



# UNMASKING SOPHISTRY

A Journal of Christian Evidences and Comparative Religions

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

**(Colossians 2:8, NASB)**

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# From The Editor's Desk

This is the twenty-second edition of Unmasking Sophistry Magazine since its inception and the second 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 *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 thought-provoking topics.

In this edition, readers will find discussions on *Alexander Campbell and Infant Baptism*; *Fellowship in Evangelism and Service*; *Refuting the "Jews Only" View of Baptism for Remission of Sins*; *Why I Left The Catholic Church*; *Was Peter the First Pope?*; *Broken Homes: From Sacred Vows to Shattered Dreams*; *Who Selected The Books For Our Bible?*; *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](http://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

## Who Selected The Books For Our Bible?

By J. Early Arceneaux

The Nicene Council (325 A. D.) published a list of the 27 books we have in our New Testament. Before the Council met there had been some rather hot controversy about a few of the books in the list. Some thought they ought to be there; some thought they should not. It is well for us to know that the Council, in publishing its list of 27 books, did not accept just any book that was suggested. They had to know that the book came either from an apostle or from the co-laborer of an apostle. If Paul wrote it, or John, or Peter, or James, or Jude; or if some man closely associated with one of the apostles, as for example Luke was with Paul; if this was the origin of the book, it was recognized as having the necessary background and authorship. Otherwise, it was not even considered. For a while there was a hot controversy over II Peter, II John, III John, Jude, and Revelation. But once the question of authorship was settled, all question or dispute over these books was at an end. The doctrine of the books was not controverted, only the authorship.

A few years ago here in Texas a very sad thing happened for one man who tried to repudiate Mark 16:16 on the ground that it is not in the two oldest manuscripts of the New Testament. He made quite an argument on that score; but he back-tracked mighty fast when he was shown that every manuscript on earth that omits Mark 16:16 also omits the whole book of Revelation! And Revelation was the book in which this character lived, and moved, and had his being. The great Fort Worth debate became an utter debacle for this notorious premillennialist and his doctrine. Repudiating a few verses of Mark's gospel completely robbed him of the use of the whole book of Revelation- J. Frank Norris was the Baptist


blunderer who made this mistake. He should have been a more careful student of the history of the manuscripts. For the last few verses of Mark have never been questioned by any reputable scholar as to their doctrine and inspiration. The only thing that has been questioned was whether Mark wrote them or not. And the evidence is such now that there is little controversy even over that.

### Catholic Vs. Protestant Bibles

Sometimes the question is asked, Why did Protestants leave out some books that Catholics have in their Bible? The question is hardly proper. The right question should be, Why did the Catholics put some books into their Bible which are not in the Bible as it was originally written?

But how do we know these extra Catholic books ought not to be in the Bible? For the very simple reason that they were never included, even by the Jews themselves, in the Old Testament. Of course the Catholics have made no additions to the New Testament canon; all of their apocryphal books have been added to the Old Testament. And we know these books should not be in the Bible because they were not in the Bibles used by Christ and the apostles, to which they gave their sanction and approval. Thus, the Lord recognized as inspired the Bible which excluded these apocryphal books. The Catholic Church is not greater in authority than the Son of God.

Let us trace the human linkage which brings our Bible up to the Council of Nice. Eusebius, the father of church history, was present at that historic meeting in 325 A. D. Jesus Christ was born in the year 1 of our calendar. Actually there is a little inaccuracy there, as Christ was really born about four years before the time



we begin our dating. This was due to an error of calculation made in the year 532 A. D. when our present calendar was adopted. We now live in the year 1949; every atheist and infidel on earth writes that date on a letter when he wants to locate it in time. That simply means that no fact in all history has yet occurred to eclipse the birth of God's Son into this world.

Jesus lived through one-third of a century, let us say to the year 33 A. D. The apostle John died in the year 100 A. D. He was contemporary with Christ during his lifetime, and outlived him by two-thirds of a century. Polycarp was a disciple of John, and was born in 69 A. D., living till he reached the age of ninety years. Justin Martyr and Irenaeus were both contemporaries of Polycarp, the former of them being martyred in 165 A. D. and the latter living on until 202 A. D. Tertullian, the great Christian scholar was born 160 A. D. and died in 230 A. D., just thirty years before the birth of Eusebius the church historian. Thus there were less than half a dozen men between Eusebius and Christ. These were the men who along with hundreds like them lived, and wrote down, and copied time and time again the words of the New Testament. They preached it night and day. They had every opportunity in the world to know exactly where these books came from. And they did know! That is why they were so positive in their contention for their inspiration.

### **The Old Testament Books**

Just a brief word about the Old Testament. Since the Old Testament was a completed volume several centuries before one word of the New Testament was written, we have the strongest possible evidence that one mind was superintending and directing the writing of both. This is clearly seen in the attitude of the New Testament writers toward the old. Jesus and

the apostles used it, read it, revered it, and quoted from it as being absolutely and unquestionably the word of God.

The Old Testament was translated out of the Hebrew into the Greek in the year 280 B. C. (the Septuagint Version). This is the Bible Jesus and the apostles used. This is the one from which they quoted. This is the one they recognized as being inspired of God. Naturally that Hebrew Bible had to exist for some little time before it could be translated into the Greek. So we are safe in saying that it was completed centuries before the New Testament was written. Catholics miss their chance completely in this respect. If they were going to add books to the Bible, they should have added them to the New Testament, not the Old. For we have the authority of Jesus himself as to the canon of the Old Testament. There can be no appeal from that.

There is no "church ordinance" in the sense in which denominationalists use the expression. The church is not a legislative body; it has no right to issue decrees, rules, laws, etc. Christ commands; the church obeys.

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# World Religions

## Why I Left The Catholic Church

By David Riggs

Following are my notes on a sermon that I preached shortly after I was converted from the Catholic Church back in 1962. It was the first sermon that I preached.

### Introduction

In this lesson I want to state some of the reasons I left the Catholic Church. I do not wish to state any of the personal experiences I had as result of leaving. I will mention, though, that I came from a large, devout Catholic family of twelve children. I attended Trinity High School in Louisville, Kentucky. At the time of my intense Scriptural study, I had two brothers who were enrolled in Catholic seminaries studying to be priests. I also want to state I did not leave the Catholic Church because of some evil that I had done or that was done to me. I left the Catholic Church because I came to believe that it was contrary to the Bible. This I will endeavor to show in this study.

### The First Reason I Left Is Because The Catholics Do Not Have The Right Attitude Toward The Truth

To illustrate what I mean by this, I will explain the difference in the two sides. Those with the right attitude toward the truth are always willing to test what they teach with others. They invite those of opposite views to work together for truth and unity. They appreciate when those who differ with them point out where they think they are wrong. They have everything thoroughly tested, studying arguments both for and against, looking at both sides of the question.

Those with the wrong attitude toward the truth are not willing to test what they teach in fair and open discussion, privately or publicly. They do not invite

others to point out where they think they are wrong, and do not appreciate when others try to do so. They won't allow their members to hear both sides of an issue, and especially they don't want them to examine opposing arguments.

Hopefully, one can now understand what I mean when I said the Catholics do not have the right attitude toward the truth. Catholics are not allowed, and especially are not encouraged to hear both sides regarding truth and error. They are not to read books which differ from their doctrine. Thus, they are encouraged by the clergy to be closed minded to anything which differs from Catholicism. We ask, "Why don't Catholic officials encourage their members to examine opposing Scriptural teaching?" False teachers have learned that when truth and error are examined side by side, some begin to see the truth. False teachers are afraid of being exposed and of losing their members.

### The Next Reason I Left Is Because The Bible Only Is The All Sufficient Guide To Salvation, But The Catholic Church Teaches That It Is Not

The Catholic Catechism For Adults on page 52 says, "Can you learn to save your soul just by reading the Bible? No, because certain things in the Bible can be misunderstood, and because the Bible does not have everything God taught." Notice that the first part of their answer to "Can you learn to save your soul just by reading the Bible?": is, "No..." However, their own translations of the Bible teaches the opposite. All Scriptural quotations that I will be giving are from Catholic translations. [2 Timothy 3:15-17](#) says, "*And because from thy infancy thou hast known the holy scriptures, which can instruct thee to salvation, by*

*faith which is Christ Jesus. All scripture, inspired of God, is profitable to teach, to reprove, to correct, to instruct in justice, that the man of God may be perfect, furnished to every good work.*” Thus, the apostle Paul by the inspiration of God, says to Timothy “*thou hast known the holy scriptures, which can instruct thee to salvation*” and make you “*perfect, furnished to every good work.*”

[Romans 1:16](#) says, “*For I am not ashamed of the gospel. For it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth, to the Jew first, and to the Greek.*” [James 1:21](#) says, “*...With meekness receive the ingrafted word, which is able to save you souls.*” Consequently, the word contained in the Bible is able to save our souls.

The next part of the answer in the Catechism to the question, “Can you learn to save your soul just by the Bible” is, “No, because certain things in the Bible can be misunderstood...” They are implying that the Bible cannot be understood. John A. O'Brien, the Catholic author of the book, “*The Faith of Millions*,” is much more expressive when he says on page 152, “The Bible is not a clear and intelligible guide to all...” The book, “*The Faith of Millions*” was given to me before my conversion by my older brother Norman who was at the time a student at St. Meinrad Seminary, St. Meinrad, Indiana.

The apostle Paul said we can understand what he wrote. “*If yet, you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me towards you: how that, according to revelation, the mystery has been made known to me, as I have written above in few words; as you reading, may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ*” ([Eph. 3:2-4](#)). Paul said the mystery had been made know to him by

the revelation of God. He then showed that he was writing it e.g., “*as I have written above in few words*” (in the chapters prior to this) and “*as you reading, may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ.*” In other words, when we read what he wrote, we can understand what he understood. Paul also said, “*For we write nothing to you that you do not read and understand*” ([2 Cor. 1:13](#)) and “*Therefore do not become foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is*” ([Eph. 5:17](#)). Thus, the inspired writers taught that we most certainly can understand the Scriptures.

The last part of the answer given in the Catechism to the question, “Can you learn to save your soul just by reading the Bible?” was “No...because the Bible does not have everything God taught.” *The Faith of Millions*, on pages 153-154 says, “The Bible does not contain all the teaching of the Christian religion, nor does it formulate all the duties of its members.” The Scriptures contain everything that is necessary to equip the man of God for every good work ([2 Tim. 3:16-17](#)). There is not a solitary good work that the Christian can do which is not provided in the Scriptures. The Scriptural proof they give for the Bible not containing everything God taught, is [John 20:30](#). It says, “*Many other signs also did Jesus in the sight of his disciples, which are not written in this book*” (See *Catechism For Adults*, p. 10).

In [John 20:30](#), John simply said that Jesus did many other signs (miracles) which he did record. Notice, though, what John says in the next verse, “...But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name.” Thus, the apostle clearly shows that he wrote sufficient things to produce the faith which brings life in the name of Jesus. Life in the name of Jesus refers to eternal life and it is obtained by belief

in the things written by the inspired writers.

We freely admit that the Scriptures do not contain everything Jesus did. John said, “There are, however, many other things that Jesus did; but if every one of these would be written, not even the world itself, I think, could hold the books that would have to be written” ([Jn. 21:25](#)). Although we do not have everything Jesus did, we do have every necessary thing. We have enough to give us life in His name.


Catholic officials follow up their claim (that we cannot understand the Bible) by stating that one can get the true meaning only from the Catholic Church. The *Catechism For Adults* on page 10 says, “How can you get the true meaning of the Bible? You can get it only from God's official interpreter, the Catholic Church.” The Catholics have no passages which mention an official interpreter and, thus, they try to support their claim through human logic and reasoning. Anytime men do such, it amounts to nothing more than human philosophy rather than Scriptural proof. The Bible says, “*Let God be true, but every man a liar...*” ([Rom. 3:4](#)). It also warns, “*See to it that no one deceives you by philosophy and vain deceit, according to human traditions, according to the elements of the world and not according to Christ*” ([Col. 2:8](#)).

The doctrine of the “infallible interpreter” implies that God did not make Himself clear. It implies that God gave us a revelation that still needs revealing. Did God fail in His attempt to give man a revelation? Do the Catholic officials want us to believe they can express God's will more clearly than God Himself? We believe that God made the mind of man and is fully capable of addressing man in words which man can understand.

