



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

Welcome to the twenty-third edition of *Unmasking Sophistry Magazine* and the third issue published in 2026. By the grace of God, what began as a modest effort to defend the truth and expose error has continued to grow, and we are grateful to the Lord for granting us the strength and opportunity to carry on this work.

The purpose of this journal remains unchanged: to proclaim the truth of God's Word and to expose sophistical arguments advanced in defense of false religion and those employed against the Christian faith. In an age where human reasoning often overshadows biblical authority, our commitment is to encourage careful Bible study, sound interpretation, and unwavering respect for the pattern revealed in the New Testament.

The previous edition featured studies on Alexander Campbell and infant baptism, fellowship in evangelism and service, the "Jews Only" view of baptism for the remission of sins, the Roman Catholic Church and the papacy, broken homes, the formation of the biblical canon, Quibbles that Backfired, and several other subjects intended to strengthen the faith of God's people.

In this edition, readers will find studies on *Scriptural Clarity on the War That Broke Out in Heaven, Is Crossover Night Authorized by the New Testament?*, *Observance of a Church Anniversary: A Matter of Faith or a Matter of Opinion?*, *What to Call the People of God, Works of the Flesh Versus the Fruit of the Spirit*, *Church Cooperation: An Historical Perspective*, *Humility Among God's Children*, together with several other articles designed to encourage sound biblical thinking and deepen our appreciation for the authority and sufficiency of Scripture.

Readers are reminded that *Unmasking Sophistry Magazine* is freely available online. Both current and previous editions may be accessed and downloaded from our website at www.unmaskingsophistry.com/downloads

Our open-door policy remains firmly in place. Any reader who believes that an article published in this journal is in error is warmly invited to submit a written rebuttal. We will gladly publish such a response together with the author's reply. Where appropriate, a formal written proposition may also be arranged so that both parties may affirm and deny the issue under consideration, with the common objective of arriving at the truth through the careful examination of God's Word.

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).

May the Lord richly bless you as you study His Word.

God's love and blessings,

Osamagbe Lesley Egharevba

Editor

CHRISTIAN EVIDENCES

Scriptural Clarity on the War That Broke Out in Heaven

By Osamagbe Lesley Egharevba | Benin City, Nigeria

Text: *"And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon..."*
(Revelation 12:7).

Introduction

Few subjects in biblical interpretation have generated more speculation than the origin of Satan. It is commonly asserted that before the creation of mankind Satan was a glorious angel who became proud, rebelled against God, led a revolt in heaven, and was cast out along with a host of rebellious angels. This narrative is frequently presented as established biblical doctrine, with Revelation 12:7–9 and Isaiah 14:12 serving as its principal proof texts. Yet an important question deserves careful consideration: **Do these passages actually teach that doctrine, or has a popular theological tradition been read into the biblical text?**

This is not a trivial question. Christians must never build doctrine upon assumptions, tradition, or imagination. Our responsibility is to allow Scripture to speak for itself. The Bereans were commended because they searched the Scriptures daily to determine whether what they had been taught was true (Acts 17:11). Every doctrine, no matter how popular, must be tested by the Word of God.

This study does not seek to satisfy human curiosity about Satan's origin. Rather, its purpose is to determine what the inspired Scriptures actually reveal concerning the so-called "war in heaven" and the famous statement, "How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer" (Isaiah 14:12).

What the Issue Is Not

Before examining these passages, several misconceptions should be removed. The issue is **not** whether Satan exists. The Bible plainly teaches his

existence. Jesus was tempted by the devil (Matthew 4:1–11), spoke of him as a real adversary (John 8:44), and warned of his deceptive work.

Neither is the issue whether Satan opposes God's people. Peter describes him as "a roaring lion" seeking whom he may devour (1 Peter 5:8), while Paul exhorts Christians to put on the whole armor of God in order to stand against the devil's schemes (Ephesians 6:11).

Nor is the issue whether Satan will ultimately be defeated. Scripture clearly promises his final destruction (Romans 16:20; Revelation 20:10).

The real issue is much narrower. **Do Revelation 12 and Isaiah 14 actually describe a prehistoric rebellion of Satan before the creation of mankind?** That question can only be answered by carefully examining the context of each passage.

Revelation Is a Book of Symbols

One of the most common mistakes made in interpreting Revelation is forgetting the nature of the book itself. Revelation belongs to a style of writing commonly called **apocalyptic literature**, which communicates truth through vivid symbols and dramatic imagery. Throughout the book John describes beasts rising from the sea, dragons, horns, lampstands, stars falling from heaven, symbolic women, and cities portrayed as harlots. No responsible Bible student insists that these figures must be interpreted literally. Rather, the symbols point to spiritual realities, and their meaning must always be determined by the immediate context.

This principle is especially important when approaching Revelation 12. The chapter introduces a



woman clothed with the sun, a great red dragon, a male Child destined to rule the nations, and a war in heaven. Since the chapter itself is filled with symbolic language, there is no justification for treating one symbol literally while interpreting the others figuratively. The safest interpreter of Scripture is always Scripture itself.

The Context of Revelation 12

John begins by describing a woman who gives birth to a male Child "who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron" (Revelation 12:5). Before any discussion of war in heaven appears, the Child is caught up to God and to His throne. The identity of this Child is unmistakable. The description echoes Psalm 2, where the Messiah is promised dominion over the nations. The Child therefore represents Jesus Christ. His being caught up to God's throne summarizes His victorious resurrection and ascension. This observation is critically important because it establishes the historical setting of the chapter. Revelation 12 is not describing events before Genesis. It is describing events connected with the coming of Christ into the world.

Only **after** the Child has accomplished His mission does John write: "And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon..." (Revelation 12:7). The sequence of the chapter naturally connects the conflict with Christ's redemptive work rather than with some remote event before creation. This understanding is confirmed by verses 10 and 11: "Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ..."

Notice the word "**now**." The victory announced here follows Christ's triumph. Salvation has arrived. God's kingdom has been established. Christ has received authority. These are New Testament realities brought

about through the death, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus—not events occurring before Adam was created.

Verse 11 further explains how the victory was accomplished: "And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb..." That statement alone should cause us to reconsider the common interpretation. Satan's defeat is explicitly connected with **the blood of Christ**, not with a prehistoric angelic conflict. The cross (not an unknown rebellion before creation) is presented as the decisive victory over the devil. This harmonizes perfectly with the teaching found elsewhere in the New Testament.

Paul declares that through the cross Christ "disarmed principalities and powers" and "made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them" (Colossians 2:15). Likewise, the writer of Hebrews explains that through His death Jesus destroyed "him who had the power of death, that is, the devil" (Hebrews 2:14). When these passages are considered together, Revelation 12 fits naturally within the broader New Testament message. The context indicates that the vision is connected with Christ's victory and the establishment of His kingdom rather than a literal conflict before the creation of mankind.

Isaiah 14 Is Not About Satan's Fall

Perhaps no passage has been cited more frequently in support of Satan's alleged fall from heaven than Isaiah 14:12: "How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!" Many readers stop at verse 12 and immediately conclude that Isaiah is describing Satan. However, sound biblical interpretation requires that every verse be understood within its context. The context of Isaiah 14 is unmistakable. The chapter begins with God's promise to restore Israel after the oppression they had endured (Isaiah 14:1–3). Then, in verse 4, Isaiah gives the key to



interpreting everything that follows: "Thou shalt take up this proverb against **the king of Babylon...**"

This inspired statement identifies the subject of the prophecy before the symbolic language even begins. The chapter is not introducing the biography of Satan but announcing God's judgment upon Babylon's arrogant ruler. Beginning with verse 12, Isaiah poetically describes the dramatic downfall of this proud king. Having exalted himself like the morning star, he is pictured as falling from his lofty position. The language is highly figurative, portraying the humiliation of one who imagined himself invincible but was ultimately brought low by God.

The surrounding verses confirm this interpretation. Verse 11 declares: "The worm is spread under thee, and the worms cover thee." This language describes the decomposition of a dead human body. It cannot literally apply to Satan, who is a spirit being. Even more decisive is verse 16: "They that see thee shall narrowly look upon thee, and consider thee, saying, **Is this the man** that made the earth to tremble?"

The inspired text identifies the subject as **a man**. Whatever symbolic language precedes or follows, the object of the prophecy is a human ruler—the king of Babylon—not the devil. Verses 19 and 20 continue by describing his disgraceful burial. He is cast out of his grave like an abominable branch and denied the honor normally given to kings. None of these descriptions can reasonably be applied to Satan. The context governs the interpretation. Unfortunately, many interpretations begin with verse 12 while overlooking verse 4, which identifies the subject, and verses 11, 16, and 19–20, which repeatedly describe a human king. The lesson is simple: no verse should ever be interpreted apart from its context.

What Does the Bible Actually Reveal About Satan?

Rejecting the traditional interpretation of Revelation 12 and Isaiah 14 does not diminish what Scripture plainly teaches about Satan. The Bible clearly reveals that Satan is real. He tempted Eve in the Garden (Genesis 3), tempted Jesus in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1–11), and continues to oppose the people of God. Jesus described him as "a liar, and the father of it" (John 8:44). Peter warned that he walks about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour (1 Peter 5:8). Paul instructed Christians to put on the whole armor of God in order to withstand his schemes (Ephesians 6:11). The Scriptures also assure believers that Satan's defeat is certain. Through His death and resurrection Christ has already secured the decisive victory over the devil (Hebrews 2:14; Colossians 2:15), and one day Satan will receive his final punishment (Revelation 20:10).

What Scripture does **not** provide is a detailed historical account of Satan's origin or a narrative describing an angelic rebellion before the creation of mankind. Where God has spoken, we must speak confidently. Where God has remained silent, we must resist the temptation to speculate. As Moses declared, "The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us..." (Deuteronomy 29:29). Faith rests upon divine revelation, not human imagination.

Practical Lessons

This study offers several important lessons for every Bible student. First, **context must always determine interpretation**. Many doctrinal errors arise because isolated verses are removed from their historical and literary setting. Revelation 12 cannot be understood apart from its description of Christ's victory, and Isaiah 14 cannot be understood apart from its identification of the king of Babylon.

Second, Christians must distinguish between



biblical teaching and theological tradition. A doctrine may be ancient and widely accepted yet still lack scriptural support. The popularity of an interpretation does not establish its truth. Every belief must be tested by the Word of God.

Third, Scripture directs our attention toward **resisting Satan rather than speculating about him.** The Bible gives comparatively little information about Satan's origin but says much about how believers should overcome his temptations. James therefore writes, "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (James 4:7). Our spiritual safety lies not in satisfying curiosity but in faithful obedience.

Finally, this study reminds us of the supreme victory of Jesus Christ. Revelation 12 is ultimately not a story about Satan's power but about Christ's triumph. Through His death, resurrection, and exaltation, the Lord defeated the great adversary and established His kingdom. Because of that victory, Christians have every reason to remain steadfast, knowing that the devil's defeat has been assured.

Conclusion

The popular story of a literal war in heaven before the creation of mankind has influenced Christian thinking for centuries. Yet careful examination of the Scriptures reveals that the commonly cited proof texts do not teach that doctrine.

