages that honor Him and withstand life's inevitable storms.



Why Marriages Succeed

The following suggestions are among the factors I have observed in successful marriages; they are not offered as a guarantee of marital success, but rather as a recognition that couples who practice these factors share common characteristics that reflect God's design.

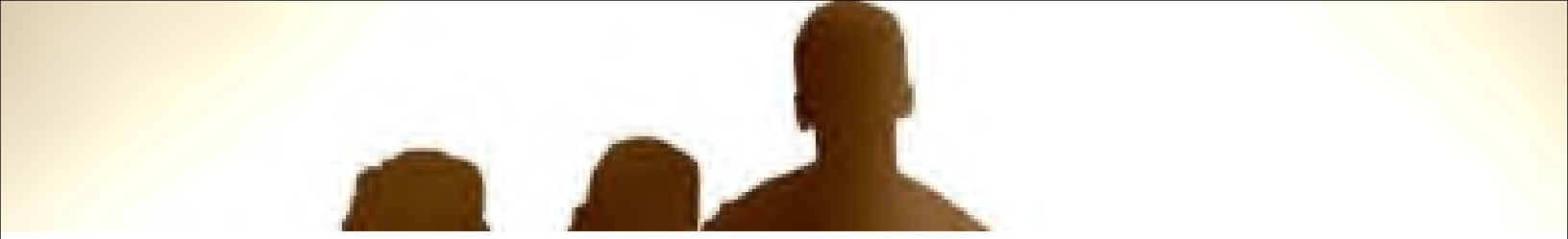
Mutual Attention and Companionship: A successful marriage is built on a foundation of intentionality, in which each spouse actively prioritizes providing their partner with the companionship and conversation they deserve. The virtuous woman of Proverbs 31:10-12 exemplifies this principle: "Her husband has full confidence in her and lacks nothing of value. She brings him good, not harm, all the days of her life." This mutual investment goes far beyond merely sharing a household—it involves actively engaging with one another's thoughts, feelings, and daily experiences. The Scripture establishes complementary roles that foster this companionship. Paul instructs wives to "submit to your husbands as to the Lord" and "respect" their husbands, while commanding husbands to "love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (Ephesians 5:22-33). In Colossians 3:18-19, he adds the warning that "husbands must not be harsh with their wives." These instructions create a framework in which both spouses actively contribute to the relationship's well-being through different yet complementary expressions of love.

True companionship cannot develop accidentally. It must be cultivated through shared activities, meaningful conversations, and genuine interest in the other person's well-being. This requires both spouses to move beyond the superficial interactions of daily logistics to engage in the deeper work of knowing and being known. When couples prioritize this intentional connection, they create the foundation upon which all other marital principles can flourish.

Physical Intimacy: God designed physical intimacy to be a source of pleasure, connection, and spiritual unity within the marital bond. 1 Corinthians 7:3-5 establishes this principle clearly: "The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband... Do not deprive each other except perhaps by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer." This divine design encompasses far more than the fulfillment of physical needs, as it serves as a profound expression of love, vulnerability, and exclusive commitment. Physical intimacy strengthens the emotional bond between spouses and reinforces the unique connection that distinguishes marriage from all other relationships. It creates a sacred space where husband and wife become "one flesh" in the most intimate sense, reflecting the mystery of Christ's union with the church (Ephesians 5:31-32).

Healthy physical intimacy requires open communication, mutual respect, and a willingness to prioritize each other's needs and desires above personal convenience or preference. Unfortunately, we now live in a world that often undermines this divine gift. Career demands, exhaustion, and misplaced priorities frequently rob couples of the time and energy necessary for meaningful physical connection, creating distance where God intended intimacy. The solution, therefore, requires intentional commitment to protecting and nurturing this aspect of marriage, recognizing that physical intimacy is not optional but essential to God's design for marital unity and satisfaction.