### **The Third Reason I Left Is Because Christ Did Not Make His Church Infallible As The Catholic Church Teaches**

The Catholic writers try to teach that the church could never go into error and is preserved from error. The *Catechism For Adults* on page 56 says, “Why can't the Catholic Church ever teach error? Because Jesus promised to be always with His Church to protect it from error.” The book, “*My Catholic Faith*” which is based heavily on materials from the Baltimore Catechism, was given to me by my father not long after I was converted. I think his intentions were that somehow it would cause me to return to the Catholic Church. It says on page 144, “Jesus Christ promised to preserve the Church from error.” On page 145, it says, “Jesus Christ commanded all men to listen to and obey the Church, under pain of damnation. If His Church can teach error then He is responsible for the error, by commanding all to obey.” On page 54 the *Catechism For Adults* says, “Does everyone have to obey the Catholic Church? Yes, because she alone has the authority of Jesus to rule and to teach.” It is easy to see that Catholics have the authority in the wrong place. The authority is not in the body, but in the Head ([Eph. 1:22-23](#); [Col. 1:18](#)). The ruling is not in the kingdom, but in the King ([Heb. 7:1-2](#); [Rev. 1:5-6](#)). The authority is in not in the church, but in Christ ([Matt. 28:18](#); [1 Pet. 3:22](#)). The church is not the Savior, but simply the body of the saved ([Acts 2:47](#); [Eph. 5:22-24](#)).

There are many passages in the New Testament which reveal that the church would not be preserved from error. [Acts 20:17, 28-30](#); [2 Peter 2:1-3](#); [1 Timothy 4:1-3](#); [2 Timothy 4:3-4](#); [2 Thessalonians 2:3-11](#). We see from these passages that there was to come a great falling away from the truth. In Acts chapter twenty we learn that perverse things would come from the



bishops of the church. Peter said ([2 Pet. 2](#)) that false teachers would arise among you (working from within) and there would be many who would follow them. Paul tell us ([2 Thess. 2](#)) that the apostasy was already underway, *“for the mystery of iniquity is already at work...”* (vs. 7). It started in Paul's day and was to continue until the second coming of Christ. He added, *“...Whom the Lord Jesus will slay with the breath of his mouth and will destroy with the brightness of his coming”* (vs. 8).

We cannot harmonize that which the inspired apostles said (there shall arise false teachers among you) with that which the Catholic writers say (shall be preserved from error). Furthermore, we call your attention to the fact that the characteristics of the departing group are identical with those of the Catholic Church. Everyone knows that the Catholic Church has forbidden its people to eat meat on Friday and at the present it forbids some from marriage. Also, the only way for the wicked one to last from Paul's day to the second coming of Christ is to have a continual succession. It could not be some wicked person of the past because he will not be here for the Lord to slay when He comes. Furthermore, it could not be ones in the future because their iniquity would not have started in Paul's day. It must, therefore, be a continual succession from the beginning until now. The Catholic Church is the only group which perfectly fits the apostles' description of the great apostasy.

The seven short epistles to seven churches of Asia in the book of Revelation reveal the relationship the church sustains to Christ (See Rev. chapters 2 and 3; see especially 2:1-5, 12-14, 18-20; 3:1-3, 14-15). Those verses plainly reveal that when a church continues in Christ's word, it keeps its identity as His church, but when it fails to abide in His word, it is not

longer regarded as His church. Also, they reveal that Christ did not establish His church as one that could never fall into error, because some of those churches went into error. Someone might say that the passages in Revelation referred to the various parishes or congregations rather than the whole church. It is true that the verses were speaking of local churches; nevertheless, the same principle that applied to them relates to the whole church. The Lord does not have a rule for one congregation which is not equally applicable to all. If one church is rejected for embracing error, all others who likewise embrace error are rejected. The early churches had to earnestly contend for the faith, and to continually be on guard against error arising from within. The doctrine of an “infallible church” causes the Catholic Church to fail in this. The Catholic Church is a church which neither recognizes nor corrects its errors.

#### **A Fourth Reason I Left Was Because Christ Did Not Make Peter A Pope**

In the books of men, the following titles are commonly used with reference to a man: “Pope,” “Holy Father,” “Vicar of Christ,” “Sovereign Pontiff.” All of these are titles that rightly belong only to the Lord Jesus Christ and to God the Father. There is not a single instance in the Scriptures where any of the above titles are applied to a man. The term, *“Holy Father”* is used only once in the entire Bible, and it is used by Jesus in addressing God the Father ([Jn. 17:11](#)). Among the above titles is the bold assertion that the Pope is the “Vicar of Christ.” A “vicar” is “One serving as a substitute or agent; one authorized to perform the functions of another in higher office” (*Webster*). When one searches the Bible from cover to cover, he finds only one passage which gives an indication of a vicar of Christ or God. It is [2 Thessalonians 2:3-4](#) and is worded as follows: *“Let no*

*one deceive you in any way, for the day of the Lord will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and is exalted above all that is called God, or that is worshiped, so that he sits in the temple of God and gives himself out as if he were God.”*


Some religionists today advocate that man is saved by faith only. However, there is only one passage in the entire Bible that has the words “*faith*” and “*only*” together and it says, “*not by faith only*” ([Jas. 2:24](#)). The Catholics today speak of the Pope as vicar, taking the place of God (Christ Himself is God, [Matt. 1:23](#); [Jn. 1:1](#)), yet there is only one passage in the entire Bible which speaks of a man doing such and it calls him “*the man of sin.*”

James Cardinal Gibbons, a Catholic Archbishop said, “Jesus our Lord, founded but one Church, which He was pleased to build on Peter. Therefore, any church that does not recognize Peter as its foundation stone is not the Church of Christ, and therefore cannot stand, for it is not the work of God” (*The Faith of Our Fathers*, p. 82). The apostle Paul said, “*For other foundation no one can lay, but that which has been laid, which is Christ Jesus*” ([1 Cor. 3:11](#)). There is no other foundation but Christ! Therefore, any church which does not recognize Christ alone as the foundation stone cannot be the church of Christ.

Catholic writers often speak of “the primacy of Peter” and “the primacy of the Pope.” However, [Colossians 1:18](#), speaking of Christ, says, “*And he is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the first-born from the dead; that in all things he may hold the primacy...*” Thus, with reference to the authority in the church, the Lord Jesus Christ holds the primacy in all things. This leaves nothing for the Pope!

Catholics claim that the Pope is the visible head of the church. The Catholic book, *Answer Wisely*, by Martin J. Scott says on p. 49, “The pope, therefore, as vicar of Christ, is the visible head of Christ's kingdom on earth, the Church, of which Christ Himself is the invisible head.” The book *Father Smith Instructs Jackson*, by John F. Noll and Lester J. Fallon, on page 42 says, “According to the will of Christ, all its members profess the same faith, have the same worship and Sacraments, and are united under the one and same visible head, the Pope.” Catholic officials always use the word “visible” no doubt thinking that it removes the thought of the Pope standing in opposition to the headship of Christ, and removes the apparent problem of having a church with two heads. Nonetheless, the Scriptures nowhere teach the idea of a visible and invisible head. Jesus said, “*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me*” ([Matt. 28:18](#); Emp. mine D.R.). [Luke 17:20-21](#) says, “*And on being asked by the Pharisees, 'When is the kingdom of God coming?' he answered and said to them, The kingdom of God comes unawares. Neither will they say, 'Behold, here it is,' or 'Behold, there it is.' For behold the kingdom of God is within you.*” The kingdom of God is a spiritual kingdom and therefore needs only a spiritual head or king.

[Ephesians 5:23-25](#) shows that Christ is the only head of the church. “*Let wives be subject to their husbands as to the Lord; because a husband is the head of the wife, just as Christ is head of the Church, being himself savior of the body. But just as the Church is subject to Christ, so also let the wives be to their husbands in all things.*” Consequently, the wife is subject to her husband as the church is to Christ. Just as the wife is subject to only one head – her husband, the church is subject to only one head – Christ. Just as



the husband does not send a substitute to rule over his wife, Christ does not authorize a substitute to rule over His bride, the church.

Catholics often use the expression, “One fold and one shepherd” to sustain the doctrine of the papacy (See *Catechism For Adults*, p. 59). They teach that the “one shepherd” is the Pope and the “one fold” represents the Catholic Church. Hear what Jesus said about it: *“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep...I am the good shepherd, and I know mine and mine know me, even as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for my sheep. And other sheep I have that are not of this fold. Them also I must bring and they shall hear my voice, and there shall be one fold and one shepherd”* ([Jn. 10:11, 14-16](#)). Jesus is that one good shepherd. If one can understand that one and one equals two, he can understand this. If one is subject to Christ as the one shepherd – that's one. If one is subject to the Pope as the one Shepherd – that's two!

The church is often compared to the human body in the Scriptures. The members of the church are represented as the various parts of the body. Christ is always said to be the head (See [1 Cor. 12:12-27](#); [Eph. 1:22-23](#); [4:15-16](#)). Our question is: “What part of the body is the Pope?” Also, “How does one get the idea of a sub-head into the body?”

One of the greatest arguments against the primacy of Peter is the fact that the apostles had an argument among themselves as to which of them should be the greatest. [Luke 22:24-26](#) says, *“Now there arose a dispute among them, which of them was reputed to be the greatest. But he said to them, 'The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them, and they who exercise authority over them are called Benefactors. But not*

*so with you. On the contrary, let him who is greatest among you become as the youngest, and him who is chief as the servant.”* The very fact that the apostles had an argument among themselves shows they did not understand that Peter was to be prince. Also, the occasion of the argument was the night of the betrayal – the last night of the Lord's earthly ministry – and yet the apostles still did not understand that Christ had given Peter a position of primacy. The Lord settled the argument, not by stating that He had already made Peter head, but by declaring that the Gentiles have their heads, *“But not so with you.”* Thus, Jesus very plainly taught that no one would occupy any such place as a Benefactor (or Pope) to exercise authority over the others.

### Conclusion

There are other reasons why I left the Catholic Church. I have simply tried to list some of the ones that made the greatest impression on me at the time of my conversion. I hope and pray that these things will be of some benefit to those who are making an honest inquiry regarding truth. I beseech and invite all my Catholic friends and relatives to examine these things in the light of God's holy Word. May God be with you in your endeavors to serve Him.

# 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 four 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 fifth affirmative and Thrasher's fifth negative are presented here. Previous editions of the magazine can be downloaded at [www.unmaskingsophistry.com](http://www.unmaskingsophistry.com)*

**Affirmative: John Martignoni | Bible Christian Society**

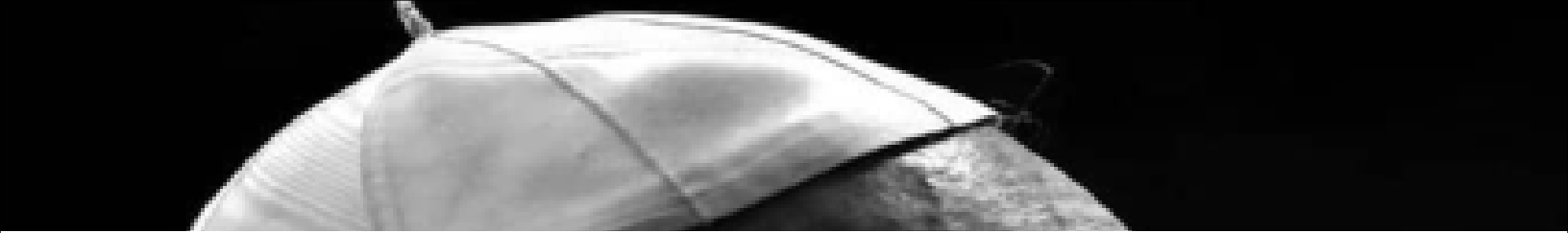
### Martignoni's Fifth Affirmative

Obviously I did "touch a nerve" with Mr. Thrasher regarding the "Campbellite" Church of Christ. I use that appellation to distinguish his Church of Christ from my Church of Christ. It is historical fact that his Church of Christ was founded by the Campbells a couple hundred years ago, so I fail to see why calling his Church of Christ "Campbellite" would be so insulting. But, he is certainly free to reject the term "Campbellite" and to take insult if he so chooses. I do not take offense at the term "Roman Catholic." The point I was making, is that he has no problem in saying bad things about the Catholic Church; yet, he gets all bent out of shape because I associate his church with its founders?! Again, I find his sensitivity to be a bit disingenuous.

Thrasher has not actually responded to my arguments regarding instrumental music in worship, nor Wednesday night church meetings, nor authorship and inspiration of the Gospel of Mark. I have to conclude that he is either unwilling or unable to do so. This is a very important point, because this line of argumentation strikes at the heart of the main portion of his arguments in this debate.

He uses "silence" in the Bible to justify banning instrumental music in the worship of God. Yet, the Bible is not silent on the use of musical instruments in the worship of God. The Bible actually commands that music be used in the worship of God (Ps 33:2-3)! And, the Bible says, "For I, the Lord, do not change," (Mal 3:6). Mr. Thrasher apparently believes the Lord does change when it comes to the use of musical instruments. Scripture shows the use of instrumental music in worship on Earth and in Heaven. So, for the Campbellite Church of Christ (CCoC) to be true, it must show where God changed His mind and specifically prohibited the use of instrumental music in worship. They can't, which means the "silence" of Scripture in this case actually contradicts their belief.