Revelation 12 is a symbolic chapter whose context centers upon the birth, ascension, and triumph of Jesus Christ. The immediate context connects the vision with Christ's triumph rather than with a rebellion before the creation of mankind. Likewise, Isaiah 14 is an inspired taunt against the king of Babylon. The chapter itself identifies its subject in verse 4, and the surrounding verses repeatedly

describe a proud human ruler whose humiliation serves as a warning against arrogance. This does not lessen the reality of Satan or the seriousness of spiritual warfare. Rather, it encourages Christians to build their faith upon what God has actually revealed instead of upon conclusions drawn from isolated passages. In an age when speculation often overshadows careful exegesis, we must continually return to the fundamental principle of biblical interpretation: **allow Scripture to interpret Scripture, and allow context to determine meaning.** When we do so, confusion gives way to clarity, tradition yields to truth, and our confidence rests securely upon the inspired Word of God.

WATCH EXPECTANTLY FOR THE LORD

Micah prophesied during the time leading up to the Babylonian captivity. He described the spiritual condition of the people in this way: "The godly person has perished from the land, and there is no upright person among them. [...] Concerning evil, both hands do it well" (Micah 7:2-3).

However, despite how discouraging the condition of the nation might have been, there was a reason for hope. Micah said, "But as for me, I will watch expectantly for the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation. My God will hear me" (Micah 7:7). Earlier in this book, Micah prophesied of the coming of Christ (Micah 5:2-4) and the establishment of His kingdom (Micah 4:1-3). Neither the sin of the people nor God's judgment of the nation would prevent this from being fulfilled.

With the confident expectation that the Lord would fulfill His promise, Micah said in the next verse, "Do not rejoice over me, O my enemy. Though I fall I will rise; though I dwell in darkness, the Lord is a light for me" (Micah 7:8).

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Christian Evidences

Is Crossover Night Authorized by the New Testament?

By Osamagbe Lesley Egharevba | Benin City, Nigeria

Text: "And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus..."
(Colossians 3:17).

Introduction

As December 31 approaches each year, many religious organizations prepare for what has become popularly known as **Crossover Night**. These services are often characterized by prayer, thanksgiving, singing, preaching, prophetic declarations, and the expectation of "crossing over" into a new year under God's protection and blessing. Because the practice has become so widespread, many sincere Christians assume it is a legitimate work of the church.

This article is not intended to question the sincerity of those who participate in these services. Many genuinely desire to thank God for preserving them throughout the year and to seek His blessings for the year ahead. Such desires are commendable and entirely consistent with Scripture. Nevertheless, sincerity does not determine divine approval. The question is not whether people are sincere, but whether the practice itself rests upon New Testament authority.

Since Jesus Christ is the Head of His church (Ephesians 1:22-23), He alone possesses the authority to determine its worship, work, and organization. Consequently, every congregational practice must be tested by Scripture rather than by tradition, popularity, or emotional appeal.

What the Issue Is Not

Before examining the biblical evidence, it is necessary to remove several misconceptions.

The issue is **not** whether the church may assemble whenever there is a need. The New Testament nowhere teaches that congregations are restricted to

assembling only on the first day of the week. Churches may gather whenever circumstances require for Bible study, prayer, evangelism, or other activities that God has authorized.

Neither is this article opposed to prayer meetings or thanksgiving. Christians are commanded to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17) and to "give thanks in every thing" (1 Thessalonians 5:18). Whenever a congregation assembles to engage in these authorized activities, it acts within the liberty granted by Christ.

The distinction lies elsewhere. There is an important difference between selecting an **expedient time** to carry out an authorized activity and **establishing a religious observance attached to a particular day**. For example, many congregations meet on Wednesday evenings for Bible study. Wednesday itself possesses no religious significance. It is simply a convenient day selected to accomplish an authorized work. The same Bible study could be conducted on Tuesday, Thursday, or any other day without changing its nature. Likewise, if a congregation schedules a special prayer meeting because of a national crisis, an evangelistic programme, or the illness of one of its members, the activity remains prayer regardless of the date. The meeting may be moved without changing its identity.

Crossover Night is fundamentally different. Its identity is inseparably connected to the transition from December 31 to January 1. If the gathering were moved to December 29 or January 2, it would no longer be a Crossover Night observance. This



demonstrates that the significance lies not merely in the church assembling to pray, but in observing a particular calendar occasion. The question, therefore, is not whether the church may assemble. The question is whether the New Testament authorizes the church to establish an annual religious observance tied to the beginning of a new calendar year.

The Principle of Biblical Authority

Every discussion concerning the work and worship of the church must begin with the authority of Christ. Paul declared, "And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Colossians 3:17). To act in Christ's name is to act by His authority. Likewise, John warned that anyone who goes beyond the doctrine of Christ "does not have God" (2 John 9). These passages establish a fundamental principle: religious practices must be authorized by the Lord.

How, then, is biblical authority established? Throughout Scripture, authority is communicated through **direct commands, approved apostolic examples, and necessary inference**. These principles are not arbitrary; they reflect the way God has always revealed His will. Some matters are authorized by direct command. Christians are commanded to assemble (Hebrews 10:25), to sing (Ephesians 5:19), to pray (1 Thessalonians 5:17), to preach the gospel (Mark 16:15), and to observe the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:23-26). Other matters are established through approved examples. The early church met on the first day of the week to break bread (Acts 20:7), providing an apostolic pattern for the observance of the Lord's Supper. Still others are established by necessary inference, where the conclusion is demanded by the evidence revealed in Scripture.

These principles safeguard the church from

substituting human judgment for divine revelation. They remind us that Christ has not left His church without guidance. Instead, He has revealed all that pertains to life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3). Consequently, every congregational practice should be examined by asking a simple question: **Where has Christ authorized this?** If no command, approved example, or necessary inference exists, then the church has no right to introduce the practice simply because it appears beneficial or meaningful.

Individual Liberty and Congregational Authority

Another distinction often overlooked is the difference between **individual liberty** and **congregational action**. Romans 14 discusses matters in which God has granted personal liberty. One Christian might esteem one day above another, while another esteems every day alike (Romans 14:5). Paul instructs both to respect each other's consciences because these are matters God has left to individual judgment. However, Romans 14 does **not** authorize the church collectively to establish religious observances of its own choosing. The chapter regulates personal liberties, not congregational worship.

An individual Christian may privately thank God on New Year's Eve, pray with his family, or reflect upon God's blessings throughout the past year. Nothing in Scripture forbids such personal expressions of gratitude.

The church, however, is not at liberty to create religious observances simply because individuals may choose to do something privately. Congregational practices require divine authority because the church belongs to Christ, not to men. What Christians may do as individuals does not automatically become the work or worship of the church.

This distinction prepares us to consider the central



question: **Does the New Testament authorize the church to establish an annual religious observance known as Crossover Night?**

Why Crossover Night Is Unauthorized

Having established the principles of biblical authority and the distinction between individual liberty and congregational action, we are now prepared to examine the central question: **Does the New Testament authorize the church to establish an annual religious observance known as Crossover Night?** The answer must be sought, not in tradition or popularity, but in Scripture.

There is no command instructing the church to observe the transition from one calendar year to another. Neither do we find an approved apostolic example of the early church assembling annually for such an observance. Nor is there any necessary inference from Scripture requiring the church to commemorate the beginning of a new year as a religious occasion. This silence is significant because Christ has already revealed the worship and work of His church. He has authorized the church to preach the gospel, observe the Lord's Supper, pray, sing, give, edify the saints, and care for those in need. When the church limits itself to these divinely revealed activities, it acts by the authority of Christ.

Crossover Night, however, is not one of those authorized works. It is a religious observance devised by men. While it often includes authorized acts such as prayer, singing, and preaching, those activities do not automatically authorize the observance itself. The inclusion of authorized acts cannot legitimize an unauthorized occasion. For example, if a congregation established an annual "Harvest Thanksgiving Festival" as a religious observance, including prayer, singing, and preaching, the presence

of those authorized activities would not justify creating the festival itself. The issue would remain the same: **Where has Christ authorized the church to establish such an observance?** The same question must be asked concerning Crossover Night.

Crossover Night Is More Than an Expedient Assembly

Many defend Crossover Night by arguing that it is merely another opportunity for Christians to gather and pray. While that explanation appears reasonable at first glance, it overlooks an important biblical distinction. An expedient facilitates an activity that God has already authorized. Choosing a meeting place, selecting a meeting time, using songbooks, microphones, or Bible class materials are all expedients because they assist activities already authorized in Scripture. They do not create new acts of worship or new religious occasions. The identity of an expedient does not depend upon a particular day. A Wednesday Bible study may be moved to Tuesday or Thursday without changing its nature because Wednesday itself possesses no religious significance. Likewise, a congregational prayer meeting may be rescheduled without ceasing to be a prayer meeting. Crossover Night cannot be treated the same way. Its identity is inseparably connected to the transition from December 31 to January 1. Remove that date, and the observance ceases to exist. A gathering on December 29 may involve prayer and preaching, but no one would call it a Crossover Night service because the occasion itself has been removed.

This demonstrates that the observance is defined, not merely by what the church does, but by **when** it does it. The calendar day becomes essential to the identity of the gathering. That is precisely why Crossover Night is more than an expedient assembly. It is the observance of a particular religious occasion.



The Significance of Religious Days

The apostle Paul expressed concern when the Galatian Christians began attaching religious significance to "days, and months, and times, and years" (Galatians 4:10-11). His immediate concern involved their return to elements of the Mosaic system, yet the principle remains instructive. God's people must be careful not to bind religious significance to days that God Himself has not appointed.

Throughout biblical history, God has reserved for Himself the right to determine sacred observances. Under the Old Testament, Israel was not free to invent feast days according to human preference. God appointed the Passover, Pentecost, the Day of Atonement, and the other sacred assemblies. Even when King Jeroboam established a feast resembling one God had commanded, he was condemned because it was "a month which he had devised in his own heart" (1 Kings 12:33). The problem was not that people assembled, offered sacrifices, or expressed devotion. The problem was that a man presumed to institute a religious observance God had not authorized. The same principle applies today. Under the New Covenant, Christ alone possesses the authority to establish the worship and observances of His church. Sincerity cannot substitute for divine authorization.

Answering Common Objections

Some object, "If Crossover Night is wrong, then Wednesday Bible study must also be wrong." This conclusion does not follow. Wednesday Bible study is simply an expedient arrangement for carrying out an authorized activity. Wednesday itself possesses no religious significance. The study may be held on another day without changing its identity. Crossover Night, however, derives its identity from the

observance of a particular calendar occasion. The distinction is between an expedient meeting time and an annual religious observance.

Others argue, "The church can meet whenever it wants." Indeed, it can assemble whenever there is a scriptural purpose for doing so. That has never been the issue. The question is not whether the church may assemble on December 31. The question is whether the church may establish an annual religious observance because it is December 31.

Still others insist, "We are only praying." Prayer is unquestionably authorized. Christians should pray every day. Congregations should pray whenever circumstances require. Yet if the gathering is truly nothing more than a prayer meeting, why must it occur specifically during the transition into a new year? Why is the date essential? The answer reveals that the significance lies not merely in prayer but in the observance itself.

Finally, some appeal to good intentions. Certainly, those who participate often have sincere motives. However, Scripture repeatedly teaches that good intentions cannot replace divine authority. The fundamental question is never, "Is it sincere?" but "Has the Lord authorized it?"