Emotional Security: A successful marriage provides



a haven where each partner finds security in the other's love and attention. Proverbs 31:11 captures this beautifully: "Her husband has full confidence in her and lacks nothing of value." This mutual trust creates an environment where both spouses can flourish, knowing they are unconditionally accepted and valued. True emotional security means developing a relationship where "there is no fear in love, because perfect love drives out fear" (1 John 4:18). It involves being a safe person for your spouse to confide in, someone who offers consistent support and encouragement while validating their feelings within godly boundaries. This doesn't mean accepting sinful attitudes or behaviors (1 Corinthians 13:6), but rather providing a secure foundation for growth and correction.

Paul's instruction in Ephesians 4:2 is sacrosanct in this context: "Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love" (Ephesians 4:2). Spouses must extend this same grace to one another, recognizing that emotional safety requires both humility and patience. When conflicts arise, and they will, the secure spouse responds with gentleness rather than defensiveness. Emotional security allows each partner to be vulnerable, authentic, and fully themselves without fear of judgment or rejection. They can share their struggles, dreams, and failures, knowing that "love covers over a multitude of sins" (1 Peter 4:8). This approach creates a positive cycle in which safety breeds intimacy, intimacy deepens love, and love reinforces security.

Commitment Without Threats: Trust serves as the bedrock of any strong relationship. As Proverbs 3:3 instructs, "Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart." This principle requires that neither spouse provoke jealousy nor constantly threaten divorce, behaviors that erode trust and create chronic instability. Genuine commitment fosters an environment of security in which each partner feels safe and loved. It means choosing to remain together even when circumstances prove difficult, working through challenges with grace and forgiveness, and prioritizing the relationship above immediate personal desires. The marriage covenant must never become a bargaining chip wielded during conflict.

The Scripture addresses the destructive nature of threats from multiple angles. Malachi 2:16 declares that "the man who hates and divorces his wife... does violence to the one he should protect," while Colossians 3:19 warns husbands "not to be harsh with their wives." However, manipulation can flow in both directions. Wives may sometimes undermine marital stability through emotional withholding, threats of abandonment, or deliberate defiance designed to control outcomes—behaviors that contradict the biblical call to respectful partnership (Ephesians 5:22-24; 1 Peter 3:1-6). God's design calls both husband and wife to honor their vows with steadfast faithfulness, recognizing that threats and manipulation from either partner, whether through harsh dominance or emotional coercion, undermine the very covenant they promised to uphold. True commitment creates a safe environment for both spouses to grow and flourish within the marriage.

Shared Parenthood: When possible, children become a blessing that strengthens successful marriages, as the psalmist declares: "Children are a heritage from the Lord, offspring a reward from him" (Psalm 127:3). Raising children together creates a shared purpose that deepens the marital bond, transforming two individuals into a unified parenting team with eternal significance. Scripture establishes clear expectations for this partnership. Ephesians 6:4

instructs, "Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord." While this verse specifically addresses fathers, the broader biblical pattern indicates that this sacred calling extends to both parents working in harmony toward shared spiritual goals.

Effective shared parenthood involves actively co-parenting, supporting each other's parenting approaches, and prioritizing the children's needs above personal preferences. It requires consistent teamwork, open communication, and a willingness to compromise for the family's greater good. As Colossians 3:21 warns, "Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged," a principle that applies to both parents and emphasizes the importance of unified, encouraging leadership. Successful couples recognize that parenting is not a competition but a collaboration, where both mother and father contribute their unique strengths while maintaining a united front before their children. This partnership in raising godly offspring not only blesses the next generation but also deepens marital intimacy and mutual respect, creating a positive cycle that strengthens both the marriage and the family.

Financial Wisdom: Responsible stewardship of resources is essential for a stable and harmonious marriage. The virtuous woman of Proverbs 31:13-24 exemplifies diligence and resourcefulness in managing household finances, while 1 Timothy 5:8 establishes the seriousness and responsibility of providing for one's household: "Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever." Financial wisdom requires more than simply earning money; it demands open communication about finances, the creation and maintenance of a realistic budget, and collectively responsible spending decisions. Both partners must align on financial goals and priorities, avoid unnecessary debt, and manage resources in ways that honor God while meeting the family's genuine needs.