Wednesday night church meetings. Thrasher uses Acts 5:42 to justify this practice. Yet, what does Acts 5:42 actually say? It says the Apostles taught every day "in the temple" and "at home." Two questions: 1) Why then is the CCoC not meeting every day; and, 2) Where does it say anything about gathering at a church? It says at the temple – a public place where the Apostles preached to believers and unbelievers alike; and at home – where private instruction of the



faithful took place. Why aren't they gathering in a public place with unbelievers or at home? Acts 5:42 doesn't describe exactly what they practice, does it? Seems they interpret the Bible to mean whatever they need it to mean to justify their beliefs.

Thrasher's comments on contraception indicate the hypocrisy of his arguments and how twisted his logic is when it comes to biblical interpretation. In his "third speech," he indicates that the CCoC's ban on instrumental music is scriptural because of the principle: "silence does not authorize, silence prohibits." Yet, nowhere does he produce a Scripture verse – Old Testament or New – authorizing contraception. So, were he consistent in his beliefs, he would say that the use of contraception by Christians is prohibited in accord with the "silence" of Scripture on this matter. Yet, the CCoC fully accepts contraception! Apparently, CCoC scriptural reasoning goes like this: A) The Bible is silent on Christians using instrumental music in worship; therefore, it is prohibited; and, B) The Bible is silent on Christians using contraception; therefore, it is permitted. Silence prohibits when it comes to music; silence authorizes when it comes to contraception. Hypocrisy.

Plus, the Bible does, in fact, speak of contraception. There is one contraceptive act in the Bible. In Genesis 38, Onan "spilled his seed on the ground," to avoid fulfilling his levirate duty to his dead brother. That was an act of contraception. What did God do? "And what [Onan] did was displeasing in the sight of the Lord and He slew him," (Gen 38:10). God killed Onan for what "he did," – spilling his seed on the ground. Furthermore, the Bible says, more than once, go forth and multiply. Nowhere does it say, "Go forth and contracept." God's displeasure with "spilling seed," contraception, is directly spoken of in the Bible.

The whole point I am making by my comments about the banning of musical instruments, Wednesday night church meetings, contraception, and the authorship and inspiration of the Gospel of Mark, is to show that Mr. Thrasher maintains one standard for himself and the CCoC when it comes to the Bible; yet, he imposes a completely different standard when it comes to the Catholic Church of Christ and the Bible. And, the arguments he employs to maintain this double standard are replete with circular reasoning, illogic, and outright hypocrisy.

For example, Mr. Thrasher's whole argument about Peter not being the first Pope can be boiled down to: "The Bible nowhere specifically states that Peter was 'Pope,' or 'Head of the Church,' or 'Bishop of Rome.'" So, the standard of proof that he places upon me is that I must show where the Bible specifically uses one of these titles in relation to Peter, or he wins the debate (according to his logic).

But, when I question him about the biblical support for his beliefs, all of a sudden there is a different standard. Mr. Thrasher believes the Gospel of Mark was written by someone named Mark, and that this Mark was inspired by the Holy Spirit and, therefore, that God is "the source" of the Gospel of Mark. Yet, when I ask for specific passages from the Bible that tell us who wrote that Gospel, or that the writer of that Gospel was inspired by the Holy Spirit, or that God is indeed "the source" of the Gospel of Mark, how does Thrasher respond?

He throws out a bunch of Bible verses, none of which are referring to the Gospel of Mark, as if that was actually an answer to my questions. When I point out that not a single verse he quoted from says anything about the Gospel of Mark and, therefore, does not answer my questions, what is his reply? "All Scripture



is given by the inspiration of God...”.

In other words, he can “prove” that God is the source of the Gospel of Mark only if he first makes the assumption that it is inspired Scripture, which then allows him to quote from 2 Tim 3:16 about all Scripture being inspired of God, and thereby he can conclude that God is the source of the Gospel of Mark. He has to first assume what he is attempting to prove, in order to prove it! A finer example of circular reasoning I have never seen! The problem is, though, he has yet to give me one shred of evidence, from the Bible, that the writer of the Gospel of Mark was inspired by the Holy Spirit or that God is indeed the source of the Gospel of Mark.

Not only does he not give one single verse that says God is the source of the Gospel of Mark, he actually admits that he doesn't know who wrote the Gospel of Mark! He admits the Bible is silent on that. So, according to the principle of “silence prohibits,” since the Bible is silent on who wrote the Gospel of Mark, I assume the second Gospel in his Bible is entitled, “The Gospel According to Anonymous,” right? Don't bet on it. He believes Mark wrote Mark. He does not practice what he preaches.

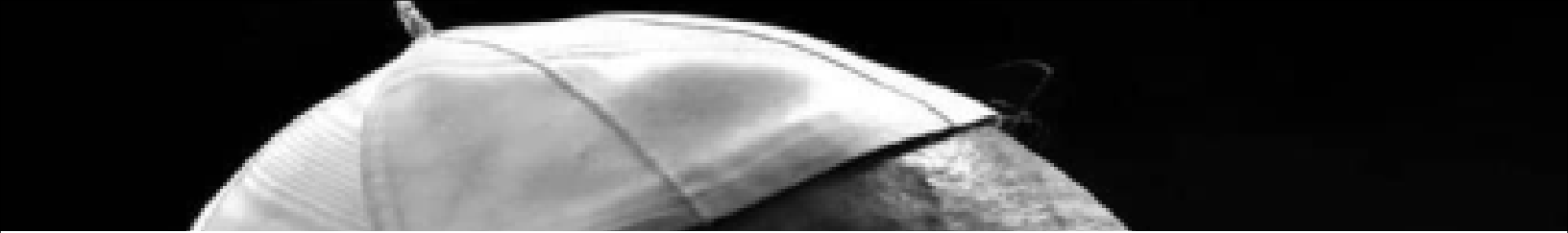
I have clearly demonstrated that Mr. Thrasher employs double standards, circular reasoning, and hypocrisy in his argumentation. None of which speaks well for his beliefs. So, unless he can give me a Bible passage that specifically contradicts God's command to use music in worship (in Psalm 33); or that everyone should meet at a church – not at the temple or in a home – on Wednesday nights only rather than every day of the week as the Scripture he cites states; or that specifically allows the use of contraception; or that specifically states that God is “the source” of the Gospel of Mark; then all of his arguments regarding Scripture being silent on Peter as

“Pope,” “Head of the Church,” or “Bishop of Rome,” are shown to be null and void. And, since the “silence” argument is the bulk of his argumentation, I win the debate.

Furthermore, as I stated in the last round, his citations regarding the successors of Peter do indeed prove, from history, that Peter was the first Pope. The sources he cited state there is disagreement as to the exact order and timing of Peter's 217 successors as head of the Church. He claims that these citations therefore show that the historical sources I quoted regarding Peter as the first Pope were “not inspired or necessarily trustworthy” in their testimony.

Well, 1) I never claimed they were inspired. These are historical sources. Since the Bible nowhere mentions Hannibal, does Mr. Thrasher then not believe Hannibal existed? By the way, on what historical sources does he rely to claim that his church is the historical Church of Christ? Or that the CCoC's elders have authority to preach and teach? 2) To state these sources are not trustworthy because they disagree as to the exact order and timing of Peter's successors, is an absolutely ridiculous claim. His sources and mine agree on these historical facts: A) Peter was the first Bishop of Rome and head of the Church; B) Peter had successors; and C) The names of those successors. They disagree on matters of timing, but not on the matter of primacy and succession. Does that make them untrustworthy? It does only if you are desperately trying to deny something that is as plain as the nose on your face. So, again, from an historical standpoint, even his own sources prove Peter was the first head of the Church. I win the debate.

His response to my comments on the obvious connection between Matthew 16 and Isaiah 22 was, essentially, “Unhh, unhh.” Both passages mention the



keys of the kingdom and binding (closing) and loosing (opening). The parallels are easy for all to see except those who have eyes but will not see. Thrasher simply pronounces that these two passages have nothing to do with each other – no reasons why, no arguments – just an infallible “Unhh, unhh.” As mentioned previously, in Isaiah 22 the chief steward of the Kingdom of David, the holder of the keys, is called a father (papa, pope) to his people. Jesus gives Peter the keys to the Kingdom, which means he is a father (papa, pope) to his people. He has no response, I win the debate.

Again, from my first four affirmatives, Scripture tells us the following about Peter and Peter alone:

- 1) Peter walked on water
- 2) Peter called for a replacement to Judas
- 3) Peter settled the issue at the Council of Jerusalem
- 4) Peter was appointed, by Jesus, as shepherd of Jesus' flock
- 5) Jesus prayed specifically for Peter
- 6) Peter spoke for the Apostles on the Day of Pentecost
- 7) Peter received a special vision from God to bring the Gospel to the Gentiles
- 8) Peter was given a special revelation about Jesus being the Messiah
- 9) Peter was given the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven
- 10) Jesus paid the temple tax for Himself and Peter only
- 11) Paul comes to Peter to consult with him
- 12) Peter generally speaks for all the Apostles

13) Peter spoke judgment upon Ananias and Sapphira

14) Peter has his name changed to “Rock.”

About no other Apostle can these things be said. Peter's role is unique. Scripture, history, and tradition (the same tradition Thrasher relies on to know his Bible is the inspired Word of God) all show that Peter was indeed the first head of the Church.

### BE STRONG AND TAKE COURAGE

David faced many adversaries, from the enemies of the nations around him to the king of Israel, Saul, who hunted him down and tried to kill him. Despite all of this, he was firm in his trust in the Lord.

In one of his psalms, David asked, “The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the defense of my life; whom shall I dread?” (Psalm 27:1). He said, “Though war arise against me, in spite of this I shall be confident” (Psalm 27:3).

At the end of the psalm, he explained that without this trust in God, he would have no reason to have confidence in the face of his opposition. “I would have despaired unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living” (Psalm 27:13).

He then encouraged all of us, “Wait for the Lord; be strong and let your heart take courage; yes, wait for the Lord” (Psalm 27:14). The example of David shows us that no matter what trials we face in this life, we can have confidence because God is our “light,” our “salvation,” and our “defense” (Psalm 27:1).

So be strong and take courage. Remember that the Lord will take care of His people. Even in situations that seem hopeless and we are tempted to despair, let us keep in mind the goodness that God has promised and hold onto our faith.

**Andy Sochor**

# DISCOURSE

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

Denial: Thomas N. Thrasher | Church of Christ

### Thrasher's Fifth Negative

Although John has previously acknowledged that “Campbellism” is a digression from the issue of this debate, he continues to employ the term, despite knowing that it is offensive to me and that I reject it. He did not show **one thing** that I believe, teach, or practice that originated with Alexander Campbell! Entirely different is my reference to the church with which he is associated as the Roman Catholic Church. That term is not only not objectionable to him, he readily accepts it (it is even in his affirmative proposition!).

John asserts, “It is historical fact that his Church of Christ was founded by the Campbells a couple hundred years ago, so I fail to see why calling his Church of Christ ‘Campbellite’ would be so insulting.” However, my friend’s “fact” is actually fiction! Alexander Campbell did not arrive in this country until 1810, and he did not preach his first sermon until 1811, yet (for example) the Bridgeport, Alabama church of Christ (not far from my home) was established in 1809. Alexander Campbell certainly did **not** “found” it!

My opponent evidently fits one of the categories cited by Vergilius Ferm (*Encyclopedia of Religion*), who observed that the term “Campbellite” is used “ignorantly by the non-church public ... [or] viciously, as well as ignorantly, by the less enlightened sects—Obsolescent, with the general advance of religious intelligence”!

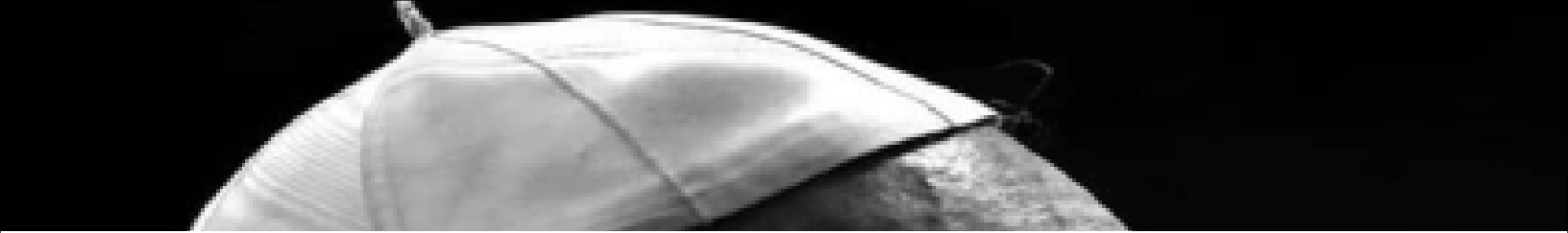
My friend adds, “The point I was making, is that he has no problem in saying bad things about the Catholic Church.” However, I have only expressed my belief that the Catholic Church is in error on certain

doctrinal matters, as even my denial of his proposition indicates. John neglected to cite instances of my “saying bad things about the Catholic Church.” I have many Catholic friends whom I love, respect, and want to go to heaven, yet I am compelled by my love for the Lord to believe and teach His word (Romans 1:16; John 8:32; Acts 5:29; 1 Peter 4:11), even when His word differs from Catholic teaching.