Conclusion

This discussion has never been about opposing prayer, thanksgiving, or additional congregational assemblies. Neither is it intended to question the motives of those who sincerely participate in Crossover Night services. Rather, the issue is one of biblical authority. There is a clear difference between selecting an expedient time for an authorized activity and establishing an annual religious observance event. The former falls within the liberty granted by Scripture; the latter requires divine authority.



Since the New Testament contains no command, approved example, or necessary inference authorizing the church to establish Crossover Night as an annual religious observance, faithful congregations should refrain from introducing it into the work and worship of the church. The church honors Christ best when she remains content with His revealed will. Rather than seeking religious significance in humanly devised occasions, let us devote ourselves to the worship, work, and ordinances that our Lord has already authorized, confident that His Word completely equips His people for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

THE RIGHT PERSON, THE RIGHT PLACE, THE RIGHT TIME

"But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." (Galatians 4:4-5)

In the workplace, we used to discuss the necessity of having the right person in the right place and at the right time. This was especially true when it came to leadership during critical periods. Having those three conditions to match up simultaneously was a very significant and strategic challenge. It still is when one is looking for what drives a vision for the future to success. Our Bible class has finished studying the book of Daniel. With that, we bring our study of the Major Prophets to a close. The Major Prophets are a perfect lead into our next study of the life of Christ. Without a doubt, we learn from the Prophets that Jesus was the right person (Isaiah 7:14; 9:6; Matthew 1:23; 17:5; John 1:1, 14). Israel (Bethlehem and Jerusalem) was the right place (Micah 5:2; Isaiah 2:3; Luke 24:47-49; Acts 1:8). So, we have the right person in the right place. What about the right time? Well, Paul has

already confirmed such in our beginning text. However, as I pointed out to our Bible class, all the conditions for the Messiah to come into the world could not have lined up any better than they did when Jesus came into the world.

Daniel had interpreted the dream of Nebuchadnezzar of four great empires each in succession which would prepare the world for the coming Messiah and His Kingdom (Daniel 2). The conquests carried out by each of these empires would bring about a dispersion of the Jews and of all people. The sharing of information that would result from that would provide others with exposure to the one true and living God. That was very significant in a world consumed with polytheism and idolatry. Alexander the Great along with his childhood tutor (Aristotle) would create the Koine Greek language. The requirement for this language to be used with his military and imposed where he conquered for business and commerce provided a language which could be understood when gospel preachers went throughout the civilized world. Rome brought organization and structure to a chaotic world. A time of the Pax Romana (Peace of Rome) that made it safer for traveling preachers. Roads, bridges, and safer travel by ship as Roman garrisons reduced roving robbers and Roman ships cleared the seas of pirates. Yes, God in His providence ensured the things were in place for His Messiah and the gospel message.

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DISCOURSE

Are Church Organized Anniversary Celebrations Scriptural?

Affirm: Joseph Babatunde | Church of Christ

Deny: Israel Oluwashina Ahmadu | Church of Christ

The topic for discussion in this section deals with the question of whether a local church is authorized to organize and celebrate "church anniversaries." Joseph Babatunde takes the position that such is a matter of opinion and the silence of the scriptures on this matter does not prohibit the church from observing it while Israel Oluwashina Ahmadu responds to the arguments that the silence of the scriptures on such matter does prohibit the church from engaging in such. Readers are encouraged to study both arguments carefully with their Bibles.

Observance Of A Church Anniversary: A Matter of Faith Or A Matter Of Opinion?

By Joseph Babatunde | Church of Christ

Introduction

This write-up is occasioned by the divergent views expressed on the UNIBEN/UBTH WhatsApp platform regarding the scripturality of a local congregation taking cognizance of the number of years it has existed and marking the occasion with prayer, thanksgiving, reflection, and perhaps fellowship with a meal.

While some argued that church anniversary observance is unscriptural because it was neither commanded by Christ nor practiced by the NT churches, others contend that although there is no explicit NT command authorizing such observance, there is equally no prohibition against it, making it a legitimate exercise of Christian liberty.

Rather than adopting the *"if denominational churches practice it, it must be wrong"* approach, I believe the issue should be examined on biblical grounds, and the simple key to decipher the matter is to answer this fundamental question: **Is the observance of a church anniversary a matter of faith or a matter of opinion?** How we answer this question largely determines how we should approach the subject.

Matters of Faith

In the New Testament, matters of faith are those teachings, doctrines/practices, that have been revealed by God through Christ and His apostles and are documented for us in the Scriptures. They constitute *"the faith once for all delivered to the saints"* (Jude 3) and are binding upon all Christians.

These are not matters on which Christians may legislate according to personal preference. The Scripture consistently teaches that God's people are not at liberty to alter, diminish, or add to His revealed will (Gal. 1:6–9; 2 John 9). To depart from matters of faith is to depart from divine authority. Examples include:

- Salvation through obedient faith, including baptism (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38).
- The weekly observance of the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 11:23–29).
- Congregational worship involving prayer, teaching, singing, giving, and the Lord's Supper (Acts 2:42; Eph. 5:19; 1 Cor. 16:1–2).
- The qualifications for elders and deacons (1 Tim. 3;

Titus 1).

- The moral obligations of Christians (Romans 12; Galatians 5; Ephesians 4–6).

Because these matters rest upon divine authority, they are not subject to human innovation or modification. Christians have no liberty to revise what God has revealed concerning salvation, worship, morality, or the organization of His church.

Matters of Opinion

By contrast, matters of opinion (also called matters of liberty or expediency) are issues concerning which the New Testament neither commands nor forbids a particular course of action. They do not alter the gospel, determine one's standing before God, or constitute tests of fellowship. Apostle Paul addresses several such matters.

Observance of Certain Days

Some Jewish Christians continued to esteem certain days above others, while Gentile Christians regarded every day alike. Paul wrote: *"One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind."* (Romans 14:5). Paul neither required nor prohibited the observance of such days. Instead, he instructed believers not to judge one another over matters in which God had granted liberty.

Eating Certain Foods

Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 8 discuss whether Christians should eat meat previously offered to idols. Paul did not elevate either eating or abstaining into a matter of faith. Rather, he emphasized personal conviction, consideration for weaker brethren, and the avoidance of causing another Christian to stumble.

Marriage and Singleness

In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul distinguishes between commands received from the Lord and inspired apostolic judgment given in view of prevailing circumstances. This demonstrates that not every issue affecting Christians belongs to the same category.

Expediencies

The Scripture commands Christians to assemble (Heb. 10:25), but it does not specify the hour of assembly; the design of the meeting place; whether fans or air conditioners should be used; whether microphones should be employed; whether lessons should be projected electronically; or whether transportation should be provided for members.

Similarly, the Scripture commands us to go and make disciples (Matthew 28:19) but allow us to apply discretion on how to go about making disciples (Matthew 10:16).

These are expedients, lawful arrangements that facilitate obedience to divine commands without altering those commands.

Where does Church Anniversary Belong?

This is where careful distinction becomes necessary.

The New Testament nowhere commands local churches to celebrate their anniversaries. Neither do we find any recorded example of apostolic churches observing annual anniversaries commemorating their establishment.

At the same time, the New Testament nowhere forbids a congregation from setting aside a day to thank God for His faithfulness over the years.

This absence of both command and prohibition is significant.

If a congregation were to teach that observing a church anniversary is a divine ordinance binding

upon all churches, such teaching would exceed scriptural authority.

Likewise, if a congregation (and anyone) were to teach that it is sinful for another congregation to observe an anniversary, that conclusion would also require biblical authority.

Silence alone cannot be used to bind either practice or prohibit it.

Furthermore, if a congregation believed that celebrating an anniversary conferred special spiritual merit before God, or constituted a divinely prescribed act of worship, it would be adding to God's revealed will.

However, where an anniversary simply serves as an occasion to:

- thank God for His faithfulness;
- reflect upon His blessings;
- encourage members;
- renew commitment to evangelism;
- strengthen Christian fellowship; and
- glorify God,

it appears to fall within the realm of expediency and Christian liberty rather than revealed doctrine. Accordingly, the legitimacy of such an observance depends less upon the fact that it is held and more upon its purpose, content, and the claims made for it.

Addressing a Common Objection

A common objection is that the early church did not celebrate anniversaries, and that such observances originated among denominational churches. Therefore, it is argued, for churches of Christ to adopt the practice would amount to imitation.

This objection deserves careful consideration.

It is certainly true that the New Testament contains no

record of churches observing annual anniversaries.

However, it is equally true that the New Testament records no examples of several practices that churches of Christ today generally regard as lawful expedients, including:

- church buildings;
- printed hymnbooks;
- annual lectureships;
- electronic projection systems;
- public address systems;
- livestreaming of worship services; and
- church-owned vehicles.

These practices are generally accepted, not because they are specifically mentioned in the Scripture, but because they facilitate biblical commands without altering divine doctrine or introducing new acts of worship.

Consequently, the mere absence of a New Testament example does not automatically render a practice sinful. The more relevant question is whether the practice violates the Scripture, supplants divine instruction, or introduces an unauthorized element into the worship or work of the church.

The Principle of Romans 14

Romans 14 provides enduring guidance whenever sincere Christians differ over matters that God has neither commanded nor forbidden.

Although, some have argued that the principles of Romans 14 apply only to individual conduct. However, it should not be overlooked that the epistle was addressed to the church at Rome as a congregation. While the issues discussed involved personal convictions, Paul's instructions were intended to regulate congregational relationships. His counsel remains instructive:

- Let each person be fully convinced in his own mind.
- Do not despise those who reach a different conclusion.
- Do not judge one another where God has granted liberty.
- Pursue peace and mutual edification.
- Never elevate matters of opinion into tests of fellowship.

These principles are meant to preserve both doctrinal fidelity and Christian unity. Don't forget, unity does not mean uniformity.

A Case for the 30th Anniversary of The Uniben/Ubth Church

Having distinguished between matters of faith and matters of opinion, the question now becomes whether there is any biblical basis for the UNIBEN/UBTH congregation to mark its 30th anniversary.

The New Testament does not command local churches to celebrate anniversaries. Neither does it prohibit a congregation from setting aside a day to remember God's faithfulness and to offer Him thanks. The question, therefore, is not whether there is a command to celebrate an anniversary, but whether the Scripture encourages thanksgiving for God's blessings.

The answer is unmistakably yes.

Paul exhorts believers:

"In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you." (1 Thessalonians 5:18)

Similarly, Christians are instructed to give thanks **always** and **for all things** (Ephesians 5:20), to continue in prayer with thanksgiving (Colossians 4:2), and to abound in thanksgiving (Colossians 2:7).

If Scripture commands Christians to give thanks **in everything**, should we assume that thanking God for thirty years of His providential care over a local congregation is somehow excluded from "everything"?

Surely not.

If God is to be thanked for daily bread, answered prayers, deliverance from danger, spiritual blessings, and individual milestones, it is difficult to see why a congregation cannot, in good conscience, gather to thank Him for sustaining His people through three decades of worship, evangelism, fellowship, and service.

Such an occasion should never be viewed as a celebration of human achievement or institutional pride. Rather, it should be an opportunity to acknowledge that *"unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it"* (Psalm 127:1). Every accomplishment of the congregation is ultimately a testimony to God's grace, not human ingenuity.