Jesus emphasized the importance of careful planning in Luke 14:28: "Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won't you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it?" This principle applies directly to marriage, where couples must count the cost of major decisions and plan accordingly. Successful couples approach finances as partners rather than adversaries, recognizing that money conflicts often mask deeper issues of trust, control, and differing values. When these underlying issues are addressed through biblical principles, wise stewardship becomes possible, strengthening marital unity while demonstrating faithfulness to God's provision. By embracing these principles, couples can cultivate marriages that reflect God's design, providing a foundation of love, commitment, and mutual support. Each of these highlighted principles thus reinforces the others by creating a marriage ecosystem where Christ's sacrificial love serves as the model. When practiced together, these interconnected habits build relationships that can weather life's inevitable storms with grace and resilience.

To be continued in the next edition

Salvation

The Book of Hebrews and Once Saved Always Saved

By Dylan Stewart | Alabama, USA

Most religious people are of the persuasion that once they believe in Jesus and accept Him into their life there is nothing that could ever happen which might cause them to lose their salvation. Although there are literally hundreds of verses in the Bible that disprove the doctrine of once saved always saved, since the Hebrew letter was written to "**holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling**" (Hebrews 3:1) [i.e. Christians], let's strictly examine the book of Hebrews and see what this inspired text has to say about the matter.

It is possible for a Christian to "drift away."

"Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away" (**2:1**).

It is possible for a Christian to develop an "evil heart of unbelief" and depart from God.

"Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus . . . Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily, while it is called "Today," lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end, while it is said: 'Today, if you will hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.' For who, having heard, rebelled? Indeed, was it not all who came out of Egypt, led by Moses? Now with whom was He angry forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose corpses fell in the wilderness? And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who did not obey? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief" (**3:1, 12-19**).

A Christian can "come short" of eternal rest by not holding fast to their confession of faith.

"Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it . . . Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession" (**4:1, 14**).

A Christian can become so engrossed by sin that they refuse to repent and, thus, are beyond restoration.

"For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame" (**6:4-6**).

God's promises are contingent upon a Christian holding fast to his hope.

"Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful" (**10:23**).

If a Christian sins willfully, he replaces the gift of Christ's sacrifice with impending punishment.

"For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing,

and insulted the Spirit of grace?" (**10:26-29**).

God's promises are contingent upon a Christian continually doing His will.

"Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise: 'For yet a little while, and He who is coming will come and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith; but if anyone draws back, my soul has no pleasure in him.' But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul" (**10:35-39**).

Sin can "ensnare" a Christian and cause him to lose the race set before him.

"Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (**12:1-2**).

Conclusion

If it is impossible for a Christian to lose his salvation, why did the writer of Hebrews spend so much time warning Christians about the dangers of such? Why would God emphatically and repeatedly warn us about something that supposedly cannot happen? Friends, let's love God enough to believe and accept His word rather than choose to believe a lie (2 Thessalonians 2:10-12).

THE BENEFIT OF MEETING FACE TO FACE

When John wrote his second epistle, he expressed his joy over the conduct of these brethren, encouraged them to love one another, and warned about false teachers who could come in and deceive them (2 John 4, 5, 7-8). Even today, we are able to read his letter and receive the same encouragement and warnings.

However, while much good can be accomplished through the written word, it does have its limitations. John acknowledged this at the close of the letter: "*Though I have many things to write to you, I do not want to do so with paper and ink; but I hope to come to you and speak face to face, so that your joy may be made full*" (2 John 12).

John was an inspired apostle. The things he wrote to these brethren were directly from the Holy Spirit. Yet he knew the importance of meeting with these brethren in person – both for his benefit and theirs.