My opponent brings up another off-topic issue: “The Bible actually commands that [instrumental, TNT] music be used in the worship of God (Ps 33:2–3)!” Note that John cited an **Old Testament command!** The Old Testament also **commanded animal sacrifices**: “And thou shalt offer **every day** a **bullock** for a sin offering for atonement” (Exodus 29:36). Does the Catholic Church do that, John?

My friend demands that I “show where God changed His mind and specifically prohibited the use of instrumental music in worship.” Although God does not change (Malachi 3:6), **His law** has (Hebrews 7:12)! We are to serve God according to the **New Testament** (Hebrews 8:6; 9:15; 10:9)! **New Testament worship** includes singing (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16), but not playing on mechanical instruments. Such instruments would be an unauthorized addition (Revelation 22:18; 2 John 9).

John mentions “Wednesday night church meetings” again. However, he ignored my response based upon Matthew 18:20—“For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I [Jesus] in the midst of them.” Doesn’t that include Wednesday night?



He again mentions “contraception”: “There is one contraceptive act in the Bible.... Onan 'spilled his seed on the ground,' to avoid fulfilling his levirate duty to his dead brother.” This text does not prove all contraception is wrong. In fact, John's own statement demonstrates that it was Onan's refusal to fulfill “his levirate duty” that involved disobedience to God (Genesis 38:9-10). Please read this text!

Even many Roman Catholics do not accept their Church's prohibition against all contraception: “Ninety percent of [the theologians on the papal birth control commission] concluded that birth control was not intrinsically evil and that the teaching against contraception could be changed” (Patty Crowley, Papal Commission on Birth Control, 1966). “Contraception is not intrinsically evil” (Archbishop Cardinal Julius Doepfner, *The Politics of Sex and Religion*, 1985). “[Fr. Richard McCormick maintains that] there are many Jesuits who do not accept the thesis that every contraceptive act is morally wrong. I can vouch for the fact that very many bishops share the same conviction” (Thomas J. Gumbleton, auxiliary bishop of Detroit, *America*, November 20, 1993).

My opponent said, “Mr. Thrasher's **whole argument** [emphasis mine, TNT] about Peter not being the first Pope can be boiled down to: 'The Bible nowhere specifically states that Peter was 'Pope,' or 'Head of the Church,' or 'Bishop of Rome.'” Isn't it strange that Peter was called an **apostle** (1 Peter 1:1) and an **elder** (1 Peter 5:1), but **never** any of the things **John says** Peter was!

- John never proved by the Bible that Peter was Bishop of Rome. In fact, Paul's letter to the saints in Rome names numerous individuals (Romans 16:1-15), but **never mentions Peter**, whom John

contends was Bishop of Rome!

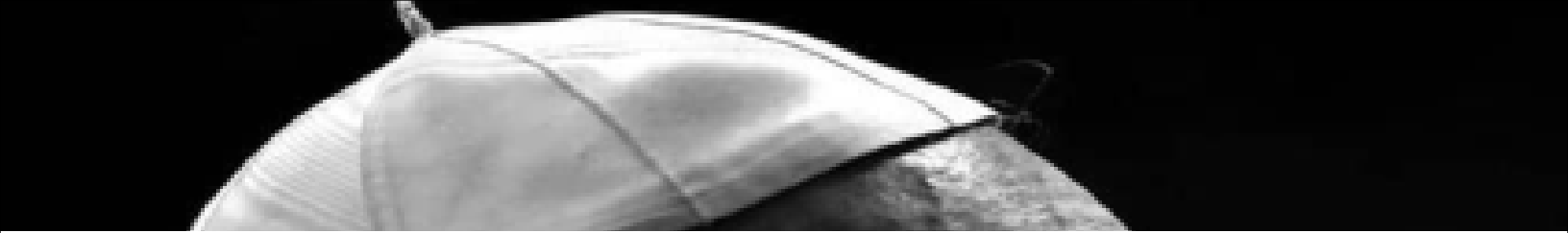
- The Bible states that Jesus was **the head** of the church (Ephesians 1:22-23; 5:23), but never says that Peter was!
- The Bible nowhere says that Peter (nor anyone else) was the Pope!

However, John mischaracterizes this as my “whole argument.” Later in his speech he admitted the incorrectness of his earlier assertion when he claimed “the 'silence' argument is the **bulk** [my emphasis, TNT] of his argumentation.”

In my fourth speech alone, I offered at least 17 other items of evidence that Peter was not a Pope. Although I do not have space to repeat them here, I urge the reader to re-read them. John neglected to respond to these items of evidence! He had plenty of time to rehash instrumental music, Wednesday night meetings, contraception, and the authorship of Mark (all of which I had already discussed), but he chose not to reply to the evidence I offered against his proposition that Peter was the Pope!!!

Despite my detailed explanation of my position, my friend largely ignores my responses and insists that I prove that Mark wrote “the Gospel of Mark.” As I emphasized previously, I do **not know for certain** who wrote “Mark,” and, if God required that we know, **He could have told us** (as He did, for example, for the authorship of Romans, Galatians, James, and Jude). However, since John evidently thinks this is such an important issue, the following entry on the “Gospel of Mark” in *Theopedia* represents my view:

*Strictly speaking, the work is anonymous, in that no claim of authorship is inherently made within the letter itself. However, there is evidence both in Scripture and in history to support John Mark ... The internal evidence is corroborated by early*



*attestations, including an ancient caption (“according to Mark”), and testimony by Papias, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, and Origen. The nearly universal acceptance of Mark as the author of the gospel in light of the fact that he was neither an apostle nor a hero in the first century church lends credence to the validity of the traditional claim that John Mark wrote the gospel which bears his name.*

However, uninspired writers may be mistaken and their testimony is sometimes contradictory. Regardless of who wrote “Mark,” God promised to preserve His word, and I am convinced He has done that.

My opponent states that he “never claimed they [his historical sources] were inspired.” He also admits that “historical sources” are sometimes wrong, as I demonstrated by citing some of their disagreements and inconsistencies. That was exactly my point in response to his effort to uphold his proposition by citing statements of uninspired, fallible men.

John lists 14 items that he claims “Scripture tells us ... about Peter and Peter alone.”

However, not any one of these separately, nor all of them collectively, make Peter the Pope!

- “Peter walked on water.” [And Peter began sinking (Matthew 14:30) and was rebuked by Jesus for his little faith (:31)!]
- “Peter called for a replacement to Judas.” [However, the apostles (“they”), not only Peter, presented the names of two men (Acts 1:23) and the Lord made the choice of Matthias (:24).]
- “Peter settled the issue at the Council of Jerusalem.” [Not true! Paul, Barnabas, and others from Antioch did not go to **Peter** to “settle” the

issue; they went “unto the **apostles and elders** about this question” (Acts 15:2, 4, 6). Several men spoke, including Peter, Barnabas, and Paul; however, it was James who proposed the solution: “Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God: But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood” (:19-20). The apostles and elders accepted James' conclusion (:22-25, 28-29).]

- “Peter was appointed, by Jesus, as shepherd of Jesus' flock.” [Peter was only one of many shepherds (1 Peter 5:1).]
- “Jesus prayed specifically for Peter.” [Jesus prayed for all of the apostles (“they” and “them”—John 17:15-20).]
- “Peter spoke for the Apostles on the Day of Pentecost.” [All of the apostles spoke on Pentecost (Acts 2:4, 7). All of the apostles were the Lord's witnesses (2:32).]
- “Peter received a special vision from God to bring the Gospel to the Gentiles.” [But when he went, he instructed them not to bow down to him (Acts 10:26) like people do to the Pope; Paul received a special vision to take the gospel to the Macedonians (Acts 16:9); Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles (Galatians 2:7-9).]
- “Peter was given a special revelation about Jesus being the Messiah.” [Paul received a special vision about Jesus being Lord (Acts 9:3-5).]
- “Peter was given the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven.” [The same text (Matthew 16:19) mentions the power to bind and loose, which Jesus gave to all of the apostles (Matthew 18:18).]
- “Jesus paid the temple tax for Himself and Peter



only.” [The fact is that Peter was involved because “they that received tribute money came to Peter” (Matthew 17:24). That doesn't make Peter a pope—even my opponent doesn't believe Peter was pope when that occurred!].

- “Paul comes to Peter to consult with him.” [Nothing is said about Peter's being Pope! In fact, Paul said, “They who seemed to be somewhat in conference **added nothing to me**” (Galatians 2:6). Later, Paul rebuked Peter for his hypocrisy (:11-14).]
- “Peter generally speaks for all the Apostles.” [Peter didn't speak for Paul, Barnabas, and James in Acts 15. That Peter was an exceptional leader and often the chief speaker (e.g., Acts 2:14-40) doesn't prove he was pope. At times Paul was called “the chief speaker” (Acts 14:12), but that doesn't make him pope!]
- “Peter spoke judgment upon Ananias and Sapphira.” [Paul spoke judgment upon Elymas (Acts 13:8-11), but that didn't make Paul pope!]
- “Peter has his name changed to 'Rock.'” [Cephas means “a stone” (John 1:42), but the “Rock was Christ” (1 Corinthians 10:4)! The name Cephas is used a few times (e.g., 1 Corinthians 1:12; 3:22; 9:5; 15:5; Galatians 2:9), but these references never indicate that he was pope or that he held primacy over the other apostles.]

In my first speech, I pointed out that not only was Peter never called Pope, Bishop of Rome, or Head of the Church in the word of God, but “the Scriptures never mention many things associated with the Roman Catholic Church: Pope, Cardinal, Archbishop, Mass, Lent, Rosary, Purgatory, Extreme Unction, Holy Water, Limbo, Immaculate Conception, Assumption of Mary, and many other

concepts.” In his four speeches since that time, John has never provided a single Bible passage that demonstrates the scripturalness of these concepts. One cannot “speak as the oracles of God” (1 Peter 4:11) in support of these doctrines!

Several times John has boasted, “I win the debate.” However, I have no desire for a personal victory, but a victory for truth over error! Furthermore, any decision concerning the merits of the arguments offered by John and me must be made by the individual reader. I lay no claim to achieving a victory over John in this debate; however, any reader who better understands God's revealed truth is truly a *winner!*

“**The truth** shall make you free” (John 8:32).

## UNMASKING SOPHISTRY IS 5



# UNMASKING SOPHISTRY

A Journal of Christian Evidences and Comparative Religions

Celebrating 5 years of Unmasking Sophistry (April 2021–April 2026). We give thanks to God for His grace and faithfulness.

# 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 that took place in 1935 at Bernie, Missouri, Mr. E. G. Newsom made a serious accusation against his opponent, W. Curtis Porter, a preacher among the churches of Christ. He claimed that Porter and his brethren were baptizing infidels. He went on to explain his reasoning. According to him, Porter and members of the churches of Christ teach that in the plan of salvation, a person must first believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and then repent. But, he argued, repentance means a “change of mind.” So, if a man already believes and then changes his mind, it would mean he stops believing. In his conclusion, such a person becomes an unbeliever—an infidel. Therefore, he claimed, they were baptizing unbelievers.

When it was his turn to respond, W. Curtis Porter asked: “Mr. Newsom, have you ever repented since your conversion? What do God's children do when they repent? They must first believe in order to be saved, they are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ as Christians, and then as Christians, they must repent of the sins they commit. They change their minds, they become unbelievers, and if you have ever repented of any sin you have committed since you were converted, then you became an infidel. The cause was a change of mind - a change from a believer to an unbeliever.” Then came the turning point. Porter applied Mr. Newsom's own reasoning back to him. If repentance truly meant changing from belief to unbelief, then every time a Christian repents, he would become an infidel. That would mean Mr.

Newsom himself had become an unbeliever each time he repented. At that point, the flaw in the argument became obvious. What was intended as a strong criticism ended up contradicting itself. The reasoning could not stand without leading to an absurd conclusion.

In a debate held in 1953 at Malvern, Arkansas, a man named Hoyt Chastain argued strongly against the idea that a child of God could fall away and be lost. Speaking to W. Curtis Porter, a preacher among the churches of Christ, he laid down what he believed was a decisive challenge. He said that if Porter wanted to prove that a Christian could go to hell, he must produce an example from the Bible. According to him, it was not enough to point to what the Scriptures teach in principle. Porter had to find a specific case—someone who became a child of God, later died in sin, and was shown in Scripture to have gone to hell. Without such an example, he insisted, the doctrine could not be proven.

When it was his turn to respond, W. Curtis Porter accepted the basis of the argument—but then turned it around. He asked Mr. Chastain a simple question: could he prove that an unbeliever will go to hell by the same method? Could he open the Bible and point to a specific individual who lived as an unbeliever, died in unbelief, and was clearly shown to have gone to hell?