Properly understood, therefore, the 30th anniversary of the UNIBEN/UBTH Church should not be about exalting the congregation but about exalting God. It should be a time to reflect on His faithfulness, remember the sacrifices of those who laboured before us, encourage one another toward greater service, renew our commitment to the Great Commission, and offer heartfelt thanksgiving to the One who has sustained His church.

Conclusion

In my assessment, the observance of a church anniversary is **not a matter of faith**, because the New Testament neither commands it nor presents it as an ordinance binding upon all congregations.

Neither does Scripture explicitly condemn a

congregation that chooses to set aside a day to thank God for His faithfulness through the years.

Accordingly, church anniversary observance belongs within the sphere of **Christian liberty** and **matters of opinion**, provided that it does not:

- become an unauthorized act of worship;
- encourage extravagance, entertainment, or worldliness;
- claim divine authority where God has given none; or
- become a standard by which faithful congregations are judged.

The real danger lies, not in thanking God for His blessings, but in confusing human arrangements with divine requirements, or, conversely, in condemning brethren where God Himself has not spoken.

Thus, those who choose to observe a church anniversary should not bind the practice upon others. Likewise, those who choose not to observe one should not condemn congregations that, in good conscience, choose to do so as an expedient expression of thanksgiving to God.

The ancient maxim remains instructive: **"IN MATTERS OF FAITH, UNITY; IN MATTERS OF OPINION, LIBERTY; IN ALL THINGS, CHARITY."**

As the UNIBEN/UBTH Church approaches her 30th anniversary, may the occasion not be viewed as the celebration of an institution, but as an opportunity to glorify God for His unfailing faithfulness. If the anniversary accomplishes nothing more than leading God's people to offer sincere thanksgiving, renew their commitment to Christ, and dedicate themselves afresh to His service, then it will have served a noble and thoroughly Christian

purpose.

May God grant us the wisdom to distinguish between divine commands and human judgments, so that we neither bind where God has not bound nor loose where God has spoken, but in all things seek to glorify Him.

FAULT FINDERS VS PROBLEM SOLVERS

Loved ones, these statements could be made about any local congregation, anywhere in the world:

"The church isn't as evangelistic as it could be. We're not doing enough to reach out to lost sinners." "We don't do enough to support the weak and to encourage those who are struggling with hardships in their lives."

"The church isn't as friendly as it could be. We don't do as well in welcoming visitors and newcomers as we could, and there's not as much close association among the members as there should be." "The Bible classes could be improved. The subject matter is sometimes ambiguous, and the teachers are sometimes unprepared." "We're not doing enough benevolence. We're too slow to step forward when legitimate needs come to us."

This is just a sampling. You can, no doubt, think of other things to expand this list. My point, however, is this: What are you doing about these deficiencies? There are two types of members in congregations, and they always have opposite reactions to the kind of problems listed here.

There are some active dedicated members who are serving in the kingdom. When they see areas that need attention, they jump into the work. Are there lost people that need to be taught, weak brethren to encourage, sick people to visit? These members don't wait to be told — they're busy working to address the needs.

Continued on pg. 24

DISCOURSE

Observance of A Church Anniversary: A Matter of Faith Or A Matter of Opinion?

By Israel Oluwashina Ahmadu | Church of Christ

Brother Joseph Babatunde's article is thoughtful and well written, but I believe it reaches an unscriptural conclusion because it begins with a faulty premise.

The issue is not whether the New Testament explicitly forbids church anniversaries. The issue is whether Christ has authorized the church to institute an annual religious observance in the first place. Throughout his article, he repeatedly argues that since Scripture neither commands nor forbids church anniversaries, they belong to Christian liberty. That is not the biblical pattern for establishing authority.

The New Testament never teaches that the church is free to introduce religious practices simply because they are not expressly prohibited. Rather, the church is required to act by the authority of Christ (Col. 3:17). Whatever we do in word or deed must have His authorization.

He compares church anniversaries with church buildings, microphones, hymnbooks, projectors and church vehicles. I don't understand. It doesn't fly. This comparison fails because those things are merely expedients that aid an already authorized command. We are commanded to assemble, teach, sing and evangelize. So, buildings, microphones and printed materials simply facilitate those commands. They aid us. A church anniversary does not facilitate an existing command. It creates an entirely new recurring religious observance which the New Testament neither commands nor exemplifies.

He also appealed to Romans 14. However, Romans 14 discusses individual matters of conscience involving eating and the personal observance of days. It does not authorize a congregation to establish an annual religious event and organize the church around it.

Extending Romans 14 to congregational innovations stretches the passage beyond its context.

Somewhere he said that silence alone cannot be used to either bind or prohibit a practice. This is precisely where our hermeneutics differ. Divine silence has always been restrictive in matters of worship and religious service. Hebrews 7:14 argues that because Moses said nothing concerning priests from Judah, Judah was excluded from the priesthood. God's silence did not authorize Judah. It prohibited Judah. Likewise, Nadab and Abihu were condemned because they offered strange fire, which the Lord commanded them not (Lev. 10:1-2). Their sin was introducing what God had not authorized.

He argues that Christians are commanded to give thanks for everything, therefore a church anniversary is simply thanksgiving. But that conclusion does not follow at all. We are indeed commanded to give thanks continually. We are not authorized to establish an annual institutional observance for that purpose. If you want to observe thanksgiving, declare all Sundays of the year as thanksgiving Sunday, don't pick one date. The command to be thankful does not authorize every method by which men choose to express thanksgiving collectively. A congregation may thank God every Lord's Day, every prayer meeting, every gospel meeting or every ordinary assembly without creating a recurring annual celebration. It's that simple.

No one here is arguing whether thanking God is scriptural. It certainly is. The crux of the matter is whether a local church has divine authority to select one day every year, elevate it into a recurring congregational observance, organize special activities

around it and perpetuate it as a religious tradition. The New Testament provides no command, no approved example and no necessary inference authorizing such a practice.

Well, I appreciate his concern that brethren should not bind human traditions upon others. However, liberty exists only where God has granted liberty. The church cannot claim liberty to create recurring religious observances where Christ has given no authority. Therefore, from a conservative understanding of biblical authority, church anniversaries are not merely matters of opinion. They represent an unauthorized addition to the work and practice of the local church.

Respectfully, the burden of proof rests upon those who introduce the practice, not upon those who refuse to participate in it. They have the more work to do. I so submit.

Thank you so much.

THE RIGHT PERSON, THE RIGHT PLACE, THE RIGHT TIME

Continued from pg. 13

Yet, as we concluded our study of the book of Daniel, I pointed out to the class how the timing would be right for the Messiah as also the hearts of men would be yearning for His coming. In Daniel, we find the people of Israel in great expectation as they realize the seventy years of captivity prophesied by Jeremiah were nearly at a close (Jeremiah 25:11, 12; 29:10). Daniel was also anxious that the Lord would fulfill His promise to restore the people of Israel to their land. Yet, as God revealed in visions to Daniel what would

happen when the people of Israel were restored to their land, he went into a period of mourning and fasting for twenty-one days. In those visions, Daniel was shown how the kingdom of Alexander would be divided into four parts instead of being passed on to his sons. Four generals of Alexander took control of his kingdom. In northern Syria there would arise the Seleucids and in Egypt to the South, the Ptolemies. These two powers would carry on six wars with Israel right in the middle of them. Finally, from the Seleucids would come Antiochus Epiphanes who would bring about a great persecution on the Jews. Yes, the Jews would return home. They would rebuild Jerusalem and the temple but their time there would be filled with hardship and persecution. Though they anticipated freedom from seventy years of bondage and separation, they would never again see the greatness and glory of Jerusalem experienced by the Jews under Solomon. Their dreams of an earthly Messiah who would restore that vision to them would never be realized. For that reason, Daniel was understandably upset. The Jews would live in chaos not only from outside forces, but among themselves there would be division and sectarianism. The world was sick to death for many reasons and in need of a Great Physician. Yes, the timing was perfect for Emanuel. "When the fulness of time was come..."

Keith Hamilton

QUIBBLES THAT BACKFIRED

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

During a discussion on the scriptural authority for Crossover Night, an objector argued, "The church can meet any day it chooses. Therefore, there is nothing wrong with holding a Crossover Night service." I agreed that the church may assemble on any day to engage in activities authorized by Christ. I then asked, "If that is true, would your congregation be willing to hold its Crossover Night service on December 29 instead of December 31?" The answer was immediate: "No. Then it would no longer be Crossover Night." That response unintentionally surrendered the very point under discussion. If the gathering were merely an expedient assembly for prayer or Bible study, changing the date would make no difference. A Wednesday Bible study can be moved to Tuesday or Thursday without ceasing to be Bible study because Wednesday has no religious significance. Likewise, a prayer meeting remains a prayer meeting regardless of the day on which it is held. Crossover Night, however, cannot be transferred to another date without losing its identity. Its significance depends entirely upon the transition from December 31 to January 1. Thus, the objector's own answer demonstrated that the gathering is not merely an expedient assembly but the observance of a particular religious occasion. The quibble was intended to prove that Crossover Night is

simply another church meeting. Instead, it established that the observance derives its identity from a specific calendar event—the very point it sought to deny.

During my discussion with a Oneness Pentecostal advocate, he argued that faithful members of the Lord's church should not insist on a particular formula or exact set of words to be spoken by the baptizer. Yet, in the very next breath, he maintained that unless the baptizer verbally pronounced the words "the Lord Jesus Christ," the baptism would not be valid. I simply pointed out that "the Lord Jesus Christ" is itself a particular set of words—a formula. Thus, while denying that Christians should insist on a formula, he immediately insisted on one. His argument collapsed under the weight of its own contradiction. The very thing he condemned became the very thing he required.

Osamagbe Lesley Egharevba

Church History

What to Call the People of God

By Andy Sochor | Kentucky, USA

During the Restoration Movement of the nineteenth century, the men who endeavored to turn back to the Bible and follow the New Testament as their only rule of faith and practice belonged to various denominations when they began their journey in pursuit of the ancient paths. Barton W. Stone (1772-1844) was a Presbyterian. Alexander Campbell (1788-1866) had been associated with the Baptists. James O'Kelly (1738-1826) was a member of the American Methodist Church. Yet as they left the creeds and churches of men in order to simply follow the New Testament, a question naturally arose: *What should they be called?*

When O'Kelly and others left the American Methodist Church, they first called themselves "Republican Methodists." Within two years of their departure from the American Methodist Church, one of O'Kelly's contemporaries, Rice Haggard (1767-1819), suggested that his brethren abandon the denominational name of Methodist and adopt the Biblical name of *Christian*.

In 1804, Haggard published a booklet titled *An Address to the Different Religious Societies on the Sacred Import of the Christian Name*. In it, he argued that the followers of Christ were to be known simply as Christians. Here is an excerpt of what he wrote (emphasis mine):

A disciple is a scholar, or learner; such were the followers of Christ—students under him their Lord, and Master. During the times of his ministry on earth, he taught them the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven; and though he taught them diligently, yet they remained only learners, until the Holy Ghost came, took of his, showed it unto

them, and anointed them. John 16. 14. 1 John 2. 20. They were then enabled to comprehend the sum of that holy science now contained in the new Testament. This being the case, **it was proper they should no longer be called disciples, but Christians; because the latter name was best expressive of their character**, and because Christ was, from that place, about to spread his kingdom, and collect out of different nations subjects of his grace and government. It was therefore necessary, that those peculiar people should have a name incontestably proper, significant, cementing, common, and agreeable to all; that those of different name, and education, as Jew and Gentile, collected to form one holy nation, might not be barbarians to each other, but united as one family.