This is an important lesson for us today, especially with technology that can deceive us into thinking that virtual connections are the same as personal ones. God knew that we needed a deeper connection with others in order to receive encouragement and be held accountable. This is one of the reasons why He designed the church as He did. It is where we physically and personally gather together on a regular basis.

So remember the benefit of meeting face to face. Yes, other forms of communication (whether written or digital) can be helpful. However, if we truly want to grow closer to one another and strengthen each other in the Lord, there is no substitute for being with one another.

Andy Sochor

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

What commandments of Jesus are we to keep?

By Jeff Hamilton | Nebraska, USA

Question:

In John 14:15, Jesus says, "If you love me, keep my commandments." What commandments would that be? Is Jesus the God of the Old Testament?

Answer:

The same commandments Jesus told the apostles to teach: "*And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen*" (Matthew 28:18-20). Therefore all that is contained in the New Testament, including the apostles' teachings, are the commandments of Jesus. "*If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord*" (I Corinthians 14:37).

Jesus was with God and is God. "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God*" (John 1:1-2). Therefore, when the Old Testament mentions that God did or said something, that would include Jesus as well as the Father and the Spirit. However, the commands that Jesus was referring to were his commands as the Father turned all things over to the Son. "*For "He has put all things under His feet." But when He says "all things are put under Him," it is evident that He who put all things under Him is excepted. Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all*" (I Corinthians 15:27-28). From this, we conclude that during the Old Testament time God, the Father, was dominant. In the Christian age God, the Son, is dominant but at the end of the age, the authority will return to the Father. "*But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God*" (I Corinthians 11:3).

The commands, the covenant between God and man, are different under Christ than it was in the Old Testament. "*Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a **new** covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah -- **not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers** in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more*" (Jeremiah 31:31-34). "*In that He says, " A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away*" (Hebrews 8:13).

Addendum

Destroying the Power and Purity of the Church

By Jefferson David Tant | Tennessee, USA

It is lamentable to note so many churches throughout the land that are losing or have lost their power and purity. Any of the churches of which we are speaking are considered faithful and sound, and this makes it even more tragic. Perhaps there are various ways in which a church may lose its power and purity, but we can think of none that will do the job as quickly as a **lack of discipline.** Including withdrawal.

To be sure, many of these churches will exercise discipline when some flagrant sin arises, such as the song leader living with two wives, a deacon's wife running a house of prostitution, etc. But we are speaking of the church's neglect in withdrawing from those who are guilty of somewhat less spectacular sins. The church should also be concerned about the souls of those members who have "quit," or who come to assemblies whenever notion strikes them—maybe two or three times a month. The soul of the "common" sinner is in danger of hell as much of the soul of the "infamous" sinner.

Why can we not appreciate this fact? Why cannot we have the same love and concern for the souls of all of the lost, whether the lost be merely a little covetous or an unrepentant murderer?

The "marking," "avoiding," or "withdrawing" of which we are speaking is not a matter of option with the church. It is **commanded.** We cannot put it in the same class deciding to buy songbooks or do without, or whether to decide to rent a meeting house or to build one. There is no parallel. We have no more latitude in deciding this than we have concerning the command to be baptized.

The sins calling for this discipline are not limited to the "notorious" sins of which we spoke earlier, **but are** as general as the word "sin" is. Many of these sins are enumerated: personal offences (**Matthew 18:15-18**); divisions or occasions of stumbling (**Romans 16:17-18**), fornication, covetousness, idolatry, reviling, drunkenness, extortion, foolish talking, jesting (**Ephesians 5:3-13**).

The whole picture might be summed up by the words written by Paul in **II Thessalonians 3:6**: *"Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from every brother who leads an unruly life and not according to the tradition which you received from us."*

Albert Barnes says of this: "A 'disorderly walk' denotes conduct that is in anyway contrary to the rules of Christ. The proper idea of the word used here is that of soldiers who do not keep the ranks; who are regardless of order; and then who are irregular in any way. The word would include any violation of the rules of Christ on any subject."