**Continued on pg. 28**

# Church History

## Alexander Campbell and Infant Baptism

By Andy Sochor | Kentucky, USA

In 1808, Thomas Campbell (1763-1854) coined the phrase that would become the motto of the Restoration Movement: “Where the Bible speaks, we speak; where the Bible is silent, we are silent” (*The Search for the Ancient Order: Volume 1*, p. 47). His son, Alexander Campbell, later became the unofficial leader of this movement that sought to restore the doctrines and practices of the New Testament.

However, at the beginning of this movement, both Campbells were associated with the Presbyterian church. Because of this, they grew up accepting infant baptism as a Scriptural form of immersion. This would present a challenge to their new way of thinking. In terms of what “the Bible speaks,” baptism is for *believers* (Mark 16:16; Acts 8:36-38; *et al.*). Since infants cannot believe, they are not Scriptural candidates for baptism. Therefore, the practice of infant baptism is unscriptural.

For those who were trying to follow the New Testament as their only rule of faith and practice, rather than the words of men, any discussion of baptism should have raised questions about *infant baptism*. Yet Alexander Campbell admitted that he “let it slip,” hoping that people would think through the issue on their own (*The Stone-Campbell Movement*, p. 178). Early on, Thomas Campbell “hoped to avoid any question about baptism so as not to hinder their plea for Christian unity” (*The Search for the Ancient Order: Volume 1*, p. 180).

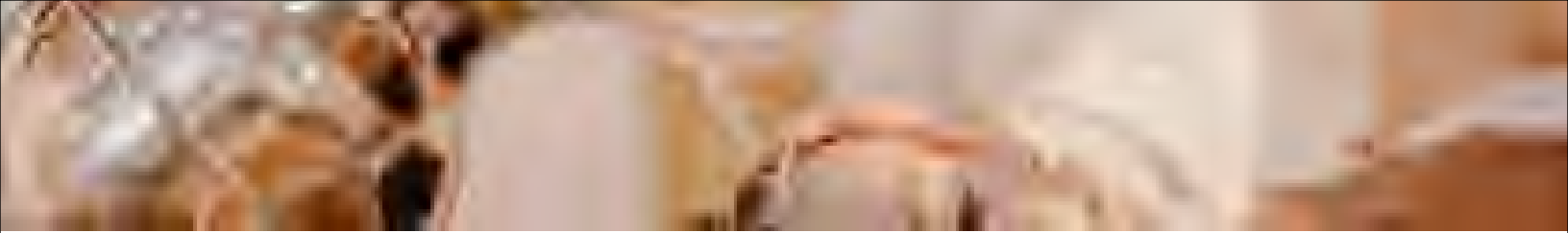
Looking back, it may be confusing to us why the Campbells were slow to change their views on baptism, especially as they championed the “restoration plea.” However, such ideas always begin

as a good-sounding theory. The challenge comes when these ideas need to be put into practice. Many religious people would agree in principle that we should speak “where the Bible speaks,” while engaging in practices that are foreign to the New Testament.

Alexander Campbell was forced to confront the question of infant baptism when it came time to baptize his own child. He and his wife Margaret had their first child on March 13, 1812, a baby girl named Jane. To his credit, Campbell did not dismiss the question as many are tempted to do when objections are raised to a familiar practice. Instead, he diligently searched for the truth on the issue.

He first obtained “all the books available in favor of infant baptism. The more he read, the stronger his conviction grew that infant baptism was of human origin” (*Restoration Principles and Personalities*, p. 58). He then studied his Greek New Testament and found nothing to endorse the practice. Historian Leroy Garrett noted, “Once he checked every use of the Greek words rendered *baptize* and *baptism* in the New Testament, he was satisfied that believers, and believers only, are the proper subjects of the ordinance. Not only did he decide not to baptize little Jane, but he resolved that he himself would be immersed” (*The Stone-Campbell Movement*, p. 178).

Campbell was able to get Matthias Luce, a Baptist minister, to agree to immerse him. This was unusual because the Baptist church required candidates for baptism to relate a religious experience beforehand. However, “Campbell insisted such was not required by the New Testament” (*Restoration Principles and Personalities*, p. 61). On June 12, 1812, in a public service at Buffalo Creek that lasted seven hours (due



to lengthy sermons by Thomas and Alexander Campbell), seven people were immersed into Christ for the remission of their sins, including Thomas Campbell and his wife, and Alexander Campbell and his wife. At the next meeting of the Brush Run church (where they were members), thirteen more were immersed.

The question about infant baptism was avoided at first for fear that it might disrupt the unity of believers. However, after careful study and reflection upon the Scriptures, they concluded that it was necessary to obey the Lord's instructions, even if it meant changing their views on the issue.

There are a few lessons we can learn from this.

**First, we must go to the Bible for all our questions about matters pertaining to the faith.** Interestingly, Alexander Campbell first consulted books that talked about infant baptism (we will consider this further in a moment), but he then went to the Bible in order to become convinced that infant baptism was not authorized. When we have questions about what is good, right, and true, we need to search the Scriptures to find the answer. Paul told Timothy, “*All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work*” (2 Timothy 3:16-17). If the Scriptures equip us for “*every good work,*” and they provide no command or authority for infant baptism, then we know that infant baptism is not a good work. We must be like the Bereans, who were commended for being “*noble-minded*” because “*they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether those things [which Paul taught them] were so*” (Acts 17:11).

**Second, we must be willing to rethink popular**

**doctrines and practices.** Just because a majority believes something, that does not make it true. Jesus warned that the majority would follow the “*broad [way] that leads to destruction*” (Matthew 7:13). Peter warned that “*many will follow*” after false teachers, “*and because of them the way of truth will be maligned*” (2 Peter 2:2). We cannot judge any doctrine or practice based upon how many people adhere to it. Instead, as we noted in the previous point, we must go to the Bible to determine what is right because the word of God is truth (Psalm 119:160; John 17:17).

**Third, we must desire to be right more than we desire to change.** When Alexander Campbell wrestled with the question of infant baptism, he began by reading what others had written on the subject. Remember that he, his father, and the brethren with whom he enjoyed fellowship had been in favor of infant baptism. Yet he was not someone who was “*given to change*” as the wise man warned his son about (Proverbs 24:21). There are many with a rebellious heart who are looking for any excuse they can find to leave the faith in which they were raised. Paul described such people as those who are “*wanting to have their ears tickled, [so] they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths*” (2 Timothy 4:3-4). Campbell was not like this. He did not find all the books *against* infant baptism because he wanted to change. Instead, he found “*all the books available in favor of infant baptism*” (*Restoration Principles and Personalities*, p. 58). If infant baptism was right, he wanted to read the strongest arguments in favor of it to convince him.

**Continued on pg. 37**

# BARBS WITH A POINT

## Fellowship in Evangelism and Service

By Osamagbe Lesley Egharevba | Lagos, Nigeria

*“I thank my God upon every remembrance of you...,<sup>5</sup> for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now”* Philippians 1:3-5

### Introduction

Fellowship is one of the most cherished blessings enjoyed by those who are in Christ. The New Testament repeatedly emphasizes the unity that exists among believers and the shared responsibilities that accompany that relationship. Fellowship is not merely a social connection among Christians; it is a spiritual partnership rooted in a common faith, a common hope, and a common mission. When the New Testament speaks of fellowship, it often refers to a sharing or joint participation in spiritual blessings and responsibilities. Because Christians are united in Christ, they are also united in the work that the Lord has entrusted to His people. Among the most important expressions of this fellowship is the shared participation in the work of evangelism and in the various forms of service that Christians render to one another. Understanding fellowship in evangelism and service helps us appreciate both the unity and the purpose of the church as revealed in the New Testament.

### The Meaning of Fellowship

The word “fellowship” in the New Testament comes from the Greek word *koinonia*, which conveys the idea of sharing, partnership, or participation. It describes a relationship in which individuals jointly participate in something that they have in common. In Acts 2:42, Luke records that the early disciples “continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.” The apostle John similarly describes the spiritual basis

of Christian fellowship. In I John 1:3, he writes, “Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.” Because believers share fellowship with God through Christ, they also share fellowship with one another. Their unity is grounded in a common relationship with the Lord. This fellowship is not merely theoretical. It manifests itself in practical ways as Christians participate together in the work that God has assigned to His people.

### Fellowship in the Gospel

One of the clearest expressions of fellowship in the New Testament is the partnership believers share in the proclamation of the gospel. The apostle Paul expressed deep gratitude for the church at Philippi because of their participation in his preaching work. In Philippians 1:5, he thanked God “for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now.” The Christians in Philippi had supported Paul’s efforts to preach the gospel and were therefore partners with him in that work. Their support included encouragement, prayers, and material assistance. Later in the same epistle, Paul reminded them that they had sent aid to him on more than one occasion. In Philippians 4:15–16, he wrote that no church had shared with him concerning giving and receiving except them alone. By supporting Paul in this way, the Philippian brethren shared in the preaching of the gospel even though they were not personally traveling with him. Their support made them participants in the work. This principle illustrates an important truth about Christian fellowship: when believers cooperate in the spread of the gospel, they are united in a common mission.



## **The Church's Work of Evangelism**

The New Testament teaches that the church has a responsibility to proclaim the gospel to the world. Before His ascension, Jesus gave His disciples what is commonly called the Great Commission. In Matthew 28:19–20, He commanded them to go into all nations, make disciples, baptize them, and teach them to observe His teachings. Similarly, in Mark 16:15, Jesus said, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.” The message of salvation was to be proclaimed widely so that all people might have the opportunity to hear and obey the truth. The spread of the gospel is accomplished through the teaching and preaching of God's word. Paul emphasized this in Romans 10:14–17, where he explained that faith comes by hearing the word of God. People cannot believe in Christ unless they hear the message of the gospel, and they cannot hear unless someone proclaims it. Because of this, Paul instructed Timothy to devote himself to the work of preaching. In II Timothy 4:2, he urged him, “Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season.” The proclamation of the word is the means by which God's message is communicated to the world. Thus, the church participates in evangelism by proclaiming the gospel and by supporting those who devote themselves to preaching and teaching.

### **Different Roles in the Same Work**

Although not every Christian serves in the same capacity, all Christians can share in the work of spreading the gospel. Paul described this cooperative effort in I Corinthians 3:6–9. Speaking of the work done among the Corinthians, he wrote, “I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase.” Different individuals contributed in different ways, yet all were working toward the same goal. This passage reminds us that evangelism often involves the

combined efforts of many people. One person may teach the gospel initially, another may provide further instruction, and still another may encourage continued growth. Ultimately, however, the increase comes from God.

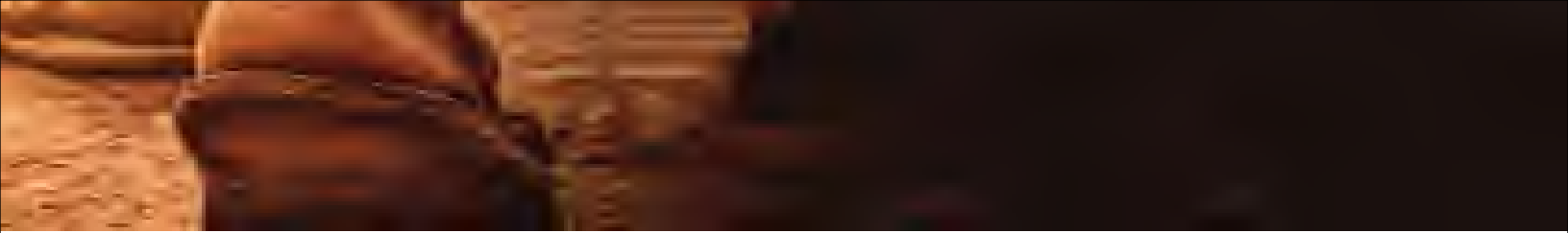
Congregations also participate in this work by supporting those who preach. The New Testament shows that churches supported preachers in carrying the gospel to other places. Such support represents fellowship in the gospel because it enables the message to reach those who might otherwise never hear it.

### **Fellowship in Supporting the Truth**

The apostle John emphasized the importance of supporting faithful teachers of the gospel. In III John 5–8, he commended those who helped traveling brethren who were preaching the truth. He wrote that those who supported them became “fellow workers for the truth.” This passage demonstrates that Christians participate in evangelism not only by teaching but also by supporting those who carry the message to others. Such support is an expression of fellowship because it represents shared participation in the work of spreading the gospel. When congregations encourage and assist faithful teachers, they help ensure that the message of Christ continues to reach new audiences.

### **Fellowship in Service Among Christians**

While evangelism involves proclaiming the gospel to the lost, Christians also share fellowship through acts of service directed toward one another. The New Testament church demonstrated this spirit of mutual care in several ways. In Acts 4:32, Luke describes how the believers were “of one heart and of one soul.” Their unity led them to share their resources so that the needs of fellow Christians could be met. The New Testament repeatedly encourages believers to care for



one another. In Galatians 6:10, Paul exhorted Christians to do good to all people, “especially unto them who are of the household of faith.” This instruction highlights the special concern that Christians should have for their fellow believers. Service to one another strengthens the bonds of fellowship within the church. When Christians encourage, assist, and care for each other, they demonstrate the love that should characterize the people of God.