Hence **they were called Christians**; and the original (chreematizoo, according to the best critics, see Schrevelius, Dod. Guyse, &c.) strongly intimates, that **they were called so by divine appointment**. For it generally signifies an oracular nomination, or declaration from the mouth of the Lord, as used in other parts of the New Testament. See Matt. 2. 22.... notwithstanding, being warned of God in a dream, he turned aside into the parts of Galilee. Luke 2. 26. And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. Acts 10. 22.... Cornelius the centurion, a just man, and one that feareth God, and of good report among all the nation of the Jews, was warned from God by an holy angel to send for thee into his house to hear words of thee. [...] From the foregoing passages therefore it is highly probable, nay to me it appears manifest, the simple meaning of the text is, that the



disciples were, by divine appointment, first called Christians in Antioch.

In this view the promise of Jehovah is fulfilled to his church; Isai. 62. 2. thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord shall name. 65. 15. for the Lord God shall slay thee, and call his servants by another name. 56. 5. I will give them an everlasting name which shall not be cut off. Acts. 15. 7. That the residue of men might seek after the Lord; and all the Gentiles upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things.

In that booklet, Haggard went on to provide several reasons that followers of Christ should be called *Christians* and nothing else. These are some of his arguments:

1. The name was significant and meant *anointed ones*.
2. It was the most proper name for those in the church.
3. The church is *one body*, so those who make up the church should be called by *one name*.
4. Unscriptural names lack divine authority and cause division.
5. As the church is the bride of Christ, His people should wear His name.

Why, according to Haggard, did religious groups begin to adopt other names? “They had lost the spirit of the christian religion, and departed from the simplicity of the gospel.”

The two who are often viewed as the leading men of the movement – Barton W. Stone and Alexander Campbell – recognized the need to give up man-made names and be called by a Scriptural designation. Campbell thought brethren should be identified as “Disciples,” while Stone (like Haggard) favored the

name “Christian.” In his Address to the Christian Churches, Stone wrote, “We have taken no party names by which to distinguish ourselves from others, but the general name CHRISTIAN. What does the Bible say about the name that the people of God should wear?”

- “*Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit*” (Matthew 28:19). The Great Commission involved preaching the gospel and converting people to Christ. Jesus referred to this process as *making disciples*.
- “*And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch*” (Acts 11:26). This verse uses both terms (*disciples* and *Christians*). The word “called” refers to a divine calling (Haggard accurately pointed this out in the excerpt quoted above). The same term is used elsewhere in the New Testament to describe a calling, warning, or revelation from God in heaven (Matthew 2:12; Luke 2:26; Romans 7:3; Hebrews 11:7). This means that God gave the name “*Christian*” to the disciples in Antioch.
- “*Agrippa replied to Paul, 'In a short time you will persuade me to become a Christian'*” (Acts 26:28). When Paul gave his defense before King Agrippa, he used it as an opportunity to preach the gospel. The king recognized what Paul was attempting to do and identified Paul and the followers of Christ as *Christians*.
- “*But if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name*” (1 Peter 4:16). Peter warned the brethren that they could face persecution. They were in danger of being targeted because they were *Christians*.



Interestingly, the word for *disciple* is not used in the New Testament after the book of Acts. The *concept* of discipleship is certainly discussed throughout the epistles, but the term itself is not used, whether as a proper name or anything else.

So what is the difference between Christians and Disciples? Is one to be preferred over the other? Consider the following:

- **People are MADE disciples** – “*Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit*” (Matthew 28:19). In fulfilling the Great Commission, the apostles would make disciples for Jesus. However, the term *disciple* by itself does not necessarily mean that one is a follower of Jesus. After all, some were disciples of men like John the Baptist (Matthew 9:14) and Moses (John 9:28). Anyone who has loyal followers can be said to have disciples. If we use this term as a name for the followers of Christ, we must assume that people understand that Christ is the master we follow. While many will take this for granted, there is no assumption that needs to be made about the name *Christian*. That name can only accurately be applied to those who are faithful followers of Christ.
- **God CALLS people Christians** – “*And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch*” (Acts 11:26). This was the name that God gave to His people once the church was composed of Jews and Gentiles united together in the cause of Christ.

We could summarize this by saying that a disciple is *what* we are; a Christian is *who* we are. It is interesting to see how brethren in the past reasoned about what they should be called. However, what the New

Testament teaches is ultimately what we should prioritize. God calls Christians all those who choose to become disciples of Christ and faithfully follow His will. It is a privilege to wear this name and an honor for God to identify us in this way. Let us strive every day to live up to this high calling.

FAULT FINDERS VS PROBLEM SOLVERS

Continued from pg. 18

For example, instead of complaining that the church is unfriendly, they're doing their best to change that reputation by inviting people into their homes and by actively showing their love and concern for others. They volunteer to teach classes. They offer constructive criticism in loving ways. They get involved in bringing about needed changes. In short, they love the church and want to see it grow.

Sadly, there are other dead members who only want to complain. They are never happy and are constantly finding fault. Those members see none of the good in the congregation. They gripe and whine and do nothing positive. Their contribution and legacy in the church is tearing down, not building up. Which of these descriptions fits you best? We beg you to be a problem solver and lovingly fix the areas of the congregation that need it. God is so good. Love you.

Samuel Matthews

BARBS WITH A POINT

Works Of The Flesh Versus Fruit Of The Spirit

By Osamagbe Lesley Egharevba | Benin City, Nigeria

Introduction

One of the greatest battles every Christian faces is the conflict between the flesh and the Spirit. This struggle began when we obeyed the gospel and continues throughout our earthly journey. The apostle Paul vividly describes this conflict when he writes: "For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary to one another" (Galatians 5:17). The Christian life is not merely a profession of faith but a daily choice between two opposing influences. One leads to spiritual ruin, while the other leads to spiritual maturity and eternal life. In Galatians 5:19-23, Paul contrasts the "works of the flesh" with the "fruit of the Spirit," showing the clear distinction between a life governed by sinful desires and one directed by God's will. Understanding this contrast is essential for anyone seeking to master the conflict between the spirit and the flesh.

Understanding the Flesh

The term "flesh" in Galatians 5 does not refer merely to the physical body. Rather, it describes the sinful desires and inclinations that oppose God's will. Paul explains that those who live according to the flesh set their minds on fleshly things, resulting in spiritual death (Romans 8:5-8). The flesh manifests itself whenever a person allows selfish desires, worldly passions, and sinful appetites to control his conduct. Even Christians are warned against yielding to these desires. Peter exhorts believers to "abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul" (1 Peter 2:11). The conflict is therefore not between the body and the soul, but between a life governed by sinful desires and a life governed by God's revealed will.

The Works of the Flesh

Paul declares, "Now the works of the flesh are manifest" (Galatians 5:19). They are called "works" because they are actions and practices produced by sinful desires. The apostle lists seventeen specific sins and concludes with the phrase "and such like," indicating that the list is representative rather than exhaustive. These works may be grouped into several categories.

Sins of Sexual Immorality: Paul begins with adultery, fornication, uncleanness, and lasciviousness (Galatians 5:19). These sins involve unlawful sexual conduct and moral impurity. God's design for sexual relations is restricted to marriage between a man and a woman (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:4-6; Hebrews 13:4). Any sexual activity outside that divine arrangement constitutes sin. In a society saturated with pornography, promiscuity, and moral relativism, Christians must remember Paul's command: "Flee fornication" (1 Corinthians 6:18).

Sins of False Religion: Paul next mentions idolatry and witchcraft (Galatians 5:20). Idolatry involves giving to anyone or anything the devotion that belongs to God alone (Exodus 20:3-5). While modern societies may not commonly bow before carved images, covetousness itself is described as idolatry (Colossians 3:5). Money, power, pleasure, and personal ambition can easily become idols. Witchcraft refers to practices associated with sorcery, occultism, and reliance upon supernatural powers apart from God. Scripture consistently condemns such practices (Deuteronomy 18:10-12).

Sins that Destroy Human Relationships: Paul's longest category involves attitudes and actions that disrupt unity among people: hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, and heresies



(Galatians 5:20). Hatred poisons the heart. Variance produces contention. Jealousy breeds resentment. Wrath erupts in uncontrolled anger. Strife generates selfish ambition. Seditions create divisions, while heresies produce factions and party spirit. These sins are especially destructive within the church. Jesus prayed for unity among His followers (John 17:20-21), and Paul pleaded that Christians “speak the same thing” and avoid divisions (1 Corinthians 1:10). Congregations are often weakened more by internal strife than by external persecution.

Sins of Envy and Excess: Paul further lists envyings, murders, drunkenness, and revellings (Galatians 5:21). Envy resents the success of others. Drunkenness and revelries involve intoxication and the reckless lifestyle associated with it. Scripture repeatedly condemns drunkenness and urges sobriety (Ephesians 5:18; 1 Peter 5:8). Such conduct reflects surrender to fleshly desires rather than submission to God.

The Consequences of Walking in the Flesh

Paul's warning is unmistakable: “They which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God” (Galatians 5:21). This statement demonstrates the seriousness of sin. Persistent and unrepentant participation in the works of the flesh places one's soul in jeopardy. Similarly, Paul taught that the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23) and that fleshly-mindedness leads to death (Romans 8:6). No Christian can successfully wage war against the flesh while excusing or justifying sinful behavior.

The Fruit of the Spirit

In sharp contrast, Paul writes: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance” (Galatians 5:22-23). Unlike the plural “works” of the flesh, Paul

uses the singular term “fruit.” The qualities listed together represent the character produced in a life that is guided by God's Spirit. We understand that the Spirit works through the inspired Word He revealed (Ephesians 6:17; 2 Timothy 3:16-17). As Christians submit to God's Word, the Spirit's influence produces these qualities in their lives.

Love: Love heads the list because it is foundational to all Christian conduct. Jesus declared that love for God and love for one's neighbor summarize God's commandments (Matthew 22:37-40). Christians are commanded to love one another as Christ loved them (John 13:34-35). Biblical love seeks the welfare of others and acts sacrificially for their benefit.

Joy: Christian joy is not dependent upon favorable circumstances. It springs from a relationship with God and confidence in His promises. Paul could command believers to “Rejoice in the Lord always” while writing from imprisonment (Philippians 4:4).

Peace: The peace produced by a Spirit-led life includes peace with God through obedience to the gospel (Romans 5:1), peace within oneself, and peace with others whenever possible (Romans 12:18).

Longsuffering: Longsuffering refers to patience and endurance in dealing with difficult circumstances and difficult people. God Himself demonstrates longsuffering toward sinners (2 Peter 3:9), and Christians are called to imitate that quality.

Gentleness and Goodness: Gentleness involves kindness, consideration, and graciousness toward others. Goodness refers to moral excellence expressed through benevolent action. Christ exemplified both qualities during His earthly ministry (Acts 10:38).

Faithfulness: Faithfulness denotes reliability, trustworthiness, and steadfast loyalty to God. The faithful Christian remains committed despite trials,



temptations, and opposition (Revelation 2:10).