As we would expect, the Lord is not without reason in commanding us to carry out these orders. He has told us what is to be accomplished by our compliance with them. (1) **To save the sinner.** This is stated in **I Cor. 5:5**: *"I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus."* In **II Thess. 3:14**, Paul says this is to be done "*...to the end that he may be ashamed."*

If, as some have done, we say this will do no good, then we put our wisdom against God's, and surely God will not overlook such a presumptuous sin on our part. (2) **To save the church:** The punishment inflicted upon Ananias and Sapphira not only served to reward them for their deed, but "*great fear came upon all them that*

heard it," thus dissuading any others who may have been tempted to do the same thing. Paul warns the Corinthians that "*...a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump*" (**I Cor. 5:6**), and commands that they purge out the influence of sin, lest the whole body be contaminated.

That church which fails to fulfill its responsibilities towards the disobedient can well expect to lose its power and purity. As the members see no action taken against sinners, others will be influenced by the example of the sinner, and the purity of the church will be compromised. Paul warned Timothy that if the evildoer is not shunned, his influence will "*eat as doth a gangrene*" (**II Tim. 2:17).** That gangrenous or cancerous part of the body that is not treated will soon affect and afflict the whole body. It is the design of Christ that His body be *"a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish."* (**Eph. 5:27**)

That church which has lost its purity loses its power. Consider the lesson of Achan and Israel in **Joshua 7.** Because of the deed of Achan, there was sin in the camp of Israel, and **Israel lost her power**. She became weak and ineffective against the enemy until the sin was purged out. Is not the same true today? What power and influence for truth and against evil can a church have when it is known that the indifferent and ungodly are members "in good standing"?

That church which is militant in its integrity is a marvellous and joyous thing to behold, and what wonderful things it can accomplish. But how pitiable and sickening is the church riddled and weakened by sin, bereft of its power and purity.

However unpleasant the task of withdrawal might be, it is ever necessary. "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great a salvation?" (Gospel Guardian, 4/3/1964)

TEST THE SPIRITS

Toward the end of the first century, a number of false teachers arose and threatened the church, teaching that Jesus had not come in the flesh. John said that one who "*does not confess Jesus is not from God,*" and that "*this is the spirit of the antichrist*" (1 John 4:3).

Because of this, the apostle admonished his brethren to make sure that what they were being taught was the truth before accepting it. He wrote, "*Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world*" (1 John 4:1).

How would they be able to determine whether someone was teaching truth or error? John explained: "*We are from God; he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error*" (1 John 4:6). The test to determine whether someone was a truth teacher or a false teacher was whether or not their message agreed with the apostles' message.

The same is true today. We can determine whether someone is teaching truth or error by comparing it with the teachings of the apostles contained in the New Testament. The popularity of the message or the sincerity of the messenger will not determine this for us.

So test the spirits. Not everyone who purports to preach the gospel is teaching the truth. Let us examine the Scriptures to determine the difference between truth and error.

Addendum

Genuine Faith

By Jefferson David Tant | Tennessee, USA

The topic of "faith" is often discussed, and often misunderstood. Skeptics accuse Christians of having "blind faith," or taking a "leap of faith," meaning that there is no basis for what we believe. Thus our faith in God's existence is no different than what I have encountered in South Africa, i.e. the practice of ancestor worship. It is believed that if one does not properly respect one's ancestors, that they will inflict harm on you.

Even modern dictionaries lend credence to the matter of blind faith. *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary* claims faith "is a firm belief in something for which there is no proof" (1998). *The American Heritage Dictionary* similarly states: "belief that does not rest on logical or material evidence" (2000, p. 636). Such definitions are totally absurd. I have faith that when I flip the light switch, the bulb will be illuminated. That faith is based on years of evidence that it really does work. Now, some may argue that this is not faith, but knowledge. To a point, that is true. But sometimes the light doesn't come on. The bulb may have burned out; power lines may be down; the lamp might be unplugged; or the switch itself may have malfunctioned. But I do have faith that is based on solid evidence.