### **Distinguishing Evangelism from Benevolence**

It is important to recognize that the New Testament distinguishes between the preaching of the gospel and the work of relieving physical needs. Evangelism is accomplished through teaching the word of God, while benevolence involves providing assistance to those who are in need. The New Testament provides examples of churches sending relief to needy saints. For instance, during a time of famine, disciples in Antioch determined to send aid to brethren in Judea (Acts 11:29), where each disciple gave according to his ability. Similarly, Paul later carried contributions from several congregations to assist needy Christians in Jerusalem (Romans 15:25–26). These examples show that congregations helped relieve the needs of fellow believers. At the same time, the preaching of the gospel remained a distinct work accomplished through teaching the word. Recognizing this distinction helps preserve the New Testament pattern for the work of the church.

### **Unity Through Shared Labour**

When Christians participate together in evangelism and service, their fellowship is strengthened. Shared labour for the Lord creates bonds of cooperation and mutual encouragement. The apostle Paul described the church as a body in which every member

contributes to the overall health and growth of the whole. In Ephesians 4:16, he explained that the body grows as each part works properly. This imagery emphasizes the importance of cooperation among believers. Each Christian has opportunities to contribute to the work of the Lord, and when all work together faithfully, the church becomes stronger and more effective.

### **Conclusion**

Fellowship is a profound spiritual relationship that unites Christians in both blessings and responsibilities. Because Christians share a common faith in Christ, they also share in the work that He has entrusted to His people. One of the most significant expressions of this fellowship is found in the shared participation in evangelism. By preaching the gospel, supporting faithful teachers, and encouraging the spread of the truth, Christians work together in fulfilling the Lord's command to make disciples of all nations. Fellowship is also expressed through acts of service as believers care for one another and assist those in need among the household of faith. Such service strengthens the unity of the church and reflects the love that Christ has commanded His followers to demonstrate. When Christians faithfully participate in these works, they manifest the true meaning of fellowship. United in purpose and devotion to the Lord, they labour together so that the gospel may be proclaimed and the body of Christ may be strengthened.

# Institutionalism

## The Church, Local - Its Responsibilities And Limitations

By John T. Overbey

I take it that everybody knows that the word "church" as applied to that blood-bought, spirit-filled institution in the New Testament is used in two senses, viz., universal and local. In its universal sense it includes all of God's children everywhere; while in its local sense it includes all of God's children in any given locality. (See Matt. 16: 18 and I Cor. 1:2) Furthermore, everybody knows that the Church in a universal sense HAS NO ORGANIZATION—only in a local sense does it have any organization. Now, in our excitement to preach the gospel to "the whole creation," we have overlooked some things in regard to the responsibilities and limitations of the local church. For that reason I am making some observations.

Our Lord has very carefully outlined the procedure for worldwide evangelism in Acts 1:8: "...and ye shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." Our trouble seems to be that we have the "cart before the horse"—we begin with the "uttermost part of the earth" and try to get back to "Jerusalem." I suggest that we stop and begin the procedure as the Lord has outlined. This procedure will never usurp the autonomy of the local congregation, but will within one generation evangelize the whole world! I know it will, because it did during the first century. (Col 1:23).

When the Jerusalem church became evangelistic as a result of the persecution which followed the death of Stephen, we find that Phillip "went down to the city of Samaria" (Acts 8:5); others were "scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea" (Acts 8:1); Ananias was at Damascus (Acts 9:10); Peter was at Joppa (Acts 9 and 10); some "traveled as far as Phoenicia, and Cyprus, and Antioch. (Acts 11:19) The careful reader

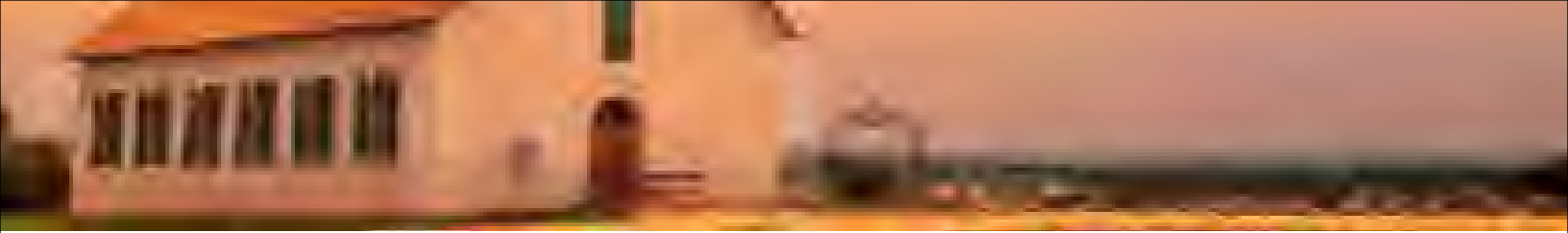
will note that all this was done under the oversight of the elders at Jerusalem.

In Acts 11:27, 28 we find a record of Agabus, one of the prophets who came down to Antioch from Jerusalem, told of a great famine over all the world. As a result the brethren at Antioch determined to send relief to the brethren at Jerusalem and in Judea. This they sent "to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul" (Acts 11:30).

Now, let's notice some things: (1) Here is a clear cut case of one congregation co-operating with other congregations in the alleviation of suffering, (2) The supplies were sent to the elders of the churches in Judea to alleviate the suffering in that locality, NOT THOUSANDS OF MILES AWAY! (3) We are not told of their setting up any organization within the church for the purpose of distributing these supplies. Seems that the elders of the local congregations were able to take care of the situation.

In Acts 13 we see where the apostle Paul and Barnabas were sent out by the church at Antioch under the direction of the Holy Spirit to do some evangelistic work in "foreign countries." I guess you would say that the church in Antioch "sponsored" them, for we read in Acts 14 where they came back to Antioch and when they had gathered "the church together, they rehearsed all things that God had done with them. (Acts 14:27).

There are three such evangelistic efforts as the one just described. Now, let's see if we can find where various congregations co-operated in such efforts. In Philippians 4:15-18 we have a very clear statement from the pen of the apostle Paul "And ye yourselves also know, ye Philippians, that in the beginning of the



gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church had fellowship with me in the matter of giving and receiving but ye only; for even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my need. Not that I seek for the gift; but I seek for the fruit that increaseth to your account. But I have all things, and abound: I am filled, having received from Epaphroditus the things that came from you, an odor of sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God."

Now note: (1) This is a clear cut case of the church at Philippi having fellowship in the preaching of the Gospel (2) Their fellowship was sent directly to the apostle Paul by the hands of Epaphroditus. The twentieth century way is to send the money to the "sponsoring" church and they in turn send it to the "missionary." In other words, the "sponsoring" church serves as a clearing-house for funds for the "missionary." Sorta looks like a Missionary Society to me!

Of course, the Lord's way of doing things is a little slower than man's way, but after all, it is the Lord's work we are trying to do, so I think we are obligated to do it His way! Maybe it is high time we were slowing down a little to get our bearings. In our desire to keep up with the denominations we are about to take on some of their paraphernalia!

Lest anyone should get the idea that I am opposed to world-wide evangelism, let me say that I am quite to the contrary—I believe that people will go to hell just as quickly for their failure to do this as they will for their failure to do any other work that is commanded by our Lord. If every local congregation will assume its responsibility, the whole world can be evangelized, yea, it will be done! Let's be very careful in our efforts to preach the gospel to the whole creation that we do it the Lord's way. **THE LORD HAS NEVER REQUIRED A LOCAL CONGREGATION TO**

**DO MORE THAN IT IS CAPABLE OF DOING ANY MORE THAN HE HAS REQUIRED AN INDIVIDUAL TO DO MORE THAN HE IS CAPABLE OF DOING.** Yes, the various local congregations can cooperate—let each one assume its responsibility and that is all the co-operation that is needed.

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### **QUIBBLES THAT BACKFIRED**

**Continued from pg. 21**

Porter acknowledged that the Bible does teach that unbelievers will be lost. But that was exactly the point. If clear statements from Scripture were not enough to prove a matter without a recorded example, then Mr. Chastain himself could not prove that unbelievers would be condemned—because the Bible does not present such a detailed case in the way he demanded. At that moment, the weakness in the argument became clear. The rule that was meant to challenge Porter ended up working against the one who proposed it. If applied consistently, it would make it impossible to prove even the most basic teachings that everyone accepted.

# Myth Buster

## We Can't Understand the Bible the Same Way?

By Emmanuel Oluwatoba | Niger, Nigeria

### Introduction

One of the most common statements heard in religious discussions today is, “We can't all understand the Bible the same way.” It is often used to justify doctrinal differences, excuse contradictions, or avoid serious study altogether. At first glance, it may sound humble and tolerant. But when examined in the light of Scripture, this statement raises an important question: Did God give His word in a way that cannot be clearly understood?

If the Bible cannot be understood in a consistent and unified way, then truth becomes uncertain, doctrine becomes subjective, and unity becomes impossible. Yet the Bible presents a very different picture.

### God's Word Was Given to Be Understood

The Bible repeatedly teaches that God communicated His will clearly so that people can understand it. In Ephesians 3:3–4, Paul writes, “by revelation He made known to me the mystery... by which, **when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ.**” Notice that understanding is not presented as optional or reserved for a select few. It is the expected result of reading what has been written. Similarly, in Nehemiah 8:8, when the Law was read to the people, it was done in such a way that “**they gave the sense, and helped them to understand the reading.**” God's word was not meant to confuse but to enlighten. Even Jesus taught with the expectation that His audience could understand. He often said, “**He who has ears to hear, let him hear**” (Matthew 13:9). This was not a call to mystery, but to attention and willingness.

### The Problem Is Not the Word, but the Approach

If the Bible is understandable, why do so many people

reach different conclusions? The issue is not with the clarity of Scripture but with the way people approach it. Some approach the Bible with preconceived ideas and traditions already in mind. Instead of allowing Scripture to shape their beliefs, they try to make Scripture fit what they already believe. Jesus rebuked this mindset in Mark 7:13, accusing the religious leaders of “**making the word of God of no effect through your tradition.**” Others approach the Bible casually, without serious study. Yet 2 Timothy 2:15 instructs us to “**be diligent... rightly dividing the word of truth.**” Understanding requires effort, careful study, and a sincere desire for truth. There are also those who rely on feelings or personal experiences rather than the text itself. While emotions are real, they are not a reliable guide to truth. Proverbs 14:12 warns that “**there is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.**”

### Unity in Understanding Is Possible

The idea that we cannot all understand the Bible the same way directly contradicts God's desire for unity. In 1 Corinthians 1:10, Paul appeals to believers to “speak the same thing” and to have “**no divisions,**” being “**perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.**” This kind of unity is only possible if there is a common standard that can be understood in the same way. God did not intend for His people to be divided into countless groups with conflicting teachings. Instead, unity is built on a shared understanding of truth. In John 17:20–21, Jesus prayed for believers to be one. This unity is not based on agreeing to disagree, but on being sanctified by truth (John 17:17). Truth, by its nature, is not contradictory. If two teachings oppose each other, both cannot be correct.



## The Role of Context and Honest Study

Understanding the Bible the same way does not mean every passage is equally simple. Some parts of Scripture require deeper study (2 Peter 3:16). However, difficulty does not mean impossibility. Proper understanding comes from respecting context, comparing Scripture with Scripture, and allowing the Bible to interpret itself. Words must be understood in their setting, not isolated from their meaning. When this is done honestly, the message of Scripture becomes clear and consistent. The Bereans provide a good example in Acts 17:11. They were described as noble because they “**received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.**” Their approach shows that understanding is attainable when the right attitude is present.

## The Danger of Accepting the Myth

Accepting the idea that we cannot understand the Bible the same way has serious consequences. It removes the authority of Scripture and replaces it with personal opinion. It allows error to go unchallenged and truth to be treated as relative. If everyone is free to interpret the Bible however they wish, then doctrine loses its meaning. Yet the New Testament repeatedly emphasises “sound doctrine” (Titus 2:1) and warns against false teaching (Galatians 1:6–9). These warnings only make sense if truth can be known and distinguished from error. Furthermore, this myth discourages spiritual growth. If understanding is seen as impossible, then there is little motivation to study deeply or seek clarity.

## Conclusion

The claim that “we can't understand the Bible the same way” may sound appealing, but it does not align with Scripture. God has spoken clearly, and He expects us

to understand His will. While differences may exist due to human weakness, they are not inevitable or acceptable when truth is at stake. The real issue is not the Bible's clarity, but our willingness to approach it with humility, diligence, and honesty. When we lay aside traditions, emotions, and personal biases and allow Scripture to speak for itself, unity in understanding becomes not only possible but expected. Rather than accepting confusion, we are called to pursue truth, to “**test all things; hold fast what is good**” (1 Thessalonians 5:21). God is not the author of confusion, and His word was never meant to divide those who are willing to follow it faithfully.