Meekness: Meekness is not weakness. It is strength under control. Moses was described as very meek (Numbers 12:3), yet he was one of Scripture's strongest leaders. The meek person submits to God's authority and treats others with humility.

Temperance (Self-Control): Temperance involves mastery over one's desires, emotions, and appetites. Instead of being controlled by passions, the Christian exercises discipline and restraint. This quality is indispensable in overcoming temptation (1 Corinthians 9:25-27).

Crucifying the Flesh

Paul declares, "And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts" (Galatians 5:24). The Christian's victory over the flesh is neither automatic nor effortless. It requires deliberate action. We crucify the flesh when we:

1. Set our minds on spiritual things (Colossians 3:1-2).
2. Study and obey God's Word (Psalm 119:11; James 1:22).
3. Pray continually for strength (Luke 18:1).
4. Avoid situations that encourage temptation (Romans 13:14).
5. Walk daily according to God's will (Galatians 5:16).

The process of spiritual growth requires constant vigilance because the conflict between the flesh and the Spirit continues throughout life.

Conclusion

The contrast between the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit could not be clearer. The works of the flesh are destructive, divisive, and deadly. The fruit of the Spirit is constructive, unifying, and life-giving.

Every Christian must decide which influence will govern his life. Those who yield to the flesh cannot inherit God's kingdom, but those who walk according to the Spirit enjoy fellowship with God and the hope of eternal life. As we seek to master the conflict between the spirit and the flesh, let us heed Paul's exhortation: "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit" (Galatians 5:25). By continually submitting to God's revealed will, we can overcome the works of the flesh and bear the fruit that glorifies God.

SEEK THE LORD THAT YOU MAY LIVE

Amos revealed God's prophecy in order to turn the people of Israel back to Him. God's message was this: "Seek Me that you may live" (Amos 5:4).

Unfortunately, what many of them did when they faced trouble – just as many do today – was look for help in other places instead of turning to the Lord. So God said, "Do not resort to Bethel and do not come to Gilgal, nor cross over to Beersheba; for Gilgal will certainly go into captivity and Bethel will come to trouble" (Amos 5:5). Then He repeated the admonition, "Seek the Lord that you may live" (Amos 5:6).

Interestingly, a few verses later, a similar admonition is given but with a slight change to the wording: "Seek good and not evil, that you may live; and thus may the Lord God of hosts be with you" (Amos 5:14). Seeking God was about more than just acknowledging Him and recognizing His power and ability to save. They also needed to do what was right and give up what was sinful.

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Institutionalism

Church Cooperation: An Historical Perspective

By Wayne Goforth

It has been argued by our institutional friends that "no one believed the things presently taught by the anti movement prior to the 1950's." Thomas B. Warren states this in his "Lectures on Church Cooperation" as well as did Bill Jackson in his lecture on "The Challenge of Anti-ism." Unfortunately I have heard sound brethren claim, "No one believed or practiced the things the liberals now do before the '50's." The truth, as it tends to be, is between these two claims. There were those who believe both sides of the issues from the earliest days of the restoration. While we realize that these men were not God, it is nonetheless interesting to notice how old and how serious the question of cooperation is.

As early as 1831 Walter Scott, Alexander Campbell and others met to discuss Cooperation. This would be a hot topic of discussion for another twenty years. Campbell believed that since the Bible is silent as to the cooperation of churches, that we are free to devise any means to so do and place it in the heavy laden basket of expediencies. Not all of the early restorationists were in agreement with Campbell. This belief of Campbell later led him to advocate the missionary societies using the same arguments. Campbell could see little or no difference between the church local and the church universal and thus he sought to engage all local congregations in single works and thus enact the church universal. He believed the church universal was made up of all the local congregations rather than all the saved, and most questions of the issues result from this misunderstanding to this day. By 1849 he called for a "more efficient" means of cooperating by having delegates from every congregation attend a general convention. This was soon to develop into the

societies. It is to be realized that most who were against the use of the instrument at that time were for the society, and most who were anti society were for the instrument. Thus a battle soon ensued. T.M. Henley criticized the society and offered an alternative:

"When any church wishes to send out an evangelist, and is unable to sustain him in the field, she may invite her sister congregations to cooperate with her."

He thus became the first to advocate the overseeing church arrangement of mission work. David Lipscomb was also against the type of cooperation advocated by Henley. Lipscomb believed the sponsoring church was too big and resembled the society too much. This plan would be rejected for a while in favor of the society until 1866. Ben Franklin attacked the society in his American Christian Review, at which time the society temporarily condescended to the "Louisville Plan." This form of sponsoring church cooperation would also be attacked by Franklin in another year. Those few, such as Franklin, who were against both the instrument and the society were also against the church using any human institution to carry out the work of the church. Those early opposed to institutionalism included Tolbert Fanning, Jacob Creath, Franklin as mentioned, and others. It was realized that the same arguments used on the behalf of those advocating the society were the same ones used for those advocating institutionalism, that is, the all-sufficiency of the church and the question of authority and silence of the Scriptures which has remained the real question over the years. The real question was not then nor is it now simply just to use societies or other human institutions, it is a much deeper question, that



concerning our attitude of the authority of the Scriptures.

In 1855, Fanning established the Gospel Advocate to deal with both sides of the question of cooperation. Fanning wrote:

In establishing the Gospel Advocate, I determine to give the subject of cooperation a thorough examination. I do not pretend to say how it has been wrought about, but I have for years believed that a change must take place in our views of cooperation...

These early preachers placed much emphasis upon education. Many a liberal preacher has pointed this out to attempt to show that the church supported institutions even during those years of the restoration, and that this shows that the church in this period practiced the church support of human institutions, and thus cooperated in this manner. Even if this were the case, it would not prove the practice to be scriptural. Yes many schools and colleges were established during those years, but were viewed as an adjunct of the home and not the church. By 1831 P.S. Fall established a girls school. Campbell established Buffalo Seminary in 1818, and Bethany College opened its doors in 1841. Many well known preachers were on the board and taught in this enterprise. Robert Richardson and Jacob Creath were two examples of such. Remember that we have already stated that Jacob Creath was set against the church support of human institutions! Campbell himself had donated the land for the school, and individual contributions of endowments were promised along with the standard tuition fees. In fact, when Campbell opposed Burnet's suggestion for a Bible society, Burnet reminded Campbell that he had already established one institution, Bethany College. Campbell told Burnet that the natures of the two institutions were altogether different. The college was

a private institution, established with private funds, whereas the Bible society was a brotherhood work supported by a church treasury. Thus we cannot find the church in this period cooperating in the support of "Christian colleges."

Conclusion

One wonders what possible arguments against the missionary societies our institutional friends have to offer, seeing the two arguments used in its behalf, it is doing the churches work and it is an expediency, are the same as the liberals use in the support of their institutions and overseeing method of mission work. Though these men were not inspired, the early leaders who stood against both the society and the instrument were also against the church support of any human institution. These brethren did at least seek to be consistent.

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WATCH EXPECTANTLY FOR THE LORD

Continued from pg. 8

No matter what might happen to him, he knew that God would lead him out of the darkness and bring about salvation. We must have this same confidence today as we face discouragement, temptation, and opposition in our service to God.

So watch expectantly for the Lord. He will save us if we are faithful to Him. Let us not allow the trials of life to discourage us so much that we lose our faith in God and abandon the hope He has given us.

Andy Sochor

Myth Buster

"The Lord's Supper Is the Most Important Part of Worship"

By Emmanuel Oluwatoba | Niger, Nigeria

The above quotation is a belief that has quietly found its way into the thinking of some Christians. It is reflected in those who arrive just in time for the "Lord's Supper, pay little attention to the sermon, prayer, singing, or giving, and sometimes even leave immediately after communion has been observed. While they may never openly admit that the Lord's Supper is the only important act of worship, their actions often suggest that they regard it as the most important one.

There is no doubt that the Lord's Supper is a sacred act of Christian worship. However, does the Bible teach that it is more important than every other act of worship? That is the question we must answer, not with personal opinions, but with Scripture.

The Importance of the Lord's Supper

The Lord's Supper was instituted by Jesus Christ on the night before His crucifixion (Matthew 26:26–29). It is a memorial that calls believers to remember the sacrifice Christ made on the cross. Paul wrote, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes" (1 Corinthians 11:26). The early church also assembled on the first day of the week to break bread (Acts 20:7), demonstrating that observing the Lord's Supper was a regular part of Christian worship. Because it reminds us of Christ's suffering, His death, and the hope of His return, the Lord's Supper should never be treated casually. Every Christian ought to approach it with reverence, self-examination, and gratitude. Recognizing its importance, however, is different from claiming it is more important than every other act of worship.

The New Testament Presents Worship as a Complete Offering

When we study the worship of the early church, we discover that the assembly involved much more than the Lord's Supper.

- The Christians prayed together (Acts 2:42; 1 Timothy 2:1).
- They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching (Acts 2:42; Acts 20:7).
- They sang praises to God (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16).
- They gave generously to support the work of the church (1 Corinthians 16:1–2).
- And they observed the Lord's Supper (Acts 20:7).

The New Testament never separates these acts into "major" and "minor" acts of worship. They were all commanded by God, and they were all practiced by the early church. To participate fully in worship is to participate wholeheartedly in everything God has instructed His people to do.

Every Act of Worship Has a Unique Purpose

Each act of worship accomplishes something that no other act can replace.

- Through **prayer**, we speak to God, expressing our praise, thanksgiving, repentance, and requests.
- Through **singing**, we praise God while teaching and encouraging one another with spiritual songs.
- Through **the preaching of God's Word**, God instructs, corrects, and strengthens His people.
- Through **giving**, we acknowledge God's ownership of all we possess and support His work.
- Through **the Lord's Supper**, we remember Christ's sacrifice and proclaim His death until He returns.

None of these acts is designed to replace another. We



cannot say that because we have taken the Lord's Supper, prayer no longer matters. Neither can we ignore the preaching of God's Word because we have already remembered Christ's death. Every act contributes to the complete worship that God desires.

The Danger of Selective Worship

One of the greatest dangers Christians face is selective obedience. We naturally place greater value on certain commands while treating others as less significant. This was the mistake King Saul made. God commanded Saul to destroy everything belonging to the Amalekites (1 Samuel 15). Saul obeyed partially but spared King Agag and the best livestock. He believed he had obeyed God, but Samuel declared, "**To obey is better than sacrifice**" (1 Samuel 15:22). Partial obedience was still disobedience.

The same principle applies to worship. If God commands prayer, singing, preaching, giving, and the Lord's Supper, then we cannot faithfully choose one while neglecting the others. When Christians arrive only for communion or leave the gathering after it has been served, they unintentionally communicate that the remaining acts of worship are less important. Scripture never teaches such a distinction.

Worship Is About Honouring God

True worship is not about doing the minimum required. It is about giving God our very best.

Jesus taught, "The true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth... God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:23–24). Worship in **spirit** means our hearts are fully engaged. Worship in **truth** means we worship according to God's revealed will. Since God has commanded every act of worship, each deserves the same attitude of reverence, sincerity, and wholehearted participation.

Our focus should never be on checking off one item before mentally disengaging from the rest of the assembly. Instead, every prayer, every song, every Scripture reading, every sermon, every offering, and every observance of the Lord's Supper should be viewed as an opportunity to glorify God.

A Challenge for Every Christian

Every Christian should honestly examine his or her attitude toward worship.