I believe the sun is 93 million miles from earth. I haven't been there, nor conducted experiments to ascertain this for myself. But I have faith in the evidence science has presented. I have faith that I have a heart. I have never seen it, but the evidence that I have one is quite conclusive. Otherwise, I would not be writing these lines.

Atheists are rather dismissive of Christians, claiming that our faith is based on emotions and some sort of generic warm fuzzy feeling. I am not sure how they establish their non-belief. Do they have *knowledge* that there is no god? Knowledge is based on facts, and I have never seen the facts that prove their claim.

The noted atheist, Richard Dawkins states, "Christianity, just as much as Islam, teaches children that unquestioned faith is a virtue. You don't have to make the case for what you believe" (*The God Delusion,* p.306). That is so far removed from logic and reason that it is difficult that an intelligent man could state that. One might say he is "delusional."

The evidence for a creator is beyond logical dispute. Oh, I know many deny God's existence, but their faith is more like that "warm, fuzzy feeling." Suppose I was in some African jungle, and dropped my watch. Some native might find it, and wonder what it was, as he had never seen one before. Would he imagine that this device made itself and just appeared? Who would think that? He might have no idea what its purpose was, but I think all would agree that he would understand that someone made it.

How much more complicated are the workings of our universe, yea, even the human body. And all this just made itself? Who can believe it? Well, there are some who can believe it, and such people have been around for a long time. Nearly 2,000 years ago, a learned scholar wrote these words about unbelievers in his day: "*...that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they*

became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools" (**Paul, Romans 1:19-22**).

In ancient Lystra, Paul declared, "*In the generations gone by He permitted all the nations to go their own ways; and yet He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good and gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness*" (**Acts 14:16-17**). Note the statement that God "did not leave Himself without witness."

Yes, God gives us free well. We can deny his existence if we wish, but that's what we call "wishful thinking." If I have cancer, I can wish it away all I want. But my "wishful thinking" will not alter reality. That ignores the evidence.

Now, back to the title. Just what is "genuine faith?" **Genuine faith is faith that is based on evidence.** "*Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen*" (**Heb. 11:1,** KJV). Consider some of the words. "Substance" is from the Greek hypostasis ("a setting under, support). "Evidence" is from elegchos ("proof, conviction:--evidence, reproof").

Among other things, the resurrection of Christ from the dead is one of the most provable events of history. The evidence is overwhelming. "*...the firm foundation of God stands...*" (**II Tim. 2:19).**

I believe I'll accept the Bible's definition of faith rather than Webster's or Dawkin's.

LIFE IS BUT BREATH

Job went from being "*the greatest of all the men of the east*" (Job 1:1) because of how God had abundantly blessed him to losing everything. This was meant to test his faith in God and whether he would turn against Him (Job 1:9-11).

Near the beginning of Job's suffering, he expressed a feeling of hopelessness over his condition: "*Remember that my life is but breath; my eye will not again see good. The eye of him who sees me will behold me no longer; Your eyes will be on me, but I will not be. When a cloud vanishes, it is gone, so he who goes down to Sheol does not come up. He will not return again to his house, nor will his place know him anymore*" (Job 7:7-10).

From Job's limited perspective, it appeared as if all of his good days were in the past, and the only thing he had to look forward to was death. Though the Lord would eventually deliver him from his affliction (Job 42:12), at this point, he could only see the trouble that had come upon him.

Job stated that his "*life is but breath.*" James made a similar point about all of us: "*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*" (James 4:14). We will not be around forever. We need to appreciate this fact and act accordingly.

So remember that life is but breath. One day we will pass from this world. No matter what our circumstances are now, let us prepare for what lies beyond this life.

Andy Sochor