## BE ZEALOUS FOR THE FEAR OF THE LORD

In Proverbs 23:17 we read: “*Do not envy sinners but always be zealous for the fear of the Lord.*” This verse is not hard to understand. We can all appreciate how people might be tempted to envy sinners who live what is sometimes called “*the good life.*” They have no interest in attaining the spiritual goals set by God. They have little or no regard for His divine standards, nor do they have respect for God's people. But it cannot be denied that some sinful people do now seem to, as we sometimes say, “*have it all!*” They are enjoying the “*pleasures of sin for a season*” but such pleasures are fleeting. (Heb. 11: 25). Psalms 37: 1 says, “*Don't worry or fret not thyself because of evildoers, neither be thou envious of the works of iniquity.*” The same thing is stated in Proverbs 24: 19-20.

But the next verse, Proverbs 23: 18 reminds us why we shouldn't envy their lives. It says: “*There is surely a future hope for you, and your hope will not be cut off.*”

**Continued on pg. 35**

# Ideal Home

## Broken Homes: From Sacred Vows to Shattered Dreams

By Rowland Femi Gbamis | Tennessee, USA

### IV. Why Homes Are Broken

It is indeed worth noting that few marriages collapse due to a single factor. While one spouse may possess a fundamental flaw that overshadows the relationship, marital breakdown typically results from multiple converging forces working together over time. These destructive elements often reinforce one another, creating a downward spiral that becomes increasingly difficult to reverse. A couple might begin with minor communication issues that lead to emotional distance, then open the door to outside influences, which further erode trust and intimacy. Whatever the specific causes, the consequences are always tragic and far-reaching. The devastation extends beyond the couple themselves to impact children, extended families, and entire communities. Understanding these destructive forces of both internal failures and external pressures can help us recognize early warning signs and guard against them before they gain momentum.

#### 1. Lack of Belief in God

The fundamental cause of broken homes lies in a breakdown of faith. When people cease believing in God, they naturally reject the Bible as His authoritative word, following the pattern described in Romans 1:18ff. Without divine authority, personal accountability disappears (cf. Ecclesiastes 12:13–14). This spiritual erosion often begins in educational settings where children learn evolutionary theory and accept false premises about human origins. When some educators boldly deny biblical accounts of creation, they undermine not only the foundation of faith but also the divine design of human relationships and family structures. Even among professing

proper reverence for what God says about marriage. Despite God's law regarding marriage permanence appearing clearly in Matthew 19:1-9 and 5:32, countless couples still approach marriage with a casual "escape clause" mentality.

Since God Himself performs the joining and legislates the terms of marriage, the attitude of "We can always get a divorce" reveals a fundamental disrespect for divine authority. Accordingly, the surest guarantee against divorce is two hearts filled with reverence for Christ and genuine submission to His word. When couples truly believe that God has joined them together and that His commands regarding marriage are both wise and binding, they will possess the anchor necessary to weather any storm that threatens their union in the sea of life.

#### 2. Moral Failures

Sexual immorality stands among the most destructive sins, capable of destroying both homes and eternal destiny for those who refuse to repent (1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Galatians 5:19). Peter's warning captures the spiritual warfare involved: "Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that... they may see your good deeds and glorify God" (1 Peter 2:11-12). Scripture consistently commands God's people to "flee fornication" (1 Corinthians 6:18; cf. Genesis 39:12; Proverbs 7), yet Satan has achieved countless victories on the battlefield of sexual desire (remember Samson! Judges 16). He accomplishes this by desensitizing believers through pervasive sexual images and innuendo while systematically normalizing deviant behaviors, making what Isaiah condemned—calling



"evil good and good evil"—seem reasonable (Isaiah 5:20).

However, God's design offers a beautiful alternative, just as the wise man counseled: "Drink water from your own cistern and fresh water from your own well... let your fountain be blessed and rejoice in the wife of your youth" (Proverbs 5:15, 18). This imagery celebrates the exclusive intimacy that marriage provides as God's gift for human sexuality. Nevertheless, moral breakdown manifests in multiple forms that prepare the heart for greater sin of immodest attire (1 Timothy 2:9), inappropriate speech (Ephesians 4:29), and lascivious conduct (Galatians 5:19). Many who condemn adultery paradoxically condone everything leading to it, as though contemplating sin were acceptable while only its commission was wrong. Yet Jesus taught the necessity of guarding our hearts from what we behold (Matthew 5:28), making the heart's purity as critical as outward behavior.

### 3. When Love Grows Cold (Internal Pressures)

**Quarreling and Conflict:** Constant strife within marriage is one of the most destructive internal forces, causing love to grow cold and destroying the peace God intends for the home. As the wise man observes, "Better a dry crust with peace and quiet than a house full of feasting, with strife" (Proverbs 17:1). This stark contrast reveals that material abundance means nothing when relational harmony is absent. Paul lists "discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions" among the works of the flesh (Galatians 5:20), while urging believers to rid themselves of "anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language" (Colossians 3:8; cf. Ephesians 4:31). Hence, we see that Scripture consistently warns against negative attitudes that fuel marital conflict. These destructive patterns don't develop overnight

but gradually poison the home atmosphere through constant arguing and nagging.

Solomon's vivid imagery captures the misery of a conflict-ridden home: "Better to live on a corner of the roof than share a house with a quarrelsome wife" (Proverbs 21:9; 19:13). While this principle applies equally to both spouses, it illustrates how unbearable life becomes when peace is replaced by perpetual strife. James identifies the root cause: "What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?" (James 4:1). The solution, therefore, lies not in winning arguments but in addressing the selfish desires that fuel them. Peace requires the intentional cultivation of humility, patience, and self-control, as these qualities transform a house of conflict into a haven of rest.

**Cessation of Courtship:** The end of romantic pursuit may be the most insidious cause of marital failure because it strikes at the very foundation of the relationship. Song of Solomon 8:6-7 declares that "love is as strong as death... Many waters cannot quench love," yet many couples allow the flame of romance to dwindle after marriage. If a proper marriage results from love developed over time before the wedding, logic demands that the relationship must continue on the same basis afterward. When courtship ends, the marriage as a love relationship begins to die—slowly at first, then with increasing momentum. The couple who once eagerly planned special moments together now take each other for granted, assuming that the wedding ceremony somehow eliminated the need for continued pursuit. This decline often stems from misplaced priorities. Many couples spend fortunes preparing for their wedding ceremony while paying insufficient attention to the foundations that will sustain their marriage, such as understanding their motivations for marriage,



learning how to nurture the relationship, and developing the character God desires in married partners through counseling, godly literature, and prayer.

Nevertheless, biblical love provides the antidote to this decline, as 1 Corinthians 13:5 reminds us that love "does not behave itself unseemly"—it never acts unkindly, untactfully, or uncouthly." In Ephesians 5:25, Paul commands, "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her." This sacrificial love requires ongoing demonstration from both husband and wife through thoughtful gestures, kind words, and intentional time together. These principles are simple yet profound. Married partners who continue showing affection, appreciation, and respect after the wedding seldom face serious difficulties later. Hence, devoted love must be nurtured consistently by creating an environment where neglect finds no foothold and resentment has no place to breed.

#### 4. External Pressures

We will now examine a few of the several external forces that can undermine even well-intentioned marriages.

**Materialism:** The relentless pursuit of possessions diverts attention from relationships to material gain, creating a dangerous competition between love and money. Jesus warned, "You cannot serve both God and money" (Matthew 6:24), yet many couples unknowingly sacrifice their marriages to material ambition. What's the connection, you asked? Well, the insatiable nature of materialism makes it particularly destructive to relationships. As the Preacher observes in Ecclesiastes 5:10, "Whoever loves money never has enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with their income." This endless cycle

drives couples to work excessively, pursuing ever-greater wealth at the expense of quality time together.

What begins as providing for the family often becomes an obsession that consumes the very relationships it was meant to protect. Paul identifies the spiritual danger in 1 Timothy 6:10: "The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil." When couples prioritize career advancement, luxury purchases, and status symbols over their relationship, they discover too late that prosperity cannot compensate for emotional bankruptcy. The pursuit of material success often requires sacrifices—longer hours, increased stress, and less family time, all of which gradually erode the foundation of marriage. The author of Hebrews offers the antidote: "Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have" (13:5). True marital wealth lies not in bank accounts but in shared moments, mutual support, and spiritual unity—treasures that money cannot buy but neglect can easily destroy.

**In-Law Interference:** While parents are a blessing whose wisdom can enrich their married children's lives, failure to establish proper boundaries often undermines marital unity. God establishes this foundational principle in Genesis 2:24: "A man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh." Jesus reaffirmed this truth in Matthew 19:5, emphasizing that marriage creates a new primary family unit that takes precedence over the original family structure. In-law interference is especially likely when spouses remain emotionally, financially, or practically dependent on their parents, seeking their parents' validation for every decision rather than establishing their own family identity. This dependency prevents the "leaving" that Scripture requires and hinders the formation of true marital unity.



While Exodus 20:12 commands us to "honor father and mother," and parents certainly deserve love and respect, this honor must not extend to allowing parents to become overbearing/domineering in overseeing or controlling their adult children's family decisions. As Proverbs 11:29 warns, "Whoever brings ruin on their family will inherit only wind." When parents overstep appropriate boundaries or when adult children fail to establish independence, both relationships suffer. Healthy marriages require couples to prioritize their spouse's needs and perspectives over parental opinions. This doesn't mean cutting off family relationships, but rather establishing healthy boundaries that honor both the marriage covenant and the parent-child relationship without compromising either.

**Alcohol and Substance Abuse:** Chemical dependency prevents individuals from being their best selves for their families, thereby creating a barrier to the sacrificial love that marriage requires. Scripture consistently warns against the dangers of intoxication. Galatians 5:21 lists drunkenness among the "works of the flesh," warning that "those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God." Proverbs 20:1 declares, "Wine is a mocker and beer a brawler; whoever is led astray by them is not wise." Since alcohol impairs judgment and emotional regulation rather than enhancing them, these substances inevitably damage marital relationships. Paul instructs the Ephesians, "Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery; instead, be filled with the Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18). This contrast is telling: while the Spirit produces "love, joy, peace, and self-control" (Galatians 5:22-23), alcohol yields the opposite.

The practical consequences are, therefore, devastating because substance abuse creates financial strain, erodes trust, fuels domestic violence, and models

destructive behavior for children. Proverbs 23:29-35 provides a vivid description of alcohol's detrimental effects by painting a sobering picture of its impact on families. Marriage requires clear-minded partners who are capable of sacrificial love, responsible decision-making, and consistent emotional presence. The latter are qualities that become impossible to maintain under the influence of substances that cloud judgment and impair character. [For a more detailed examination of this topic, see my article on alcoholic beverages.]

**Preoccupation:** When spouses place other people or activities above their marriage partner, they violate God's design for the marital relationship. While our relationship with God must remain supreme, our spouse should be our highest earthly priority. Matthew 6:33 establishes this principle: "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." This verse affirms God's primacy while implying the proper ordering of all other relationships. However, many couples allow careers, hobbies, friendships, or even church activities to overshadow their marriage. Paul addresses this tension in 1 Corinthians 7:33-34, noting that married individuals should be "concerned about... how he can please his wife" and vice versa. Colossians 3:2 reminds us, "Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things," yet this spiritual focus should strengthen, not diminish, marital devotion. When spouses become preoccupied with external pursuits, whether sports, social media, demanding work projects, or even ministry activities, they neglect the covenant relationship that should anchor their earthly lives. This misplaced priority creates emotional distance, breeding resentment and loneliness that can ultimately destroy what God intended to be a source of mutual support and joy.



#### IV. Conclusion: The Path to Restoration

When we abandon God's guidance and disregard His Word, we become law unto ourselves, inviting sorrow into our present lives and jeopardizing our eternal destiny. Yet when faith in God's design is restored, we will witness the transformation that brings broken homes and countless families flourishing in His intended harmony. The choice before us is clear: embrace God's blueprint for marriage and experience the fullness of His blessings, or reject His design and suffer the devastating consequences of fractured families. In a culture where sacred vows too often dissolve into shattered dreams, we must choose the path that leads from the wedding altar through a lifetime of love, commitment, and divine blessing. The restoration of our homes begins with our hearts being restored to God. When we align our marriages with His perfect design, we not only protect our own families but also become beacons of hope in a broken world by demonstrating that God's way still works and His promises still hold.

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1 Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, 2 When they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear. 3 Do not let your adornment be merely outward—arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel. 4 Rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God. 5 For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands, 6 As Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, whose

daughters you are if you do good and are not afraid with any terror. 7 Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered (1 Peter 3:1-7-NKJV).

#### BE ZEALOUS FOR THE FEAR OF THE LORD

##### Continued from pg. 30

What is that saying? It is saying people who live godly lives will surely have God's future blessings---and it is also reminding us that a time is coming when all the hopes and dreams of people living sinful and wicked lives will be "cut off!" In summation then, the prosperity of the wicked is superficial and temporary and those who trust in God may be certain that, finally, they will be the ones who will be blessed.