- Do I arrive prepared to worship from beginning to end?
- Am I equally attentive during prayers, singing, preaching, giving, and the Lord's Supper?
- Do I see every act of worship as an act of obedience to God?

Our answers reveal whether we have developed a biblical view of worship or a selective one.

Conclusion

The Lord's Supper is one of the most beautiful and meaningful acts of Christian worship. It reminds us of the price Christ paid for our redemption and proclaims His death until He comes again. Its importance cannot be overstated. Yet the New Testament never teaches that it is **more important** than prayer, singing, giving, or the preaching of God's Word. Every act of worship has been commanded by God, and every command reflects His wisdom and purpose. The Christian who truly loves God will not ask, "*Which act of worship matters most?*" Instead, he will seek to honour God through **every** act of worship, offering Him complete obedience from a sincere and grateful heart.



IDEAL HOME

Humility Among God's Children

By Rowland Femi Gbamis | Tennessee, USA

Text: 1 Peter 5:5 - "Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble"(KJV).

Introduction

In a world that celebrates self-promotion, personal branding, and the relentless pursuit of recognition, humility stands as a countercultural virtue that seems almost antiquated. Yet, throughout Scripture, humility is not merely a desirable trait—it is an essential characteristic that God expects from all His children. The apostle Peter's instruction to "be clothed with humility" uses the imagery of putting on a garment, suggesting that humility is something we must wear intentionally and deliberately. This is not optional attire for the Christian; it is the uniform of discipleship.

Humility is a crucial godly virtue that God expects from all His children, regardless of age, role, or relationship. It is the foundation upon which all other Christian virtues are built and the key to receiving God's grace. When we understand that "God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble," we recognize that our spiritual vitality depends upon our willingness to humble ourselves before God and one another. This article explores how humility must permeate every aspect of our lives—from generational relationships to ministry, leadership, marriage, and our collective life as the body of Christ.

Understanding Humility and Its Importance

Before we can practice humility, we must understand what it truly means. Humility is not self-deprecation or false modesty. It is not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less. From a biblical perspective, humility means having an accurate assessment of

oneself before God—recognizing both our inherent worth as image-bearers of God and our complete dependence on His grace, while valuing others above ourselves. As Paul writes in Romans 12:3, we should "not think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith."

The importance of humility cannot be overstated. Throughout Scripture, we see that God consistently opposes the proud while extending grace to the humble. Proverbs 15:33 reminds us that "before honour is humility," and Jesus Himself declared, "Whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted" (Matthew 23:12). Our supreme example is Christ, who, though He was God, "made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant" (Philippians 2:7). He washed His disciples' feet, served the outcasts, and ultimately humbled Himself to death on a cross. If the Son of God embraced humility, how much more should we?

The consequences of pride—humility's opposite—are devastating. Pride goes before destruction (Proverbs 16:18), as evidenced in the falls of Lucifer, Nebuchadnezzar, and countless others throughout biblical history. Pride blinds us to our need for God and others, isolates us from genuine



fellowship, and ultimately invites God's resistance rather than His grace. Conversely, humility opens the door to wisdom, unity in the body of Christ, effective prayer, and spiritual growth.

Humility Across Different Age Groups

Having established what humility is and why it matters, we now turn to specific areas where this virtue must be lived out. One of the most critical areas for practicing humility is intergenerational relationships. Proverbs 20:29 acknowledges that "the glory of young men is their strength: and the beauty of old men is the grey head." Both youth and the aged have unique strengths, and both must approach one another with humility.

Older generations must resist the temptation to dismiss or look down upon the youth. Experience can breed condescension, and the familiar refrain "we have always done it this way" can stifle the fresh energy and perspective that young people bring. Scripture is filled with examples of young people whom God used mightily: Joseph remained faithful in his youth despite persecution and rose to leadership in Egypt; David was anointed as a youth and defeated Goliath with remarkable faith; Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were teenagers when they refused to compromise their convictions in Babylon; and Timothy was known for his faith from childhood and became Paul's trusted companion in ministry. Ecclesiastes 12:1 calls young people to "remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth," affirming that God expects and values the service of young believers. Older Christians must mentor and encourage young people rather than criticize them, creating opportunities for youth to serve and lead while celebrating their energy and passion.

Conversely, young people must not treat older

generations with contempt or assume they are out of touch with reality. The temptation of youthful pride is to dismiss the value of wisdom and experience, grow impatient with traditional methods, and overestimate one's own knowledge. But wisdom cannot be bought in the marketplace or downloaded from the internet—it comes through years of walking with God, weathering storms, and learning lessons that books cannot teach. Ephesians 6:1-3 commands children to obey and honor their parents, and 1 Peter 5:5 instructs the younger to submit to the elder—a principle that extends beyond the home to the entire church family. Young believers must actively seek counsel from mature Christians, show respect in speech and demeanor, and recognize that they don't know everything. When both young and old humble themselves before one another, the church becomes a beautiful intergenerational family where the strength of youth combines with the wisdom of the aged to create a peaceful, loving community.

Humility in Ministry and Leadership

The Preacher's Temptation

Humility is absolutely essential for those who serve in ministry and leadership roles. Preachers face unique temptations because their public platform can breed pride, and the praise and recognition they receive can inflate their egos. Knowledge, particularly biblical knowledge, can lead to arrogance if not tempered with humility. Paul warned in 1 Corinthians 8:2-3, "And if any man thinks that he knoweth anything, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know. But if any man love God, the same is known of him." True knowledge leads to humility, not pride, because the more we learn, the more we realize how much we don't know.

Young preachers must be especially careful. While 1 Timothy 4:12 encourages Timothy to "let no man



despise thy youth" and to be an example in word, conduct, love, spirit, faith, and purity, this passage does not license young preachers to arrogantly reject instruction and correction from others. Confidence in one's calling is not the same as being unteachable. A humble preacher preaches Christ, not himself (2 Corinthians 4:5); welcomes correction and feedback; continues to study and grow (1 Timothy 4:12-16); serves the congregation rather than merely preaching to them; and gives glory to God for any success.

The Elder's Responsibility

Elders, too, must shepherd God's flock with profound humility. Acts 20:28 reminds elders that the Holy Spirit has made them overseers "to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood." The church belongs to God, not to the elders. 1 Peter 5:2-3 instructs elders to serve "not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre [not for dishonest gain-NKJV], but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being examples to the flock." Humble elders listen more than they speak, seek consensus rather than imposing their will, admit mistakes and ask for forgiveness, and serve alongside the congregation rather than above them. The negative example of Diotrephes in 3 John 9-10, who "loved to have the preeminence," demonstrates how one proud leader can damage an entire congregation. Elders must remember that they are shepherds of God's flock, not lords over it, and their primary role is to feed and nurture, not to control and dominate.

Humility in Marriage

Perhaps nowhere is humility more essential—and more challenging—than in marriage. Ephesians 5:22-33 presents marriage as a living illustration of Christ's relationship with the church, and both roles require profound humility. Wives are called to submit to their

husbands "as unto the Lord," which is a voluntary act of humility and trust, reflecting their reverence for Christ Himself. This submission is not weakness but strength under control—a deliberate choice to honor God's design for the family. The older women in Titus 2:3-5 are instructed to teach younger women "to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed." This passage reveals the sacred calling of women as homemakers—not as a limitation, but as a sphere of profound influence and ministry.

A wife's love for her husband and children is not merely emotional affection, but an active, sacrificial commitment demonstrated daily through service, encouragement, and faithful presence. Her role as keeper of the home involves creating an atmosphere of peace, order, and godliness where her family can flourish spiritually and emotionally. When a wife embraces this calling with humility and joy, she becomes a living testimony to the beauty of God's Word. Conversely, when she neglects or despises this role, she risks bringing reproach upon Scripture itself—causing unbelievers to blaspheme God's Word as irrelevant. The Christian wife's humble devotion to her home and family serves as a living example for the gospel, demonstrating that God's ways produce flourishing rather than bondage.

Nevertheless, husbands receive an even more demanding command in Ephesians 5:25: "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it." This is the key verse on marital humility. Christ's love was demonstrated through humble service and ultimate sacrifice, and husbands are called to die to self daily, leading through servant leadership rather than domination. Jesus modeled this perfectly in John 13:12-17 when He washed His



disciples' feet. The Lord and Master became the servant, declaring, "If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet." Husbands must serve their wives in practical, humble ways, recognizing that no task is beneath a godly husband. In 1 Peter 3:7, husbands are instructed to dwell with their wives "according to knowledge, giving honor unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life." This means studying your wife—knowing her needs, fears, and dreams—honoring her as precious and valuable, and recognizing her as a co-heir with spiritual equality. Remarkably, Peter adds that a husband's prayer life will be hindered if he fails to treat his wife properly.

Both husbands and wives must embody the love described in 1 Corinthians 13, which "seeketh not her own"—the very essence of humility. This means putting your spouse's needs above your own, being patient with each other's weaknesses, forgiving quickly and completely, and assuming the best rather than the worst. When humility characterizes a marriage, the result is unity, peace, effective prayer, a powerful witness to the world, and joy in the relationship.

Collective Humility Among God's Children

Finally, humility is not just for certain roles or relationships—it is a universal need for every Christian in every situation. The church thrives when humility is practiced collectively. The negative example of Diotrephes in 3 John 9-11 shows how one person who "loveth to have the preeminence" can damage an entire congregation through pride, rejection of godly authority, malicious words, and divisive actions.

In contrast, Romans 12:3 calls us to sober self-

assessment: "not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly." Philippians 2:3-4 provides the blueprint for collective humility: "Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others." This mindset—avoiding selfish ambition, valuing others above yourself, and considering others' interests—creates the unity that allows the church to flourish.

Conclusion

Humility is the uniform of discipleship, the garment every Christian must intentionally wear. From generational relationships to ministry, leadership, marriage, and our collective life together, humility must permeate every aspect of our walk with Christ. Our supreme example is Jesus Himself, who humbled Himself to death on a cross and was therefore highly exalted by God. The pattern is clear: humility precedes exaltation.

We stand at a crossroads with two paths before us. The path of pride leads to destruction, isolation, and God's resistance. The path of humility leads to grace, unity, and God's favor. God's promise is sure: "Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up" (James 4:10). May we choose humility, clothe ourselves with it daily, and experience the abundant grace that God gives to the humble.

Salvation

The Covering For Sin

By Samuel A. Matthews | Oregon, USA

“Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered” (Psalm 32:1, KJV). “He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy” (Proverbs 28:13, KJV).

Loved ones, the first passage above commends the covering of sin; the latter one condemns such. How are these two inspired oracles to be reconciled?

The solution to this seeming difficulty is quite simple actually. In the former text, a blessing is pronounced upon him who has his sin covered by means of God's forgiveness. On the other hand, the writer in Proverbs is addressing the state of one who attempts to deal with his evil in a human fashion, rather than seeking Heaven's pardon.

Satan has the entire lost world caught in the bondage of sin leading to eternal death (1 John 5:19; Romans 6:23). Only the Christian has been freed from sin's bondage by the blood of Jesus (Revelation 1:5). However, the devil is still using sin as his weapon to try and destroy the children of God.

Generally, man is a rebel. He does not seek to do the will of his Creator, hence, he is ever involved in wickedness. Jeremiah indicts haughty humanity as follows: “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” (Jeremiah 17:9).

It is hardly a wonder that human beings, stubborn as they are, should seek, in their vain imaginations, a variety of methods by which they might avoid facing the responsibility for their violations of divine law. We will now review briefly several of these attempts to overlook “the deceitfulness of sin” (Hebrews 3:13).

Denial

One method of dealing with evil is simply to deny its

reality. Atheism argues that sin does not exist. Humanist's reason: “There is no God. If there is no God, there is no objective code of ethics. If there is no code of ethics, there can be no transgression. Therefore, there is no such thing as sin.”

French philosopher Jean Paul Sartre contended that whatever man chooses to do is right; we can, he affirmed, “Never choose evil.” Sigmund Freud characterized sin as a mere “illusion.” And so, the skeptic covers his sin by contending that it has no basis in reality. What a convenient way of addressing the problem of human evil!

Concealment

For centuries man has entertained the idea that he can hide his wickedness. “If others do not know, what's the difference?” The difference is: “All unrighteousness is sin...” (1 John 5:17). Wrong is still wrong, whether others are privy to it or not.

Adam and Eve sought to hide their shame from the Creator, but the effort was for naught (Genesis 3:8-13). After the battle of Jericho, Achan hid the forbidden spoils of battle beneath his tent, but God brought the rebellious deed to light (Joshua 7:19-22).

Concealment can be but a temporary respite. The day will come when that which has been done in secret will be shouted from the housetops (Luke 12:1-3). God is the revealer of the secrets of men (Romans 2:16).

Redefinition

Another ploy in dealing with evil is the alteration of vocabulary. Somehow we labor under the illusion that if we can but find a less emotive term by which to designate our vices, the evil has disappeared.



And so, drunkenness becomes “alcoholism,” adultery is merely an “affair,” sodomy is “gay,” and pornography is “adult literature.” But, as Shakespeare once noted, “... a rose by any other name smells as sweet.” And so it is —sin, under any alternate appellation, is still its vile self (cf. Romans 7:13).

Rationalization

Rationalization is the mental process whereby one justifies his actions by assigning to them a motive that appears to legitimize the conduct. A student throws trash on the schoolroom floor and defends his act on the ground that if the janitor did not have work to do, he would have no job, hence no income with which to support his family!

King Saul of Israel disobeyed Jehovah and refused to destroy the livestock booty taken from the Amalekites. He excused himself on this basis: “...for the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen, to sacrifice unto the Lord thy God...” (1 Samuel 15:15).

People all over the world are experts in the art of rationalization. A student cheats on his final exam and feels no guilt because “others are doing it,” and he “must make the grade curve.” After all, a future job is at stake. We abort our babies and defend the atrocity on the basis that we must not produce millions of youngsters who will not have adequate medical and educational facilities. Rationalization is a soothing lotion for a dull conscience.

Legalization

Another way folks cover their sins is to appeal to the license of civil law. The claim frequently is: “Well, it’s legal, isn’t it?” A man sits in front of his TV and guzzles beer until drunk. Whose business is it? It’s not against the law. A woman divorces her husband because she no longer finds him attractive.

Subsequently, she marries a former boyfriend. So what! It’s legal.

What many obviously do not understand is that civil law is human law, and not infrequently it is in direct violation of the will of God (cf. Acts 5:29).

Substitution

Substitution is the idea one can engage in the vices of his desire, but it really doesn’t matter, because he does plenty of other things to balance the account. Good deeds are thought to gloss over base conduct. This is the common philosophy of many within the Roman Catholic Church. One is free to pursue almost any lifestyle, provided he rattles off the appropriate number of “Hail Mary’s.”

Conclusion

Human attempts to cover disobedience are futile. The wise person will let the Lord handle the problem — in His appointed way. In the divine plan of redemption, Jesus Christ becomes the “covering” (“propitiation” — Romans 3:25) for sin. By virtue of the Lord’s sacrifice at Calvary, and our response to his will, our sins can be covered (cf. Matthew 26:28).

The God of Heaven and Earth is so good, and His love reaches all. Through the free gift of God’s grace by Jesus’ blood (Ephesians 2:8; Revelation 1:5) and your obedient faith (Romans 1:5; 10:17; 16:26), salvation is offered. If you have Bible questions or wish to comment on this post, please do so. Lord willing, a Bible answer will be provided for every Bible question. The churches of Christ are neither Catholic, Protestant, nor Jew (Romans 16:16; Matthew 16:18-19). We are the loving suffering ONE body of Christ (Ephesians 1:20-23; 4:4-6) – CHRISTIANS: “Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf” (1 Peter 4:16; cf. Acts 11:26; 26:28). We love you with the love of the Lord (John 13:34-35).

Questions and Answers

What About Elders That Do Not Actively Feed The Congregation With Spiritual Meals?

By Rowland Femi Gbamis | Tennessee, USA

Question

Dear Brother Rowland,

Thank you for your article on "A Brief Reflection on Ezekiel 34: Faithful and Unfaithful Shepherds." You observed that "one of the most crucial ways elders can lead by example is by demonstrating strong leadership in providing the congregation with the appropriate spiritual nourishment." You also quoted 1 Peter 5:2-3, which says that God expects elders to serve "not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre [not for dishonest gain-NKJV], but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being examples to the flock." Question: What is your response to elders who do not lord it over the congregation and are so loving, yet do not actively feed the congregation with spiritual meals?

Brotherly,

Roberts (Athens, AL).

Answer

Dear brother Roberts,

Thank you for your question. When Peter commands elders to shepherd God's flock without lording over it (1 Peter 5:3), we rightly warn against authoritarian control and domineering leadership. However, your observation highlights an equally dangerous opposite extreme: passive eldership, in which men hold the title but abdicate the actual work of shepherding. While some elders err by controlling and dominating, many others have relegated their fundamental responsibility to feed and nurture the congregation, often because they believe that is what the preacher is paid to do. This "hired gun" mentality reflects a

fundamental misunderstanding of biblical eldership and creates a clergy/laity divide that Scripture never intended.

The professionalization of ministry has led many elders to believe their role is merely to make business decisions and keep church operations running smoothly, while all spiritual work—teaching, pastoral care, and discipleship—belongs to the paid minister. But this contradicts the New Testament pattern. In Acts 6:4, the apostles insisted on devoting themselves "to prayer and to the ministry of the word" rather than being consumed with administrative tasks—a principle that applies directly to elders today. Elders are the primary shepherds of the flock, called to prioritize spiritual oversight: feeding the sheep with sound doctrine (Titus 1:9), knowing them personally (Acts 20:28), visiting the sick, comforting the grieving, and restoring the wayward (Galatians 6:1), and praying regularly for those under their care. Yet many modern elders have inverted this priority, focusing almost exclusively on buildings, budgets, and business matters while outsourcing prayer and the ministry of the word to paid staff. The preacher or evangelist serves alongside them as a fellow-laborer, often with specialized teaching gifts, but his role is to equip the saints for ministry (Ephesians 4:11-12), not to replace the elders' shepherding responsibilities. In a large congregation, a single preacher cannot know most people intimately or provide the personal spiritual oversight that a plurality of engaged elders can offer.

When elders retreat into boardroom management and delegate all spiritual work to paid staff, the consequences are severe and far-reaching. Members do not know their elders personally, and vice versa.



Spiritual problems go unnoticed until they become crises. Preachers burn out trying to do the work of multiple shepherds; false teaching spreads unchecked; young men see no model of active shepherding to emulate. Biblical eldership is not a retirement platform from secular jobs or an honorary title—it is a calling to intensive, personal, sacrificial shepherding, in which mature wisdom is actively poured out rather than passively held (cf. Acts 20:20,26-27,31).

If you would not hire a babysitter and then never check on your children, why would you hire a preacher and then disengage from the spiritual care of God's flock? Elders must ask themselves: When was the last time I had a spiritual conversation with a member outside of Sunday or Wednesday Bible study? When did I last teach, lead a Bible study, or disciple someone one-on-one? Can I identify the spiritual struggles of the families in my care? Am I praying regularly and specifically for individuals in the congregation? The Acts 6:4 principle demands that elders prioritize prayer and the word over administrative minutiae, yet many elderships spend hours debating carpet colors and building maintenance while spending a few minutes in prayer and virtually no time in personal ministry of the word to their members.

The biblical model of leadership presents a clear partnership: elders (plural) share the shepherding responsibility of teaching, caring, and leading, devoting themselves to prayer and the ministry of the word; evangelists/preachers proclaim the gospel and equip the church; deacons serve practical needs so elders can focus on spiritual oversight (Acts 6:1-6); and all members use their gifts to build up the body (Romans 12:3-8; 1 Corinthians 12). Both extremes—domineering control and passive

abdication—fail to reflect this model. True shepherding means elders must remember they are neither lords over God's flock nor absentee managers of a religious organization. Their primary role is to feed and nurture through active, personal, sacrificial engagement with the souls entrusted to their care, maintaining the Acts 6:4 priority of prayer and the ministry of the word while working in partnership with deacons, preachers, and the entire body to build up the church in love and truth.

God's blessing!

SEEK THE LORD THAT YOU MAY LIVE

Continued from pg. 27

Many religious people today claim to “seek the Lord,” yet they are content to remain in their sin. Rather than doing what the Lord has instructed them to do, they follow the course of the world around them. Yet, if we want the Lord to save us, we must follow Him in His way.

Andy Sochor

ADDENDUM

Finishing The Task—or Hanging In There

By Dennis Abernathy | Texas, USA

To hang in there, and finish the course, never giving up in tough times, is a rugged and difficult assignment. Read 2 Cor. 4:8-18. Thoroughness, commitment, determination, and endurance are rare qualities to be found in a world whose favorite byline seems to be “*Just get by.*” Think about it. Many a school paper, study course, or a promise, is stamped with the ominous remark “INCOMPLETE!”

Just ask any personnel manager, and they will tell you the number one problem in the business world today is finding people who will do the job without cutting corners or dodging the details! In other words, it is difficult to find people who will stick to the assignment and see it through until it is finished, i.e., people who will hang in there, finish the task, and never quit! Starters are a dime a dozen! Countless people begin something, and they make great plans, and there is a lot of flag-raising, cheer leading, and enthusiasm. But continuing, following through, persevering, completing...Well, that's a different story, isn't it?

Former President Calvin Coolidge said, “*Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not; Nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent. Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not; the world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination are omnipotent.*”

All of God's people have or will face situations that demand determination and perseverance. Always there is temptation to quit, to give in or give up, to just run away as fast as they can. The strong temptation is to slack off and walk out and give up. Face it, has there ever been a time when you just wanted to quit? But

please remember this. When you think you have reached a dead-end street, realize it is just a place to turn around. The trouble with some is that during trying times they stop trying! Christians need fortitude because victory comes to those who endure, hold on, and hang in there. When you think, you have come to the end of your rope, as Franklin D. Roosevelt said, “*Just tie a knot and hang on!*”

We read in Heb. 10: 35-39, “*Therefore, do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise. But if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him. But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul.*” Christians need fortitude because victory comes to those who endure, hold on and hang in there. We can't afford to shrink back and even give up.”

Our goal is Heaven, and we know that failure is the path of least persistence, and that, “*just over the hill is a beautiful valley, but we must first climb the hill to see it.*” Think on these things.