You may be sure that the righteous life is the highest quality of life to live. The wicked sinful life hurts the one who lives it and others as well. It will eventually self-destruct, but the righteous life is a blessing in this world, it is a blessing to those nearby, and it will be rewarded in the world to come. So, what are we to do? Focus on God and on doing good! Busy yourself with God's work on earth. Do what you can to prevent evil but commit your ways to God. Trust in Him for He will judge evil and wickedness in His own time.

My friend don't let the glitter of sin blind you to the fact that there is a hereafter, and the choices we make in this life determine our salvation or condemnation in the life to come. Therefore, "exercise yourself toward godliness...which is "profitable...having the promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come" (1 Tim. 4: 8). Think on these things.

- Dennis Abernathy

# SALVATION

## Refuting the “Jews Only” View of Baptism for Remission of Sins

By Dylan Stewart | Alabama, USA

Dispensationalists argue that the command in Acts 2:38 to “repent and ... be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins” was strictly limited in application to the Jews and does not apply today. There are multiple scriptures that prove that argument to be false.

### The Promise of Acts 2:39 Was Given to Jews and Gentiles

Right after telling the crowd to “repent and ... be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins,” Peter immediately added: “For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call” (Acts 2:39). Notice the scope of this promise - it was not limited to the Jews. Peter made this promise to “all who are afar off.” That phrase naturally extends the promise beyond the immediate Jewish audience to others who would later be called by the gospel (2 Thessalonians 2:14), including the Gentiles. In fact, the Gentiles are exactly who Peter had in mind when he used the expression “all who are afar off.” We know that because Ephesians 2:11-13 uses the same wording in reference to Gentiles that Peter used in Acts 2:39. Paul said, “Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh—who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands—that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.” Those who are “far off” are Gentiles. Since the promise of Acts 2:39 applies to

both Jews and Gentiles, then the condition upon which the promise is given in Acts 2:38 (repenting and being baptized for the remission of sins) must also apply to both Jews and Gentiles.

### The Example of Cornelius

Also consider the example of Cornelius in Acts 10. Cornelius, a Gentile (Acts 10:1, 45), and his family heard the same message about how to obtain forgiveness through Christ that the Jews heard on Pentecost. After Cornelius's family believed, Peter did not treat baptism as optional or unnecessary. Even though Cornelius and his family already received Holy Spirit baptism (Acts 10:44-45), Peter still commanded them to be baptized “**in the name of the Lord**” (Acts 10:48). Do you notice the similarity in language between Acts 2:38 and Acts 10:48?

- Acts 2:38 - “Repent, and let every one of you be **baptized in the name of Jesus Christ** for the remission of sins...”
- Acts 10:48 - “And he commanded them to be **baptized in the name of the Lord...**”

Clearly, we are talking about the same baptism in both of these passages. If Acts 2:38 were strictly a “Jewish baptism,” Peter would never have required it of Gentiles. Cornelius's conversion proves that Gentiles were required to obey the same command regarding baptism that Peter gave to the Jews in Acts 2:38.

### Remission of Sins Began at Jerusalem But Didn't End There

In Luke's account of the Great Commission, Jesus said that “**repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem**” (Luke 24:47). Paired with Acts 2:38 and

the other gospel accounts of the Great Commission, we know that "remission of sins" is a summarized expression of the gospel invitation, which includes baptism (see Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:16). Notice that Luke 24:47 tells us that the message of "remission of sins" (which included baptism for that purpose) would begin in Jerusalem; the text does not say that message would remain there. Acts 2 shows the beginning of that preaching, but the book of Acts shows that message spreading to Samaritans, Gentiles (see again the example of Cornelius in Acts 10), and, ultimately, the whole world. In other words, the command connected with the remission of sins that began in Jerusalem (baptism) continued everywhere the gospel went. The same gospel that called Jews to repent and be baptized for the remission of sins also called people of all other nationalities to take the exact same steps to have their sins covered by the blood of Christ.

### Conclusion

The command to "repent and ... be baptized for the remission of sins" was not a temporary instruction limited to the Jews on Pentecost. No, this instruction is part of the universal gospel message that applies to every person the Lord calls by His gospel, both Jew and non-Jew alike.

### Alexander Campbell and Infant Baptism

#### Continued from pg. 23

However, reading the strongest arguments in favor of it and seeing how they fell short helped convince him that there was no Biblical support for the practice. We must always remember that truth has nothing to fear from open, honest investigation.

**Finally, we must be willing to make changes once we come to a better understanding of the**

**Scriptures.** As we noticed in the previous point, some are "*given to change*" and will abandon the truth for something new and different. We must not be like this, but we do need to change our minds when we learn that what we thought was true is not in harmony with the truth found in God's word. The apostle Paul is an example of the attitude that we ought to have. He was "*formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor*" (1 Timothy 1:13). After the death of Stephen, he was "*breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord*" and set off for Damascus to find Christians and "*bring them bound to Jerusalem*" (Acts 9:1-2). But when the Lord appeared to him, and he obeyed the gospel in Damascus (Acts 9:3-18), he began "*preaching the faith which he once tried to destroy*" (Galatians 1:23).

Once he learned the truth, he followed it, regardless of how difficult it was to make the changes necessary to become a Christian. We need to be willing to do the same.

It is good to examine the religious doctrines and practices we have held on to, evaluate them according to the Scriptures, and then either continue in them or repudiate them after we find the truth in God's word. Alexander Campbell did this on the subject of infant baptism after his daughter was born. Then, when he learned the truth, he obeyed it. We need to do the same thing. Whether on baptism or any other topic, we must conform all that we say, think, and do to what has been revealed in the Scriptures.

# QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

## Did the Catholic Church edit Matthew 28:19?

By Jeff Hamilton | Nebraska, USA

### Question:

What baptismal proclamation was used in your baptism? Probably you were baptized, "In the name of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Do you know that this Baptismal Proclamation is not the original text commanded by Jesus Christ as in [Matthew 28:19](#)? The Roman Catholic Church has edited and replaced the original text. Do you know that this Baptismal Proclamation has never been used in the Scriptures by the apostles in baptizing anyone in the First Century Church? Then why was it used for you?

### Answer:

You make a charge that the text of a verse was altered; however, you provided no evidence of the change. You should be able to cite manuscripts before and after the change to prove your assertion. You didn't. In truth, you can't because such evidence doesn't exist. The manuscript evidence is consistent: "in the name of the Father, and the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" appears from the earliest copies and citations of the Scriptures. Many of these manuscripts predate the declaration of the bishop in Rome that he was the Universal Father of the church.

One barrier to claiming that the biblical text was intentionally altered is that there are so many copies of the text scattered around the world. A concerted effort to alter the text cannot succeed because the editors cannot access all the manuscripts to make the change. Nor could editing be done without leaving traces of alterations. These are not computer documents. They were handwritten with ink. Your claim of adding additional words to the verse causes major problems because the remainder of Matthew would have to be rewritten to make room for the extra

text. In some manuscripts, there isn't enough space. Changes like that leave evidence of erasure, changes in handwriting, and changes in the ink used. Thus, while you can theorize that a change was made, such a change would leave a trail of evidence that the change was made. Such a trail doesn't exist.

What you are advocating is a figment of your imagination.

The second problem is assuming that there is a set formula of words that must be recited at every baptism. The New Testament does not record what was exactly said during a baptism. "In the name of" indicates that the baptism is authorized by another and not by the person doing the baptism. To say "I baptize you" alone would leave the impression that you were doing it by your own authority. The one doing the baptism technically has no authority. He is merely assisting the one wishing to be baptized. Paul makes that clear when some Corinthians claimed to be followers of different people. *"Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, lest anyone should say that I had baptized in my own name"* ([1 Corinthians 1:13-15](#)).

Since God is one -- united in all that the Godhead does -- then a baptism done by the authority of one is also a baptism done by the authority of all. If Jesus authorized something, then I know the Father's authority is also given ([John 12:49-50](#)), as is the authority of the Holy Spirit ([John 16:13-14](#)). Therefore, the claim that there is a difference in authorization for a baptism depending on the words used is also false.

# Addendum

## How Does Sin Enslave Us?

By Andy Sochor | Kentucky, USA

*“Jesus answered them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin. The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son does remain forever. So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed”* (John 8:34-36).

In the verses leading up to Jesus' statement above, He explained that the *truth* is able to make us free (John 8:32). Free from what? From sin. Sin enslaves those who commit it.

How does this happen? It does not somehow remove our free will. Even after we sin, we still have the ability to *“choose...whom [we] will serve”* (Joshua 24:15) and be persuaded to follow the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:11). So how does this “enslavement” happen?

In this article, we will notice seven ways that sin enslaves us. As we consider these, remember that most are actually accomplished by the devil and his ministers, who tempt us to sin, but they are attributed to sin itself.

### **Sin Enslaves Us by Telling Us There Are No Consequences**

This is what Satan did in the Garden when he tempted Eve to sin. He told her, *“You surely will not die”* (Genesis 3:4), in an attempt to convince her that violating God's law was inconsequential. Yet there are *eternal* consequences, as Paul pointed out, *“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (Romans 6:23). Even in this life, sin produces hardship. The wise man said, *“Good understanding produces favor, but the way of the treacherous is hard”* (Proverbs 13:15). But it is much easier to continue in sin if we are led to believe that

there are no consequences for it.

### **Sin Enslaves Us by Telling Us There Is No Chance to Overcome**


Many portray the battle to overcome sin as being completely hopeless. They may even cite Paul's words to make this point: *“For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me”* (Romans 7:19-20). However, applying this passage to our lives as Christians ignores the context in which Paul described life *before* he was *“in Christ Jesus”* (Romans 8:1). God has promised a *“way of escape”* with every temptation (1 Corinthians 10:13). To reject that is to disregard the fact that *“God is faithful”* (1 Corinthians 10:13). Furthermore, Jesus has shown us how to live a life *“without sin”* despite being *“tempted in all things as we are”* (Hebrews 4:15). Rather than remaining enslaved to sin, we need to follow the example of Christ and take the way of escape when we are tempted.

### **Sin Enslaves Us by Telling Us of All the Pleasures of Sin**

Moses was cited as a hero of faith because he chose to give up *“the passing pleasures of sin”* (Hebrews 11:24-26). There is no point in denying that there is some pleasure to be derived from certain sins. Yet any pleasure we receive from sin is *temporary*. Therefore, we need to develop self-control and learn to deny self (Luke 9:23) so that we can avoid doing what is wrong.

### **Sin Enslaves Us by Telling Us That Everyone Is in the Same Condition**

Sin is a universal problem: *“For all have sinned and fall*



*short of the glory of God*" (Romans 3:23). However, some act as though Christians are still like the world with regard to sin. Even though we *"have sinned"* (Romans 3:23), we are not to *"continue in sin"* since we have *"died to sin"* (Romans 6:1-2). We are to be different from the world, as Paul wrote, *"Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect"* (Romans 12:1-2). Our lives have been given to God and must not be handed back over to sin.

### **Sin Enslaves Us by Becoming a Habit**

When we do something often enough, it becomes our default behavior. This is dangerous with sin because we eventually reach the point where we no longer *"know how to blush"* (Jeremiah 6:15) and sin without thinking seriously about it. However, we must take care not to become *"seared in [our] own conscience"* (1 Timothy 4:2). Instead, like Tabitha, who was *"abounding with deeds of kindness and charity which she continually did"* (Acts 9:36), we need to develop a habit of doing what is right.

### **Sin Enslaves Us by Becoming a Coping Mechanism for Hardships in Life**

Satan thought this would work with Job because it works so often with others. The tempter believed that if Job lost all of the blessings he had received from God, then he would *"curse"* God (Job 1:8-11). However, despite all that he suffered, *"Job did not sin with his lips"* (Job 2:10). Even so, this temptation is very effective against many. Yet when we face

hardships, we need to turn to the Lord instead of away from Him. Peter said we must *"[cast] all [our] anxiety on Him, because He cares for [us]"* (1 Peter 5:7). The more we focus on God's promises, the *"lighter"* our troubles seem (2 Corinthians 4:17), and the easier it is to avoid sin.

### **Sin Enslaves Us by Shifting Our Focus Off of Jesus**

Remember that when Peter walked on the water with Jesus, he began to sink when he lost focus on Christ (Matthew 14:21-31). By *"fixing our eyes on Jesus,"* we can *"lay aside...the sin which so easily entangles us"* (Hebrews 12:1-2). As we noted earlier, Jesus left us with a perfect example (Hebrews 4:15), and we are to *"follow in His steps"* (1 Peter 2:21-22), not *"continually"* go astray as we did before (1 Peter 2:25).

### **Conclusion**

Jesus came to set us free from sin, and this is possible through the truth He proclaimed and His sacrifice on the cross. However, in order to take advantage of this freedom, we need to understand how sin enslaves us so we can learn to overcome it.

Even after being set free from sin, we do not want to become enslaved again. So understanding how this happens can help us be on guard against it.